

Small School Reform: The Challenges Faced by One Urban High School

Carroll E. Bronson

SAGE Open 2013 3:

DOI: 10.1177/2158244013486789

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://sgo.sagepub.com/content/3/2/2158244013486789>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>



Additional services and information for *SAGE Open* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://sgo.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://sgo.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Small School Reform: The Challenges Faced by One Urban High School

SAGE Open
April-June 2013: 1-14
© The Author(s) 2013
DOI: 10.1177/2158244013486789
sgo.sagepub.com


Carroll E. Bronson¹

Abstract

This qualitative ethnographic case study explored the evolution of a public urban high school in its 3rd year of small school reform. The study focused on how the high school proceeded from its initial concept, moving to a small school program, and emerging as a new small high school. Data collection included interviews, observations, and document review to develop a case study of one small high school sharing a multiplex building. The first key finding, "Too Many Pieces, Not Enough Glue," revealed that the school had too many new programs starting at once and they lacked a clear understanding of their concept and vision for their new small school, training on the Montessori philosophies, teaching and learning in small schools, and how to operate within a teacher-cooperative model. The second key finding, "A Continuous Struggle," revealed that the shared building space presented problems for teachers and students. District policies remain unchanged, resulting in staff and students resorting to activist approaches to get things done. These findings offer small school reform leaders suggestions for developing and sustaining a small school culture and cohesion despite the pressures to revert back to top-down, comprehensive high school norms.

Keywords

small school reform, organizational change, teacher-cooperative model, school culture, urban schooling

The state of the American public high school in urban communities is a matter of great concern for parents, students, educators, and policy makers. Urban high schools are plagued by high drop-out rates, increased violence, low achievement levels, low levels of student engagement, and inequitable standards (Cotton, 1996; Fine, 1991; Fowler, 1995; Howley, 1994; White, 1982). As a result, increasing numbers of large public urban districts are seeking more efficient alternatives to the traditional comprehensive high school.

In response to this problem, high schools across the country are focusing on reorganizing into smaller learning communities. Research conducted over the past 20 years supports that small schools are better for students academically, and they are safer too (Supovitz & Christman, 2003). This "small is better" reform movement has concluded that smaller high schools have better attendance and performance on reading and writing assessments, and higher graduation and college-going rates, despite serving a more educationally disadvantaged population of students (Bryk, Easton, Gladden, Kochanek, & Luppescu, 1999; Howley, 2002; Lee & Smith, 1994; Lee, Smith, & Croniger, 1995; Mitchell, 2000).

The Small Schools Movement

The small schools movement is described by Meier (2002), founder of one of the first and most successful small schools

in Harlem, as a cultural rather than an institutional change. The small schools movement is about relationships and creating a culture in which students, teachers, families, and community members are known to each other (Klonsky, 2000). Ayers (2000) wrote,

The large, factory model school has its own kind of culture. It is a default culture. It exists because nothing else has consciously been put in its place. This culture parodies what is most absurd, most unjust, and most cruel about society at large. (p. 99)

While the majority of school improvement strategies today focus on increased performance and standardization, small school restructuring efforts attempt to redefine schooling as a relational enterprise focusing on the unique needs of individuals and communities.

Small School Research

Small school research began with several large-scale quantitative studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These studies

¹Cardinal Stritch University, Milwaukee, WI, USA

Corresponding Author:

Carroll E. Bronson, Doctoral Leadership Department, Cardinal Stritch University, 6801 N. Yates Road, Milwaukee, WI 53217, USA.
Email: cebronson@stritch.edu

confirmed educators' assumptions that small schools make educational achievements possible; students stay in school, know their teachers better, and are achieving academically (Fowler, 1995; Howley, 1994; Visher, Emanuel, & Teitelbaum, 1999). According to the research, small schools generally enroll no more than 400 students (Bearman & Ahmed, 2012; Cotton, 1996; Dentith, Bronson, Beachum, & Schneider, 2007; Fine, 2005; Meier, 2005; Wasley & Lear, 2001) and counteract the problems faced in larger schools, such as overburdened teachers who struggle to keep up or inadequate supports for students who need extracurricular help (Cotton, 1996; Heard, 2002; Howley, Strange, & Bickel, 2000). Smaller environments promote meaningful relationships between staff and students, which is thought to lead to more success for students in academics and personal endeavors.

