

A STUDY OF THE EFFECT
OF CLOSING THE ONE ROOM SCHOOLS
OF KANSAS

by

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INTRODUCTION

For many years school men of Kansas have been cognizant of the fact that our rural schools have been very inefficient. It is also true that we as school men have done little to remedy the weaknesses that have so long existed. Many of our most outstanding educational leaders have called attention to some of these defects. State Superintendent Fairchild (14, p. 43) in 1908 reported:

The most pressing educational problem today is the rural school; while all eyes have been turned to the high school, to the college, and to the university, it is feared that the welfare of the rural school has been sadly overlooked.

The conditions which prompted Superintendent Fairchild to make this statement remained to haunt later educators. In a circular letter ¹ in 1931, State Superintendent George A. Allen, Jr. made this statement:

What the outrageous, obsolete system of schools does to education in Kansas is beyond the reach of ordinary English. One is tempted to fling linguistic convention to the winds, and indulge in the forceful vernacular of the early frontier.

Thinking men have agreed that the most glaring defect of the one room rural school has been the lack of a desirable social atmosphere. This is an unhealthy condition, because the boys and girls are learning to live in a different manner than they will later, when forced to become a part

¹ Circular letter (Dec. 9, 1931) to school officials.

of society. The lack of the best social atmosphere in the small one room rural school, has not been its only short-coming. As a general rule, the teachers in the rural schools have not been as well trained as have been the teachers in the larger school. This, in part, has been due to the fact that the new teacher could get experience in the rural school, and if successful move on up into the better paying positions. Other disadvantages of the rural school, have been their inability to furnish instruction in music, art, physical education, and health. One of the most unbelievable facts has been, that as rule, the rural bred boy is found to be less physically fit than his metropolitan cousin. This has probably been due to the fact that most rural schools have had little or no health supervision.

At one time, it was thought that the consolidation of schools would do away with these evils. With consolidation, large expensive plants were built, and districts expanded to cover many square miles. As the financial stress of the depression years became more painful, the taxes needed to keep these schools in operation, and pay for these fine buildings were not forthcoming. Dissatisfaction with the school systems ran rampant, and as a result budgets were halved, needed equipment was not bought, buildings were not kept in repair, and teachers salaries were not conducive to good teaching.

In other communities where consolidation would have been the most logical solution to their educational ills, it has been very difficult, or in many cases impossible to consolidate, because the individual districts did not choose to discontinue their identity as a district. For in the organization of a consolidated district, the several individual, original districts cease to exist and their identity is lost through their absorption into the new district. The several school boards are replaced by one board for the newly organized consolidated district.

The 1935 session of the Kansas legislature enacted a law which provided for the organization of co-operative school areas. The purpose of this law was to provide ways and means, where by two or more schools might provide for the maintenance of one school jointly in order to reduce expenses and to obtain certain educational advantages for their children, without the disorganization of either district.

The co-operative school area law repealed the law which compelled the disorganization of a one teacher school district which lies adjacent to a graded school district maintaining a high school, if it should discontinue its school for three years or more. Consequently, it is now possible for a district to close its doors for an indefinite period, and send its children to another district without being disorganized.

If such a law as the Co-operative School Area law were to mean anything to rural communities, some means of transportation must be provided. Out of this discussion came a statute that legally permitted the use of public funds for the purpose of transporting pupils to and from a combined school. In the Kansas School Laws (10, p. 103-4) occurs:

That the board of education of any city of the first or second class, or the school board of any school district, consolidated school district, rural high school district, or community high school district, shall have the authority to use the public funds of such boards of education, or such districts, for the purpose of transporting any grade of grades or any high school class or classes there-of to and from any school maintained by any other board of education, or by any other district under such rules, and regulations--as such board of education or school board may prescribe, upon agreement there of between the board of education or school board desiring to transport such pupils, and the board of education or school board of the school to which such pupils are to be transported.

Thus, the present school laws of Kansas have permitted the organization of Co-operative School Areas without serious difficulties being involved. The organization of such areas requires the action of the district boards, the district meetings, and that arrangements be made for instruction. The district boards of the one room rural school joining with larger districts would provide the transportation.

