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Administrator Opinion on the Need for Small and Large School Divisions Within the North Central Association

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**ADMINISTRATOR OPINION ON THE NEED FOR SMALL
AND LARGE SCHOOL DIVISIONS WITHIN
THE NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION**

(TITLE)

BY

GORDON L. ECKOLS

**B. S. in Ed., Southern Illinois University, 1955
M. S. in Ed., Southern Illinois University, 1964**

**A FIELD STUDY
THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

SPECIALIST IN EDUCATION

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1971

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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DEPARTMENT HEAD

PREFACE

This study involved the assessment of opinions of administrators in secondary schools within the geographic area of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools concerning some aspects of the evaluation of small and large high schools with the same techniques and procedures and use of the same standards for quality educational programs regardless of the size of the school.

The investigator's work on several North Central Association evaluation teams in secondary schools of differing sizes led to this decision to assess opinions regarding the use of certain standards for the evaluation of a school in relation to the size of the school.

This study was made as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the field experience aspect of the Specialist in Education program at Eastern Illinois University.

Dr. Robert Shuff and Dr. Donald Smitley served as faculty advisers for the investigation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

General Information

The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools is but one of the several accrediting associations existing in the United States. By far the largest of the associations, it geographically encompasses nineteen states and has in its membership about 40 per cent of the more than 11,000 secondary schools in those states. Since the time of its founding in 1895 to the present, the North Central Association has increased in membership; grown in status; and grossly enlarged and diversified its services, purposes, and goals.

The primary role of the North Central Association as seen by the local school staff is generally that of an accrediting agency. It is often viewed as having an established set of standards for quality education against which local school programs are measured. The member school administrator becomes rather familiar with the accrediting activities of the association as he submits his reports of various pertinent information to his state chairman and awaits the decision of the reviewing committee regarding the school's ability to meet the minimum standards or criteria set by the North Central Association.

The accrediting policies of the North Central Association have changed during its years of existence just as naturally as educational problems, curricula, and programs have changed during the same period of time. From its earliest concern for the adequate preparation of high

school students for university level work to the present concerns of the evaluation of programs in the member schools and the suggestions to staffs to bring about self-improvement within the schools, the North Central Association has played a major role in helping the member schools achieve a significant level of educational status. It is quite often the concern for this status, or perhaps the fear of losing it, that keeps a member school's staff aware of the criteria for quality education that have been established by the North Central Association and also aware of the fact that failure to meet those criteria can lead to the school's being dropped from membership.

Problem Statement

Until recently, except for certain areas of the school program where the minimum level for quality is based on or related to the number of students enrolled in the school, no differentiation between the small high school and the large high school has been made. The same yardstick has been used to measure effective programs in all sizes of schools in all geographic regions which the North Central Association encompasses. Thus, the Association has established a singular type of membership for large and small schools alike. Dues uniformly assessed on the member schools have been the primary source of revenue for the operational expenses.

When one examines the membership of the North Central Association, it becomes quite clear that the typical non-member is a small high school. Former North Central Association executive secretary Gordon Cavelti provides the reason as to why this is true, "Many smaller schools cannot meet the standards which have been established."¹ To be

¹Gordon Cavelti, "What High School Accreditation Means Today," Nation's Schools, LXXIX (February, 1967), p. 73.

concerned with these non-member schools is to be concerned with about 60 per cent of all high schools in the nineteen states served by the North Central Association. However, these same schools account for only about 27 per cent of the total enrollment in the same region. This is not to say that no small high schools hold membership, but merely to point out that there are more small schools that are non-members than there are small schools holding membership. This does not hold true for the large schools in the same area.

That the North Central Association is aware of the problems facing its small school members and those small schools wishing to become members is evidenced by the recent establishment of a Committee on Small Schools. In his letter to the administrators of member schools in Illinois Lowell B. Fisher reviewed the purpose of the Committee:

The charge of the committee was to identify the salient characteristics of a quality small school program, then determine how these characteristics best can be preserved and enhanced by NCA membership, either under the prevailing criteria or by some slight modification of them. There is no strong support in any quarter for the development of a separate set of membership standards for small schools. To the contrary, the basic effort of this committee will be centered on working out ways that the intent of the existing criteria can be met by our small member schools.¹

The fact that no mention was made of the attitudes or opinions of the administrators of member schools regarding differences in the evaluation of small and large schools or separate membership standards encouraged the researcher to undertake this study.