Cotton (1996) reviewed more than 103 documents that identified a relationship between school size and some other aspect of schooling. According to her results, students in small high schools score higher on tests, pass more courses, and go on to college more frequently than those in larger ones. Moreover, Cotton suggests that these results appear to be greater for low-income students and students of color:

Poor students and those of racial and ethnic minorities are more adversely affected academically, attitudinally, and behaviorally, by attending large schools than are other students. Unfortunately, poor and minority students continue to be concentrated in large schools. (p. 11)

The research on small schools has recently shifted from demonstrating the benefits of small school size to looking for best practices within restructured or newly formed small schools. The literature has begun to inform educational reformers the ways in which they can take advantage of the smallness of their own schools. Copeland and Boatright's (2004) research suggests that small schools offer the opportunity for leadership practices to emerge that strengthen interpersonal relationships between adults and students, and build professional communities that are focused on the improvement of teaching and learning for everyone. Reports from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation examine issues of initiating and maintaining successful small school reform, and ways to identify barriers to sustaining thriving small schools (Hendrie, 2004). One of the key barriers mentioned is finding enough principals and teachers who truly understand the complex features of successful small schools: "Many small schools are struggling to put into place strong curricula and instructional practices, in part because their detracted classrooms include students of widely varying skill levels" (p. 30). The article also discusses the difficulty in renovating large buildings at a "time of overcrowding and tight budgets" which "pose other serious roadblocks" (p. 30). Darling-Hammond (1997) commented, "There's a big debate

in the reform community on whether it's even worth the effort to try to convert large high schools as they are, or whether only useful strategy is to go to new, small, completely autonomous schools" (p. 31). Currently, there is little research available that supports either approach as better than the other.

The positive effects of small schools are attributed to the fact that small schools foster school communities that focus on teaching and learning (Ancess, 1997, 2003; Cotton, 1996). Although individual factors related to school effectiveness have been explored, little is known about the evolution of small schools—how organizational and leadership change is experienced in the newly configured small high schools. Insights into a relatively new phenomenon of such complexity can best be acquired through in-depth investigation of a particular site through an analysis of these relationships as part of a sustained inquiry.

This study attempted to contribute to the knowledge base by exploring and analyzing the evolution of an urban small high school in its 3rd year of reform in a large multiplex. This ethnographic case study reports on issues of organizational change through focused attention on the altered roles of the teachers and administrators, as well as their relationships with each other and with the central administration office. Moreover, this study describes the complexity of shared spaces within a multiplex structure and discusses the repercussions this arrangement has on its students and school leaders within this large midwestern school district.

Theoretical Framework

Restructuring a large high school into a smaller learning community is a challenging process. Schools undergo this transformation because their current structure is failing. However, creating successful small high schools needs more than just small numbers of students (Cotton, 1996; Howley et al., 2000; Wallach, 2010). Personal relationships, unique curriculums, and alternate assessments are a few of the components that are needed as well (Ancess, 2003; Cotton, 1996; Heard, 2002; Klonsky, 2000; Oxley, 1994; Ravitz, 2010; Wasley et al., 2000). Although these components are more easily achieved in smaller schools, they are not an automatic result of a smaller school and must be worked for instead.

Fine's (2005) research suggests that dividing large schools into smaller units is a step in the right direction, but simply dividing or "fracturing" current structures would not ensure success. Newly created small high schools must be supported by districts, states, and local communities or they will have trouble surviving (Cotton, 1996; Howley, 2002). The small schools movement was meant to reclaim the public sphere and reinvigorate public education with a commitment that would inspire, spread to, and support other schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Fine, 2005). Keeping the intention of the small schools movement clear is vital to its success.

Based on the Bank Street research project in Chicago, Fine (2005) contended that small schools were established to provide students:

Access, participation and democracy: Educators craft elaborate plans for curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to nurture the minds and souls of youth. They build democratic participation into the fabric of schools and communities.