Dr. W. E. Sheffer, sponsor of the Co-operative movement felt that the law should (a) afford educational opportunities as good or better than those now offered, in all schools involved with a reduction in costs; (b) reduce costs if the quality of education is not improved; (c) improve the quality

of education, if costs are to remain the same; (d) require no expenditures for new school plants; (e) make a maximum use of present school facilities; (f) not involve the disorganization of any school districts; and (g) not render the return of a one teacher rural school difficult or impossible.

Before beginning a study of the Co-operative School Areas it seemed advisable to learn what previous work had been done in studying co-operation in Kansas.

In 1937, Evens completed a study of the operation of the co-operative school area in Kansas. In this work he studied the expenditures of co-operating schools in 32 counties and compared them with the expenditures of the schools before closing. He broke the total expenditures down into 14 divisions such as light, water, heat, janitor supplies and insurance. These expenditures were only for the year before closing, and the year after closing. Evens found (5, p. 48) that:

This study reveals the fact that there is a reduction in the total expenditures of 8.6 per cent. It must be remembered also that this reduction occurred at the time when salaries, and other budgetary expenditures were generally being increased.

The same year Bryan (1) conducted a related study. He was concerned with the attitudes of the patrons, board members and county superintendents of Kansas, toward the co-operative plan. He concluded that the patrons and school board members were well satisfied with the plan, but that the county

superintendents did not favor co-operation. Bryan suggested that an amendment be added to the co-operative law that would require the county superintendent to file a copy of each annual co-operative report. Failure to do this would prohibit the county superintendents from drawing their salaries.

The object in this study was to determine whether or not the Co-operative School Area Law has accomplished something of what Dr. W. E. Sheffer hoped that it would, namely that the Co-operative School Area should; (a) afford educational opportunities as good or better than those now offered in all schools involved, with a reduction in costs; (b) reduce costs if the quality of education is improved; and (c) improve the quality of education if the costs are to remain the same.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Terms used in this study are here defined.

Co-operating School refers to those schools that discontinued their school, and furnish education to their children by sending them to another school.

School Co-operated With refers to a school that accepts the children from the co-operating school.

Combined School refers to the two or more schools as they operate under co-operative relationship.

COLLECTING DATA

After brief consideration it appeared that the best

source of data would be the County Superintendent's Annual Report to the State Superintendent. It seemed advisable to consider only the expenditures after the 1933-34 fiscal year, for this year marked the beginning of the Co-operative School Areas. It also seemed logical to consider no schools that had already closed before 1933-34. In addition to the above restrictions on the number of schools studied, it seemed that if this study were to have any significance, no schools that closed their doors because of a lack of pupils should be considered. After eliminating these two groups from all schools closed, the schools left were those closing since 1933-34, and co-operating with some other school.

At first it seemed the best procedure to go directly to the separate county superintendents, and get the data first hand, rather than send out questionnaires. Accordingly those counties adjacent to Riley County were visited and the county superintendents contacted.

This procedure soon proved expensive in time, mileage and money as it was impossible to visit more than one of these county seats a day. The actual copying of the materials needed, took from three to four hours in each case, and if the county superintendents were interviewed another hour was consumed. After several such tiring experiences, it was apparent that much time and mileage could be saved by going to the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction at Topeka and there getting the information needed.

After carefully going over the annual reports, it was found, in many cases, that these reports lacked essential information on the length of the school term, and the type of school to which the co-operating schools sent their children. To obtain this information a return post card Form No. 2, (Appendix) was sent to 70 county superintendents. Of these returns were received from 41 counties having 284 co-operating schools. This group of schools furnished a good cross section of Kansas, as the counties reporting were widely scattered over the entire state (Fig. 1).

To facilitate the interpretation of the large amount of data, Form No. 3 (Appendix) was developed in this way.

The average cost per year before closing, and the average cost per year after closing was calculated by averaging the expenditures from the year 1933-34 to the time of closing, or averaging the expenditures after the time of closing. This procedure seemed fair, even though a school closing in 1934-35 would have only one year expenditures as a basis for comparison, while a school closing at a later date would have less data regarding the cost after closing.

After each county was handled individually, the data regarding the expenditures of those schools cooperating were combined into Table 1 which gives an overall view of the financial status of cooperative schools all over the state.