Definition of Terms

The Committee on Small Schools has defined a small school as a comprehensive high school that has 300 students or less. The researcher attempted to use this same definition, but as data were

¹Letter from Lowell B. Fisher, Chairman, Illinois State Committee, North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, October 5, 1970.

collected and reviewed it was found that a substantial number of schools recorded as having enrollments below 300 had increased above the 300 level through normal population growth or because of consolidation procedures. Therefore, it was decided to define a small school as one with an enrollment of 350 students or less. A large high school is defined as having an enrollment of 351 or more. Member schools are those reported as belonging to the North Central Association while non-member schools are those reported as not belonging to the North Central Association at the time of the opinion survey. Other terms which might be misinterpreted are defined or explained as they are used.

Overview of the Study

This study was made to assess the opinions of selected administrators of secondary schools within the geographic area of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools regarding some aspects of differences in the evaluation of small and large high schools. Also, the opinions of these administrators regarding the need to establish different standards for measuring the quality of programs in schools of different sizes were assessed.

In this report, conclusions and recommendations relating to the data collected on the opinionnaire are presented from the compilation and interpretation of the data by the researcher. All books, periodicals, and other materials used in connection with this study are included in the bibliography.

CHAPTER II

MAJOR STEPS IN CONDUCTING THE STUDY

Survey of Related Literature

A survey of several volumes of the Education Index produced no evidence of any survey of opinions similar to those proposed for assessment by this researcher. Several articles relating to the evaluation of schools and the problems of small schools were reviewed. These articles are included in the listing in the bibliography. All resources used in the survey of the literature were from Booth Library at Eastern Illinois University.

Proposed Sampling Methodology

It was definitely beyond the scope of this project to attempt to assess the opinions of administrators in all of the secondary schools in the nineteen states which are served by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. It was decided that a sample of about 200, or approximately 2% of the secondary schools in the nineteen states, would be used in this study. To secure a representative sample of near 200 the following procedure was used.

1. Each of the nineteen states was assigned a basic sample of 6 which provided a total basic sample of 114 or slightly more than half of the desired total for the total sample.
2. On a percentage basis to the nearest whole number, each state was assigned additional samples which resulted in another 103 for the total sample.
3. As nearly as possible, each state's final sample

was divided into a sampling of 60 per cent small school and 40 per cent large school. This is the approximate percentage distribution of small and large schools within the survey area.

4. Each state was divided into approximate geographic quadrants with as nearly as possible equal sampling in each of the four resulting areas.

Table 1 illustrates the procedure used to determine the distribution of the resulting sample of 217 among the nineteen states.

TABLE 1
DETERMINATION OF THE SAMPLE FOR OPINIONNAIRES

State	Number of Secondary Schools ¹	% of Total Basic Sample	Basic Sample	Additional Sample	Total Sample	Small Schools	Large Schools
Arizona	108	.94	6	1	7	4	3
Arkansas	540	4.70	6	5	11	7	4
Colorado	397	3.46	6	3	9	6	3
Illinois	1483	12.92	6	13	19	12	7
Indiana	1006	8.76	6	9	15	9	6
Iowa	716	6.24	6	6	12	7	5
Kansas	553	4.82	6	5	11	7	4
Michigan	1118	9.74	6	10	16	9	7
Minnesota	620	5.40	6	5	11	7	4
Missouri	702	6.11	6	6	12	7	5
Nebraska	419	3.65	6	4	10	6	4
New Mexico	214	1.85	6	2	8	5	3
North Dakota	291	2.53	6	3	9	6	3
Ohio	1055	9.19	6	11*	17*	10*	7*
Oklahoma	686	7.72	6	8	14	8	6
South Dakota	247	2.15	6	2	8	5	3
West Virginia	351	3.06	6	3	9	6	3
Wisconsin	645	5.62	6	6	12	7	5
Wyoming	130	1.13	6	1	7	4	3
Totals	11481		114	103	217	132	85

*A computational error resulted in two additional opinionnaires being mailed to Ohio. The additional sample should have been only 9.

As can be seen from the information presented in Table 1, the smallest resulting sub-samples were for Arizona and Wyoming which

¹U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Digest of Educational Statistics, 1970 edition, (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office), p. 7.

contained seven each while the largest sub-sample of nineteen resulted for the state of Illinois.

Preparation of the Opinionnaire

The opinionnaire prepared for this study consisted of sixteen items which could be answered either yes or no by checking the appropriate box for each item. In addition, three of the sixteen items were designed to allow for additional comments, and a final statement on the opinionnaire requested any additional comments from those responding. A preliminary letter attached to the opinionnaire contained a brief description of the study.