Commitments to equity: While small schools vary in theme, origin, and structure, at their best they are designed to encourage sustained, critical inquiry among heterogeneous groups of youth who are being educated toward college.

Sophisticated systems of assessment that support better teaching and learning: The small schools movement has historically resisted high-stakes tests and externally generated assessments as fundamentally anti-intellectual.

Schools for social justice and social responsibility: Defining schools as public institutions with deep social responsibilities for intellectual, economic, and civic well-being, many in the small schools movement originally conceived the schools as a movement for educational justice. (pp. 12-14)

These ideas emphasize the original intent of small schools and these findings foreshadow the focus of this research project, providing the conceptual orientation of the proposed study. These concepts have provided a framing lens through which to better understand the phenomena of small school reform. The following section describes the methods and data collection for the study.

Methods and Data Collection

This yearlong ethnographic case study conducted in 2009 marked an attempt to explore how one urban high school, a new small high school housed in a multiplex, evolved from a concept, to a program, and finally to a new small high school. This case study design used qualitative strategies of data collection. Field data were collected through school site observations, document analysis, and 25 individual interviews. The researcher observed general leadership meetings with all staff members, department team meetings with teachers, administrator meetings with parents on discipline issues, and general staff development sessions. The researcher interviewed administrators and teachers, as well as observing students, classrooms, hallways, principal or other school leader's offices, the cafeteria, and other events.

Data were managed and organized through the use of NVivo, a qualitative research software program. NVivo supports the ways in which researchers work with their data. The computer's capacity for recording, sorting, matching, and linking can be directed by the researchers to assist in answering their research questions from the data, without losing access to the source data, or the original context of the data.

The researchers produced node reports and conducted relational mapping through intersection and union of identified nodes relative to the research questions.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed generally accepted forms of qualitative inquiry and relied on the research questions to guide the data collection, analysis, and reporting of the ethnographic case study findings. Data analysis was an ongoing, continuous process in this qualitative study. According to Merriam (2009), "Making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning" (pp. 175-176). The data analysis process began simultaneously with data collection. The researcher reflected on observations, analytic memos, field notes, and interview data independently. Patterns were identified and initial codes were determined after multiply readings. By examining the complexity of these different categories, the researcher began to see an emerging picture of how an urban high school experienced its evolution. More specifically, several internal and external factors emerged that affected the school's development.

This study addressed two overarching questions:

1. In what ways have the original ideas behind this new small high school in an urban setting evolved and taken shape from its initial concept, to a program, to a new small high school?
2. In what ways, if any, have the internal (leadership, building space, curriculum, and school identity) or external factors (funding, local or state support, and parent support) of this school affected its evolution?

The following section provides the context for the research study.

Context of the Study

The United States has been entrenched in cycles of school reform for more than 100 years. In Grassmore¹ the most recent wave of large-scale high school reform, called Weston's² High School Redesign Initiative, was implemented in the fall of 2003, with a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the amount of US\$17,250,000. The grant outlined a 5-year plan to redesign Weston's large comprehensive public high schools by developing small autonomous high schools throughout the city, with the goal of helping students graduate from high school prepared for college and the workforce, and ready to be productive and contributing members of society.

Weston's High School Redesign Initiative suggested that new small high schools should be in their own building or share space in a multiplex (an old large high school housing

three or more separate schools). New small high schools should be autonomous with a specific mission and specific objectives for success. The goal in Weston was to have schools throughout the area offer parents and students choice in approaches to curriculum, teaching methodology, and classroom structures. In addition, there would be schools that keep at-risk students from disengaging from the learning process by offering counseling, personal attention, and support in addition to an innovative curriculum.