Table 1. Financial status of co-operating schools.

County	Number schools closed	Number pupils before closing	Number pupils last yr. after closing	Average annual cost before closing	Average annual cost after closing	Average annual saving
Allen	2	17	17	\$1514.82	\$1174.01	\$ 740.81
Anderson	7	*	*	1394.02	1371.94	22.08
Atchinson	4	13	9	1487.61	441.44	1046.17
Berber	15	90	73	8888.88	6772.18	2096.70
Berton	10	47	41	4117.67	2904.82	1212.85
Bourbon	4	25	11	1675.37	501.00	1174.37
Brown	7	29	19	4232.35	1895.23	2337.12
Butler	12	72	37	7202.23	4925.04	2777.19
Chase	9	35	30	4302.87	3626.17	1176.70
Chouteau	14	79	37	5697.48	2775.76	2921.72
Cherokee	6	52	48	3662.06	1996.82	1665.24
Cheyenne	6	39	37	3432.79	2453.88	978.91
Clark	10	43	40	4998.32	4620.99	377.33

Table 1. Cont.

Cley	4	10	7	978.20	263.70	714.50
Cloud	7	21	22	3285.52	1845.05	1440.47
Coffey	9	48	27	3656.61	1753.10	1903.51
Comenche	7	*	*	3979.08	3162.41	816.67
Cowley	15	*	*	8156.44	5250.33	2906.11
Crewford	9	*	*	2123.44	658.60	1464.84
Decatur	10	25	16	3152.47	2865.99	286.48
Dickinson	9	58	28	4910.95	3338.76	1572.17
Doniphan	2	9	1	1135.59	481.92	653.67
Douglas	3	26	10	1616.64	979.60	637.04
Edwards	15	59	75	5551.69	5912.50	330.81*
Elk	10	33	18	2557.69	1586.21	971.48
Ellis	3	16	18	791.51	624.73	166.78
Elleworth	9	*	*	4929.69	2619.75	2309.94
Finney	12	*	*	7075.63	4817.09	2258.54
Ford	15	25	36	7801.48	5213.14	2788.34

Table 1. Cont.

Franklin	2	7	10	1046.69	759.05	287.64
Geary	2	*	*	1114.28	398.28	716.00
Gove	3	*	*	2266.03	1326.69	939.34
Graham	21	64	42	6683.74	4248.96	2434.19
Grant	9	34	19	3200.35	1616.43	1583.92
Gray	3	15	15	1979.98	1200.29	778.79
Greeley	Information not Usable					
Greenwood	9	37	21	4101.50	2483.81	1617.69
Hemilton	13	75	88	10289.35	6759.94	3529.41
Harper	12	46	29	5649.13	3437.48	2211.65
Harvey	1	4	2	584.30	173.31	410.99
Haskell	8	34	25	4989.57	1937.49	3052.08
Hodgeman	4	23	10	2483.47	893.11	1590.36
Jeakson	5	15	15	2303.44	1005.42	1298.02
Jefferson	5	19	9	1777.92	591.29	1186.63
Jewell	30	143	63	11501.28	4775.42	6725.86

Table 1. Cont.

Johnson	9	61	30	3642.00	1571.90	2070.10
Keerny	3	25	11	1283.76	475.67	809.09
Kingsall	18	54	39	6761.90	4076.35	2685.55
Kiowa	7	38	37	3392.35	3368.25	24.10
Labette	6	59	37	3094.84	1907.85	1186.99
Lane	9	33	42	4536.04	2914.73	1621.31
Leavenworth	Closed before 1933-34					
Lincoln	11	38	24	4635.24	2595.32	2039.92
Linn	6	52	20	1420.93	526.71	894.22
Logan	2	5	5	1081.15	619.70	461.45
Lyon	4	11	14	1398.07	1317.05	81.02
Merion	10	46	26	5354.78	2774.96	2579.82
Marshall	8	35	43	3733.32	2362.49	1370.83
McPherson	5	22	16	3033.10	1588.18	1444.92
Meade	7	63	50	4722.54	3528.97	1193.57
Miami	6	44	21	3145.55	1804.23	1341.21

Table 1. Cont.