The 217 opinionnaires were mailed to those schools selected in each state from information made available to the researcher through the Office of Public Instruction of the state. A stamped, return-addressed envelope was included with each opinionnaire mailed. All of the 217 opinionnaires were mailed within a five day period of time. The name of the high school, the enrollment of the school, and the name and title of the administrator responding were requested.

Specimens of the opinionnaire and of the preliminary letter are included in the appendix.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Description and Tabulation of Data

Of the 217 opinionnaires mailed, 139 or 64.1% were returned with usable data. Another ten were received either returned blank or lacking sufficient data to be used. No follow-up letters or other means were used to secure additional returns. Nebraska was the only state providing 100% return. The poorest response was from North Dakota in that only two of the opinionnaires were returned representing 22% of the nine mailed to that state.

Four categories were established for tabulation of the data from the returned opinionnaires: small schools with membership in the North Central Association, ~~a non-member~~ small schools, large schools with membership in the North Central Association, and ~~non-member~~ large schools. This tabulation procedure resulted in data for 32 small school members, 35 small school ~~non-members~~, 67 large school members, and 5 large school ~~non-members~~. The fact that there are only five large schools which do not hold membership in the North Central Association reemphasizes the fact that the smaller schools in the nineteen states included in this study are more likely to be ~~non-members~~ of the North Central Association.

Table 2 describes ~~some~~ additional characteristics about the schools included in this study.

TABLE 2

Characteristic of Schools Included in Survey Respondents

Category of Schools	Number	Enrollment	Mean	% of Total Sample
		Range	Enrollment	
Member Small School	32	96-337	223	23.0
Non-member Small School	35	66-350	200	25.2
Member Large School	67	380-3500	1338	48.2
Non-member Large School	5	450-800	608	3.6
Totals	139	66-3500	768*	100.0

*Mean enrollment for all schools

With the exception of question 1, question 14, and the individual comments, the responses to the opinionnaire questions are reported in Table 3. Question 1 responses state the North Central Association membership status of the reporting schools and were used to place the remaining data in the proper tabulated categories. Responses to question 14 were not suitable for tabulation as they involved responses other than the yes or no required for the other questions.

TABLE 3

Tabulation of Responses to Opinionnaire Questions

Question Number	Small Schools				Large Schools			
	Member		Non-member		Member		Non-member	
	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
2			8	27			2	3
3			13	15			2	3
4	32	0	24	11	67	0	4	1
5	29	3	10	23	50	7	3	2
6	25	2	7	3	61	1	2	0
7	7	23	19	16	17	47	3	2
8	7	0	16	2	16	1	3	0
9	21	10	4	29	40	25	0	4
10	12	18	32	3	31	31	5	0
11	24	7	32	3	44	15	5	0
12	14	15	28	4	34	33	5	0
13	12	17	3	26	17	43	1	3
15	12	20	29	4	23	41	4	1
16	25	7	26	9	41	26	5	0

Review of Data

From the responses to the first series of questions concerning the activities of evaluation, the great majority of administrators report that an evaluation of their school has been made. In fact, 66% of the administrators reported that they had used the same instrument, the Evaluative Criteria, in an evaluation of their schools. This indicates that the responding administrators have some similarities in experiences and therefore, the responses to those questions more closely related to the concerns of this study have a certain credence based on these experiences.

In response to question 9, "Do you believe that the evaluation of schools can be accomplished in the same way regardless of size?", the opinions are almost equally divided on the issue. Of the 133 responses, 49% agreed on the affirmative reply while 51% replied negatively to question 9. Differences of opinion concerning this issue are apparently related to North Central Association membership in that 67% of the member school administrators believed that evaluation can be accomplished in the same way regardless of school size while only 5% of the non-member school administrators share their opinion.

The issue of different criteria for evaluation is raised in question 10 which asks, "Do you believe that for effective evaluation of small schools and large schools a different set of criteria for measurement must be used?" Of the 132 administrators who replied to this question, 61% believed that different criteria were necessary. The support for this belief came chiefly from the non-member school administrators in that 91% of those from the small non-member schools and 100% of those from the large non-member schools favored different criteria. It should be remembered that there were only 5 large non-member schools in the

sample. For the member school administrators, those from the large schools were equally divided in their opinions while those from the small schools rejected the need for different criteria with only 40% believing that the need exists.