Federal accountability standards driven by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) demand that systematic change occur in secondary education around the country. Weston's comprehensive high schools have been identified as schools in need of improvement and are therefore subject to rigorous federal sanctions that could lead to school reconstitution. Due to the grim statistics facing them, leaders throughout Weston have mobilized efforts to address the challenges of NCLB and the need to improve high school attendance, performance, and graduation rates by implementing a small high school design. It is estimated that 15,000 students were affected by this comprehensive reform effort between the years 2003 and 2008. Within the Weston Public School (WPS) system, 7,000 students were served in multiplex facilities located in reconfigured large WPS high schools and 6,000 students in 30 or more newly created small schools. According to a report issued by the National Assessment of Education Progress, a testing program of the federal government often called The Nations' Report Card, Weston had the most dramatic negative results regarding the achievement gap figures (Borsuk, 2008). These figures suggested that other larger issues than education are affecting the lives of African Americans in Weston. The report suggested that rising poverty, loss of blue-collar jobs, high rates of single-parent households, increased numbers of teen births, and severe crime are a few issues affecting African American students and the Weston community at large.

Undeniably, action needed to be taken given the state statistics on school performance in Grassmore. On average, 43.1% of students graduate from an urban high school in Grassmore compared with the U.S. national average of 70% (Toppo, 2006). The statistics in Weston, the city in which this study is focused, are even more staggering as there is a large disparity between the inner-city schools and their surrounding suburbs. In Weston, 82.5% of students graduate from suburban schools while only 54.5% graduate from urban schools (Thomas, 2008). The 28% disparity in Weston is the 10th-largest among cities in the United States.

WPS District

At the time of the study in 2009, WPS District was the largest school district in its midwestern state and is the 27th largest school district in the country. It served more than 100,000 students in more than 200 schools around the city. In 2006, 75% of the WPS students received free or

reduced lunch, the measure used to indicate student poverty, which has grown from 69% a decade ago (Borsuk, 2007). The number of students with disabilities has increased as well from 14.6% in 2002 to 16.6% in 2006 (Borsuk, 2007).

In WPS, 90% of high school-age students attend 15 large comprehensive high schools with an average enrollment of more than 1,300 students. Student proficiency and graduation rates in these schools are extremely low. One of every four WPS high school students fails to pass enough courses and earn enough credits to move to the next grade level the following year. One of every three freshmen fails to advance to sophomore status the next year. The average high school student attendance rate is only 80% (Borsuk, 2007). Student mobility rates are also high with nearly one of every three high school students changing schools every year. On average, students who dropped out of WPS have attended four high schools before leaving the system. Over the past several years, the average grade point average (GPA) for high school students was 1.8 (D+) and one third of the students failed all of their courses. The 2004-2005 district graduation rates were 65%, and the suspension rate for high school students was 41% (Borsuk, 2007). The small school strategy is clearly an important one in Weston; currently, 18% of the high school graduates come from small high schools, even though these schools enroll only 10% of the WPS high school student population and represent 4% of the WPS high school budget.

In 2003-2004, the Weston Superintendent received approximately 75 new proposals for 30 new schools set to open in the fall of 2006. The goal was to plan and create more than 30 new small schools for approximately 3,000 WPS students by converting at least 7 large schools into multiplexes serving 7,000 students and new small schools (400 students or less) serving 6,000 students. The school focused on for this study, Summit High School, is one of the new small schools mentioned above, and it opened in August 2006, joining three other new small high schools in a multiplex building.

Findings

The research project on small high school reform has produced several distinct findings that are organized here under two broader dilemmas of practice in contemporary urban schooling:

1. *Key finding—Too many pieces, not enough glue:* Summit High School did not have a successful evolution from vision to reality. Its founders had too many new initiatives starting at once. They lacked a clear understanding of the concept and vision for their new small school. Staff lacked training on the curriculum philosophies, teaching and learning in small schools, and operating within a teacher-cooperative model.

2. *Key Finding—A continuous struggle:* Internal and external factors hindered the development of Summit High School. The shared building space presented many problems for the teachers and students at Summit High School. District policies remain unchanged, resulting in staff and students resorting to activist approaches to get things done for their school.

In the sections that follow, the findings are discussed with an attention to this backdrop and the articulated dilemmas present in an urban high school setting.