Mitchell	13	48	34	6052.76	2922.98	3129.78
Montgomery	1	*	*	1073.16	397.64	775.52
Morris	5	39	17	2928.53	1560.16	1368.37
Morton	4	38	20	3234.29	2009.81	1224.48
Nemaha	12	68	66	5242.08	4392.49	849.59
Neosho	No schools closed after 1933-34					
Ness	11	54	40	5928.34	4377.39	1550.95
Norton	21	124	48	8246.31	5529.42	2716.89
Osage	12	64	63	5929.91	2660.41	3269.50
Osborne	18	96	52	8638.36	5810.97	2827.39
Ottawa	14	78	41	8327.36	4634.42	3692.94
Pawnee	10	77	52	7186.78	5173.65	2013.13
Phillips	22	*	*	7705.97	3450.62	4255.35
Pottawatomie	23	*	*	7705.39	5328.53	2376.86
Prett	9	55	57	6227.39	5862.50	364.89
Rawlins	14	85	48	6673.03	3168.76	3504.27

Table 1. Cont.

Reno	13	*	*	8702.80	7574.55	1128.25
Republic	11	57	36	4933.10	2085.20	2847.90
Rice	6	31	21	4398.50	2587.72	1810.78
Riley	12	49	37	7248.82	5059.89	2188.93
Rooks	9	43	23	3643.54	2035.46	1608.08
Rush	5	29	23	2286.36	1906.20	380.16
Russel	6	33	21	3237.68	1769.85	1467.83
Saline	8	32	30	5206.83	3041.59	2165.24
Scott	8	35	25	4963.97	2637.85	2326.12
Sedwick	10	55	40	6914.14	2666.92	4247.22
Seward	5	34	31	3210.04	3503.05	293.01*
Shawnee	10	72	74	5871.29	4711.61	1159.68
Sheridan	7	43	29	3327.51	1887.97	1439.54
Sherman	5	29	19	2058.62	891.28	1167.34
Smith	19	109	50	7889.86	3418.88	4470.98
Stafford	8	53	34	5225.54	2628.55	2596.99

Table 1. Concl.

Stanton	4	22	11	2723.43	1766.67	956.76
Stevens	10	61	38	6070.02	3898.86	2171.16
Summer	14	83	63	8523.71	4883.58	3640.13
Thomss	Information not available					
Trego	4	30	16	2184.98	874.75	1310.23
Wabeunsee	8	29	13	3740.62	1823.01	1917.61
Wallace	Information not available					
Washington	10	42	18	5550.36	1828.86	3721.50
Wichite	7	46	26	3564.79	2451.48	1113.31
Wilson	7	49	30	4246.71	2318.54	1928.17
Woodson	3	31	34	1389.20	1291.78	97.42
Wyandotte School	#46 Closed before 1933-34					
Total	881	3897	2700	434638.77	266096.96	168541.81

* Denotes loss

FINDINGS

Expenditures Before and After Closing Schools

A study of Table 1 shows that 99 counties were considered in determining the average total expenditures of the co-operating schools before and after closing. Three counties, namely, Wyandotte, Neosho and Leavenworth had no schools closed since 1933-34, and now co-operating with another school. The counties Wallace, Thomas and Greeley were not considered because of incomplete data. Thus this phase of the study is based on the expenditures of 99 of the 105 counties.

Dr. W. E. Sheffer in relating the merits of the Co-operative School Areas, stated that they should provide education as good as, or better than that previously furnished, at a reduction of cost.

From the study of Table 1 it was found that the schools in only two counties in 99 had higher annual expenditures after co-operating, than they had before closing their one room schools. These counties were Edwards, with a higher annual expense to the county of \$330.81 after co-operating, and Seward with an added expense to the county of \$293.01. Following are some reasons why these two counties showed increased operative costs under the co-operative school plan. They were both Western counties, where schools are few and far between, and transportation was thus more expensive.

Edwards county for some reason, had more pupils the first year after closing, than during the last year before co-operating--59 pupils previous to closing, and 75 the first year after closing. Seward county having five schools co-operating showed a loss in enrollment of three, but one particular district, namely 32, showed an expenditure of \$1090.00 during the year 1937-38 for transportation. This seems like an exorbitant amount, for the five co-operating schools had a total average annual expenditure of \$5912.50.