All categories of schools supported the belief that a small school can maintain a quality program for its students using different standards from those for large schools. This is demonstrated by the fact that 89% of all responses to question 11 were affirmative. The non-member school administrators supported this belief with a 93% response while those from member schools responded with 85% support.

In question 12, the administrators are asked to indicate whether or not the North Central Association should consider establishing separate standards for accreditation of small high schools from those for large high schools. Of the 133 who responded to this, 61% indicated that it should. This figure tends to be misleading in that the member school administrators were evenly divided on the issue and the influence of the non-member school administrators affected the outcome. The small non-member school administrators were in favor of having the North Central Association consider adopting different standards as reflected by the 88% support of the issue. Very few of the administrators made any comments about the issue raised and those who did tended to offer the reminder that the standards are minimum and should be met by all schools or, for those with different opinions, the general theme was that there are too many differences related to size that prohibit measuring quality with the same standards.

The fewest number of responses on the yes-no type of question were received for question 13 which asked, "If the North Central Association should establish different standards for the small high school will this weaken the Association as an accrediting agency?" The

122 administrators who responded were of the opinion that this action would not weaken the Association as 73% of them replied negatively to this question. It should be noted that only 59% of the administrators from the small member schools were with the majority while their counterparts in the small non-member schools registered a 90% response with this majority opinion. Thus, on this issue as well as on the others in which they participated, the administrators from the small non-member schools were more closely aligned than any of the other groups.

In question 14 the administrators were asked to indicate in which areas the standards for small schools could differ from those of large schools without a lowering of the minimal level required for quality education. Only 84 of the 139 administrators responded to this question with 20 indicating that none of the standards should differ. Opinions from 64 or 46% of the total returned indicated that the number of units of course work required of small high schools could differ from that required of large high schools, an issue agreed upon by the North Central Association at its 76th annual meeting. Requirements relating to foreign language units and the required seating in the school library received 55 and 53 indications each respectively which is less than 40% of the 139 possible responses.

The most extreme suggestion was made in question 15 which asked, "Do you believe that there is a need for separate small and large school divisions within the North Central Association?" To this 134 administrators replied with 51% favoring separate divisions. These responses to this extreme suggestion show definite differences of opinions between the administrators from member schools and those from non-member schools. Those administrators from the small member schools

showed only 38% support for the suggestion while those representing the small non-member schools supported the suggestion with the 88% response for the affirmative. Only 36% of the large member school administrators believed there exists a need for the two divisions. Of the 5 large non-member school administrators in the sample, 4 of them or 80% supported this suggestion.

Of the 139 who responded to the opinionnaire mailing, 70% of them wish to receive a follow-up of the results of this study. This might well be interpreted as an indication that some of the issues mentioned in the study are of interest to many school administrators.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

General Comments

This project involved only the assessment of the opinions of selected school administrators concerning aspects of the evaluation of small and large high schools, the possible necessity of using different standards for evaluating small and large high schools, and the need for establishing small and large school divisions within the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Since the opinionnaire used in the survey forced responses for the most part to be either affirmative or negative, the conclusions cannot provide information concerning the degree of each response.

From data provided by the opinions of 130 secondary school administrators within the geographic area of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the following conclusions are drawn.

Evaluation of Small and Large Schools

In general, those administrators from schools which have membership in the North Central Association share the opinion that the evaluation of schools can be undertaken in the same way regardless of the size of the school involved. Administrators from schools which do not belong to the North Central Association (primarily smaller schools) have a different opinion and rather strongly agree that different evaluation procedures should be used with small schools. While the large

school administrators tend to be evenly divided on the issue of need for separate criteria for evaluating small and large schools, the small member school administrators do not see such a need. Perhaps this is evidence that the small member school attains a status when aligned with the larger schools in membership for the small non-member school administrators are opinionated in favor of separate evaluation criteria for small schools.

The fact that 47% of all the member school administrators see a need for some differences in criteria for large and small schools seems to be a rather good indication that the North Central Association is justified in establishing the Committee on Small Schools.

It is obvious from the responses of those who used the Evaluative Criteria in making evaluations of their schools that it has proved to be an effective instrument. Also noteworthy is the fact that of the 46 respondents who reported using some other guide or process in the evaluation of quality education 91% assessed that guide or process as being effective. This provides opportunity for further investigation and inquiry into what techniques were used in those particular evaluations and the possibility of incorporating additional or alternate procedures within the already popular and effective Evaluative Criteria.