Key Finding: Too Many Pieces, Not Enough Glue

School Concept. The practice of a shared concept involves developing “pictures of the future” that foster genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance (Senge, 2006, p. 9). According to Senge (2006), dictating a vision will never work, rather people will excel and learn when they want to. The original founders of Summit High School,³ Cathy, Dave, and Barb, had good intentions when they began planning their new small school. Their vision and mission statement was clearly defined on paper, but they had trouble figuring out how to make it a reality within the school building.

When Summit High School first opened in 2005, the staff was faced with multiple challenges and spent many hours just trying to get things done. None of the teachers had been principals, received any formal leadership training, or had the equivalent administrative licenses. Understanding how to enroll students, deal with district policies, and handle budgets was all new to this staff. Quite frankly, the staff, a group of teachers who cared about their school and were trying to make it work, was overworked and overwhelmed.

Summit High School’s initial small school proposal described the advantages of combining two unique curriculum philosophies, Montessori and International Baccalaureate (IB), stating that the rigor of the IB program coupled with Montessori’s concept of creating a lifelong love of learning was a unique mix that would enhance academic achievement, increase family involvement, and develop character (school document, January 2, 2003). Montessori is a unique curriculum with specific features that teachers need to be sufficiently trained so that they can incorporate these principles into their own teaching and learning practices. Even though Summit provided a few initial professional development sessions centered on Montessori philosophies, these few hours of seminar sessions were not enough to assist teachers in incorporating these philosophies into their curriculum.

Moreover, the lack of clarity around the school concept was evident during the planning stages of Summit High School, and even through the early years of the school’s existence. This contributed to the school remaining stagnant. Many staff did not know if they would be required to go to

Montessori training over the summer, which would be a 6-week commitment out-of-state. Barb knew how difficult it would be to recruit teachers, and then tell them that they had to attend out-of-state training, so she continued to tell new hires that the training was “optional.” Many teachers who did not want to continue in the Montessori philosophy or attend the training left the school, which resulted in high turnover the first few years.

In 2006, Summit High School made another important decision and applied for and received Charter status with WPS District. This decision was made to “trade a higher level of accountability for a higher level of autonomy” (school document, January 5, 2007). The staff believed that changing the school’s status would benefit them in several ways, including more local control over finances, flexibility in scheduling and school calendar, assessment practices that match the school’s vision and mission, and the opportunity to supplement nutritional services with locally grown healthy food.

Another reason that Summit High School decided to apply for Charter status was their leadership model. From the beginning, Summit High School operated as a teacher-cooperative model and teachers collectively shared in the decision-making process. However, as a non-Charter school, they were required to maintain a 5% principal appointment, and this appointment carried more weight in terms of decision making than the school’s founders originally realized. Essentially, the 5% principal had the authority to overrule or change any decision made by the group. Even though this never did happen, this change would protect the work they had started, and Charter status would allow the group to function as a recognized, structured teacher-cooperative model.

Montessori Knowledge and Training. Small schools originated as creative places where teachers have a clear idea of the professional culture they want to nurture. “Relevant curriculums and assessments should ideally grow out of that culture, and teachers should have the flexibility to develop unique curriculums, methodologies, and assessments appropriate to their students” (Cook & Tashlik, 2005, p. 15). The objective is to develop curriculum that challenges and promotes critical inquiry in a student body. The lack of teachers trained in Montessori principles was a major issue that Summit needed to overcome. At the time of the study, only 3 staff members (Cathy, Dave, and Barb) were trained in Montessori principles and had certification. That left 12 teachers without sufficient tools to implement the Montessori philosophy into their daily curriculum.

The Montessori training program required a large financial commitment from the school and a large time commitment from the teachers. The closest training site was located in Ohio and required attendees to stay for a period of 6 weeks. Dave explains why teachers were not sent their 1st year of employment:

What we learned is that it is best to bring teachers on, have them teach with us for a year, kind of get their feet wet and you know kind of absorb the lesson and the integrated teaching style. Then after their first year, go to the 6-week adolescent training. Going in cold without really knowing what's going on is difficult and plus for our school, it's a \$6,000 investment. (D. Segal, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Summit High School, in some respects, took a big risk hiring candidates without discussing the training commitment in advance. Staff members who are not trained in a particular curriculum focus will not be able to incorporate the method effectively into their own teaching and learning pedagogy. Interestingly, all seven of the recently hired staff members are single, and new to the teaching profession.