There are indications of some malpractices in transportation, such as a family moving to a farm at some distance from the school to which their children should be transported, in order to collect more transportation money; and a charge of \$160 for transportation for a child of grade school age who rode to the city school with his brother, a high school student. On the other hand there are many cases where no transportation charges are made. If the parents furnish transportation free to the district, it would seem that they must realize the benefits gained by their children and are willing to pay for them.

Some districts have closed their schools when their enrollment became low, and later when their enrollments increased, returned to their one room school. This is an exception rather than the rule, for in most cases a school that has closed once does not return to its original status.

Bryen (16, p. 45) reported:

Among those answering the question in the questionnaire, 89.1 per cent reported that children living in districts with closed schools, liked to attend larger schools, because they can be in larger groups, which offer more competition and interest.

The tuition charges were found to be inconsistent in most cases. There were many cases where no tuition charges were made. The reason for this is that schools are desirous of keeping their enrollments up, so that their educational advantages may be the best, and also, so that they can profit from the state school equalization fund. The superintendent of Pottowatomie County mentioned this fact when asked why so many schools in his county charged no tuition. However, there are cases in which tuition charges do seem too high.

Referring to Table 1 it is seen that the total average annual expenditures of the 881 co-operating schools in 99 counties, including Seward and Edward counties that showed losses the year before closing their schools, was \$434,638.77. The total average annual expenditures for these same schools the year after closing was \$266,096.96. This was a saving of \$168,541.81 to those counties. This means that if those counties had had no co-operating schools, their average annual expenditures would have been over \$168,000.00 more than they were after co-operation. This represents a saving of 38.7 per cent, or the cost after closing the schools was 63.5 per cent as great as was the average annual cost before closing.

This saving is more significant because of the fact that teacher salaries and other school expenses have risen in the past few years.

Opponents of the Co-operative School Areas have said that this reduced cost was because of reduced enrollments, and not the more efficient operation of the combined school. It is true that the enrollment was smaller after co-operating, but this reduced enrollment was not due to any fault of the Co-operative plan. This decrease was due to the fact that the rural population in Kansas is less than it was in 1900. Not only is the rural population less than it was in 1900, but the elementary school enrollment for the state is less than it was in 1900. McCleary (17, p. 45) stated that elementary schools showed a loss in enrollment of 35 per cent during the period 1900 to 1941. Had it not been for co-operation, many more schools would have been operating for, from one to four pupils.

Comparison of Per Capite Costs

Educators have been accused of being unbusinesslike. To be fair to both sides of the question of the advisability of organizing co-operative school areas, it would be best to determine the cost of education of the per capite basis.

As noted in Table 1 there were 681 schools co-operating, and 3,897 pupils enrolled before the schools closed. The first year after these schools were closed, 2700 pupils were

enrolled. This represents a loss in enrollment of 1,197 pupils. At the same time Table 1 shows that the cost of operating these schools had also dropped appreciably. If it costs \$434,638.77 to provide education for 3,897 pupils, the cost per pupils per year, would be \$111.52. The year after closing the schools 2700 pupils were sent to school for \$266,096.96. This would be \$97.44 per boy or girl sent to school for the school year.

Dr. W. E. Sheffer in his second statement relative to the advantages to be obtained from the Co-operative School Areas, said that the Co-operative School Areas should reduce the costs, if the quality of education is not improved. Assuming that the co-operating school provided education of the same quality as provided by the one room school, the Co-operative School Areas have reduced the costs, as the per pupil cost dropped from \$111.52 to \$97.44. This represents a saving of \$14.07 per pupil to those districts providing schooling by co-operating with another school despite added transportation costs.

Comparison Of Educational Opportunities

Teacher training, experience and supervision are factors that improve the quality of instruction furnished the pupils in the school.

It is a well known fact that the rural teachers are the lowest paid in the profession. In this study, teachers were

found to be receiving as little as 40 dollars a month.

Inexperienced teachers must be content with the lower salary range, as must the teacher with only the minimum educational requirements. This being true, the rural school falls heir to the inexperienced teacher, or the teacher with the least training and the lowest salary--a combination that usually results in a poor quality of teaching.