Standards for Small and Large Schools

There is general agreement among administrators that a small school can maintain a quality program for its students even while using different educational standards than those of the large school. The majority opinion is that the North Central Association would not be weakened if it established different standards for small and large high school accreditation, but the member schools are rather divided on the issue as to whether or not it should be done. The non-member school

administrators are of the opinion that this should be done. About one-half of the administrators share the opinion that the small school should not be required to offer the same minimum number of units as that expected of the large high school, especially in the foreign language field.

Divisions Within the North Central Association

When confronted with the suggestion of establishing small and large school divisions within the North Central Association, over a third of the member school administrators see this as a possibility. Whether or not a radical change of this type might affect the membership status of the present non-members is not known, but the majority of the opinions show that this group of administrators are in favor of this kind of change in the Association.

Again, the action of the North Central Association in establishing the Committee on Small Schools may be the best action at the present time; however, in the near future a more complete assessment of opinions and attitudes should be made.

APPENDIX

To The Administrator,

The Opiniionnaire Preliminary Letter

At the 76th annual meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools a resolution was passed which allows small high schools to offer and teach fewer units of course work than that required of the large high school members. Also, the North Central Association has recently established a Committee on Small Schools whose interest in evaluation is one area of concern.

It is possible that these actions by this accrediting association indicate that there is a trend toward the establishment of different evaluation procedures or standards for the small and larger high schools.

The most widely used evaluation guide within the geographic area of the North Central Association is the Evaluative Criteria which is used frequently as a guide for determining the quality of a school's educational program. With its use, both quality and quantity assessments and measurements are made. Is it conceivable that assessments and measurements made in any school evaluation with the Evaluative Criteria, or any other guide, will be more realistic if the size of the school becomes a factor considered in the evaluation?

As a part of my field experiences research project with the Specialist in Education program at Eastern Illinois University, I am seeking opinions from administrators from selected schools regarding the evaluation standards and procedures in relation to the size of the high school. Please take the few minutes necessary to respond to the questions. Your opinions are important for this undertaking.

Thank you for your assistance.

Gordon L. Eckols

used?

- 11. Do you believe that a small school can maintain a quality educational program for its students using different standards than those for a large school?

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Questions 12 through 15 relate directly to the North Central Association. Please respond to these even though your school is not a member of the association. The North Central Association has defined a small school as one with an enrollment of 300 or less.

- 12. Should the North Central Association consider adopting different standards for the accreditation of small high schools than those adopted for the accreditation of large high schools? Why or Why Not

Yes	No

- 13. If the North Central Association should establish different standards for the small high schools will this weaken the association as an accrediting agency?

- 14. If different standards were adopted for the small high schools, in which areas can they differ from the large high schools without lowering an accepted minimal level for a quality educational program?
 None _____ Foreign Language Units _____ Seats in Library _____
 Units required to be offered _____ Others _____

The Opionnaire

Official Name of High School

Enrollment

Name of Administrator Responding

Title

	Yes	No
1. Is the school a member of the North Central Association?		
2. If not, has the school ever been a member of the North Central Association?		
3. If not, is membership in the North Central Association desired?		
4. Are you familiar with the <u>Evaluative Criteria</u> ?		
5. Have you used the <u>Evaluative Criteria</u> in making an evaluation of your school?		
6. If so, was it an effective instrument for your evaluation?		
7. Have you made an evaluation of your school using some other guide or process?		
8. Was this guide or process effective in your evaluation?		
9. Do you believe that the evaluation of schools can be accomplished in the same way regardless of the size?		
10. Do you believe that for effective evaluation of small schools and large schools a different set of criteria for measurement must be used?		
11. Do you believe that a small school can maintain a quality educational program for its students using different standards than those for a large school?		

Questions 12 through 15 relate directly to the North Central Association. Please respond to these even though your school is not a member of the association. The North Central Association has defined a small school as one with an enrollment of 300 or less.

	Yes	No
12. Should the North Central Association consider adopting different standards for the accreditation of small high schools than those adopted for the accreditation of large high schools? Why or Why Not _____ _____		
13. If the North Central Association should establish different standards for the small high schools will this weaken the association as an accrediting agency?		
14. If different standards were adopted for the small high schools, in which areas can they differ from the large high schools without lowering an accepted minimal level for a quality educational program? None _____ Foreign Language Units _____ Seats in Library _____ Units required to be offered _____ Others _____ _____		
15. Do you believe that there is a need for separate small school and large school divisions within the North Central Association? Why or Why Not _____ _____		
16. Would you like the results of this opinionnaire?		

Please make any additional comments or offer any opinions relating to evaluating small and large high school educational programs you would like to share.

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