The Leadership Model. One of the main objectives of small school reform is to allow smaller schools the ability to create leadership models in which leadership is distributed across the staff, instead of being centered on one person. Summit High School struggled with its leadership model, and how that leadership model fit in with the rest of the multiplex. None of the staff was a trained administrator, so running and leading a school was a new experience. Not only were staff members trying to figure out how to run and manage their own school but they also needed to operate within the building council, which was a group of principals representing the other small schools, housed in the Summit multiplex.

Building Council. The building council meetings were established as a method of joint decision making for the entire multiplex. The goal was for leadership to be shared among many participants, but the reality was that the decisions were made by only a few leaders. The building council reverted to a hierarchical pattern of leadership, similar to that of schools operating with a principal. This pattern prevented some teachers, especially from Summit, from participating more in building-wide programs and events.

This lack of communication between the building leaders resulted in whole building programs usually falling through. Collaborating on programs within the multiplex would have helped create more unity between the small schools. If the schools felt more connected and more like a community, rivalries between the school programs and the students of different schools might have decreased. Summit High School teachers were trying to negotiate within this new arena without proper training from the district, or help from the more seasoned leaders from the other schools. Summit High School staff members were left on their own to figure out even basic tasks, such as getting duplicate keys made for a classroom or hiring a DJ for a school dance.

Throughout the study, the building council continued to be dysfunctional. The other building council leaders were principals and operated in a different leadership model, and when present at the meetings they had the ability to make

decisions on the spot if needed. Summit staff members, however, always needed to go back to the rest of the staff before making any decisions. One explanation for the impasse of the building council group is that the different leadership models did not work within the time constraints necessary for building decisions. Another explanation is that the other building leaders were assigned into their leadership roles as principals in the multiplex, therefore not choosing to be a leader of a small school.

Teacher-Cooperative Model. The teacher-cooperative model gives teachers a systematic way to bypass the traditional chain of command, which relies on a principal, and act as a collaborative body of classroom-level reformers, making daily decisions in ways that will benefit their students (Williams, 2007). This type of leadership model provides more autonomy in decision making but does require staff members to take on more tasks. Dave explains,

Our leadership model has been very confusing over the last 3 years. We started out as a lead-teacher model and no one really knew a lot about what that was at that time. And then we became more of a teacher cooperative where we tried to solve everything through consensus and long discussions. (D. Segal, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

At Summit High School, teachers faced a heavy workload that included, among other things, long, arduous meetings. Many were not willing to put the extra time in to get everything done, for example, arranging parent informational meetings, or afterschool clubs and activities. As a result, many teachers left during the 1st and 2nd year.

For a teacher collaborative model to be successful, all teachers need to embrace the ways in which decisions are reached by consensus. The reality of teachers practicing leadership is far from simplistic.

Knowledge of Small Schools. According to Meier (2005), teachers must believe in and be involved in their small schools for those schools to be successful. Teachers in small schools need to rethink how schooling is done; understanding what small schools are about is the first step. Summit teachers were unprepared. Emily, a new English teacher explains,

I think small schools struggle, because they are dealing with the population that comes out of factory sort of education style and all of a sudden they have to learn and it is the students who are also going into shock. (E. Jones, personal communication, April 7, 2009)

It is difficult to provide engaging teaching and learning in an environment that is unfamiliar. This was true for the majority of the staff at Summit High School.

The research revealed that staff members knew little about teaching and learning in small schools, most of them

referred to the basic features of small schools, most notably school size. Nilga, a math and science teacher, commented, "Small school is an alternate school that has 100 students per grade level, or it has a limited enrollment" (N. Nganle, personal communication, March 20, 2009), or "small schools should have small classroom sizes" (T. Johnson, personal communication, April 7, 2009).