In the Twenty-Seventh Biennial Report, State Superintendent Allen (15, p. 491) reported:

The total number of teachers employed in all Kansas public schools during 1929-30 was 20,178 of whom 2,597 were inexperienced. Of the inexperienced teachers 1,797 or 65.7 per cent were serving in the one teacher school.

It has been stated that the rural school teachers possess the lower grade certificates. State Superintendent Allen (15, p. 491) reported:

During 1929-30 of all the teachers of one teacher schools 77.8 per cent held certificates which did not require college training. In the two or more teacher schools only 50.9 per cent of the teachers held such certificates.

The only supervision the rural school teacher has access to, is the county superintendent. Such supervision is almost negligible, as this office may have as many as 100 schools to supervise. Thus, when visiting a school, the county superintendent is more concerned with inspectorial duties than with supervision--a condition for which the system should be blamed.

Being interested in the comparison of the educational

opportunities offered by the one room school, and the combined school, it is necessary that the type of school offered by the combined school be known. Forty-one county superintendents reported on 284 co-operating schools, and stated that 187 of them sent their children to a graded, nine months school whild 136 schools sent their children to an eight months rural school. This means that in 242 co-operating schools 64.7 per cent of their pupils attended a school definitely superior to its one room predecessor. The remaining schools, sending their students to an eight months rural school, had the advantage of sending their children to a larger school, even though the quality of teaching has been the same.

CONCLUSIONS

A study was made of effects of closing one room schools in 99 of the 105 counties of Kansas, and joining in CO-operative School Areas.

1. The organization of Co-operative school areas has definitely reduced the cost of education for the co-operating schools. The average annual cost of operating the one room school before closing was \$434638.77, while that of sending pupils to a co-operating school was \$266096.96. This represents a saving of \$168,541.81 to the 99 counties considered.

2. The Co-operative School Area has reduced the per capita cost. When operating as a one room school the average per pupil cost was \$111.52, while the average per pupil cost after cooperating was \$97.44. This means that a saving of \$14.08, per pupil was made possible by the Co-operation of schools in Kansas.

3. The pupils of the co-operating schools have educational advantages not enjoyed by the closed schools. The teachers in the combined schools have the better training, most experience, wiser supervision and better salaries.

4. The transportation problem is one that is worthy of more study. Whenever transportation costs vary to such an extent, as they do in Kansas, some method of standardizing these costs seems advisable.

5. Tuition irregularities offer a problem that may in many cases delay the formation of co-operative school areas.

6. The teachers of the rural schools have been underpaid, but an increase in salary would mean increased teaching efficiency, for the better paid teachers have more experience and better qualifications.

7. Schools after once co-operating are hesitant to return to their original status, and lose the educational advantages of the combined school.

8. Children from the closed schools attend schools having a larger enrollment. Over 60 per cent of the co-operating schools sent their pupils to a nine month graded school.

9. Many schools do not charge tuition in order that they may benefit from the school equalization fund.

10. The Co-operative school plan has replaced the older consolidation plans with the result that at present there are no new consolidations.

11. Other studies on the co-operation of schools indicate that the plan is acceptable to the pupils, patrons, and board members.

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APPENDIX

Form 1. Data For Co-operating School Of Kenses
County

	Pupils 1933-34	Pupils 1934-35	Pupils 1935-36	Pupils 1936-37	Pupils 1937-38	Pupils 1938-39	Pupils 1939-40
Dist.							
Total							
Trans.							
Tuition							
T. Salary							

Form 2. Questionnaire

Dear County Superintendent: Would you please fill out the questionnaire on the attached self addressed post card. The information would aid me materially in the work on my thesis for a Master's Degree.

Very truly,

Attached Card

County _____

County Superintendent _____

List. with closed schools	Kind of School attended	Term in most school attended	No. children from closed district

Form 3. Effects resulting from closing one teacher schools in Kansas

County _____

Dist.	No. pupils last yr. before	No. pupils first yr. after	Kind school after	No. mo. term before	No. mo. term after	Annual cost before	Annual cost after	Saving to coopera- ting schools