It appeared that on some level, Summit High School was not really functioning as a small school, which resulted in the staff not understanding how they were a small school other than referring to size or knowing students' names. The literature suggests that to truly embrace small school reform, teachers need to be educated and understand the nuances of teaching and learning within a small school to take advantage of all the things small schools can offer staff and students.

Key Finding: A Continuous Struggle

Shared Space. Small schools are often required to share space with other schools. This is primarily the case because school districts need to utilize the buildings that they already own and operate, and most of these are old large comprehensive school buildings. Unfortunately, districts often do not spend the money to renovate these spaces to accommodate the new small school configurations, and this was the case in WPS.

The staff and the students at Summit High School did not embrace the shared space or multiplex configuration. Summit High School's school calendar is slightly different than the other three schools; they start 3 weeks earlier in the fall and end 3 weeks earlier in the spring compared with the other three schools in the multiplex. When Summit High School first opened in 2005, they had the school to themselves for the first 3 weeks. Dave reflects on what that experience was like:

Thinking back to our first 3 heavenly weeks when it was just us and our kids, I mean of course there were problems and there was profanity and all the things that bug you but once the other schools moved in, everything was just . . . [it] went to hell. Everything got twice as hard in a week. (D. Segal, personal communication, April 6, 2009)

Summit High School was located in the basement near the cafeteria and the gymnasium. Being near the common spaces was a problem as the students from the other schools constantly interrupted Summit's school day, either by kicking on doors, running through the hallways, or starting fights. Eventually, all common doors in Summit High School became locked doors, including the teacher work rooms, classrooms, the library, and bathrooms.

Throughout the study, the tensions and problems associated with the shared space continued to deteriorate. In response to the tensions, Summit concentrated on character

education and appropriate behavior. Ruth comments that the other schools "have too much power over our education here, because I feel like they are either interrupting our education or they have kids running down our hallways" (R. Menner, personal communication, March 26, 2009). This situation caused Summit students to shift their identities to fit in with the students from the other small schools in the multiplex. Summit students acted one way in the classroom and once they were in the hallways, they switched into a different role that was more accepted among the population of students; they did not want to be seen by their peers as different. It became a chameleon effect. The poor behaviors became the status quo and continued to be perpetuated. This became the accepted school culture.

District Policies. The small school reform movement has been about creating an environment where students can flourish personally and academically. Small schools are not little replicas of large schools. Successful small schools are about creating change in curriculum, school culture, teacher's work, and student assessment (Raywid & Schmerler, 2003). For these changes to occur, the policy environments supporting small schools need to change as well.

Summit High School had difficulty working with WPS. Their processes appeared to be outdated and remained unchanged even though the school structure had changed. On one hand, WPS claimed to support the small school initiative, but on the other hand, expected Summit to operate like a large school with the same reporting structures. These reporting practices have not been altered to recognize the newly changed school programs. There is a sense of "sameness" that continues to prevail; WPS operates as though schools, large and small, are the same and should be treated the same (D. Segal, personal communication, April 6, 2009). This was extremely frustrating to the teacher leaders at Summit.

There were other countless examples of WPS using outdated practices included in the field notes throughout the study. For example, district principal meetings were held during the school day. Teacher-led administrators were not able to attend because they were teaching in the classroom during the meeting time. Furthermore, requiring high enrollment numbers from new small schools was not realistic in such a short period of time. At times, the situations seemed so simple to handle and yet the processes to which the teachers were asked to adhere seemed obsolete and excessively time-consuming. As Summit High School attempted to develop systems that worked for their school, they were met with resistance from the district. Tensions emerged between which policies the district was willing to change and which policies it was not. One major problem Summit was dealing with was sharing teachers within the multiplex. WPS District put a rule in place that schools cannot share teachers if the schools are operating under different calendars. Even though Summit is housed with three other schools, because of this

rule it would not be able to share any teachers with the other schools because those schools have a different school calendar. The schools in Grassmore that share a similar calendar to Summit are located miles away and are large comprehensive schools that would not need to share teachers to save money. One benefit of small schools sharing space is that they have the opportunity to offer extra programs, including after-school activities or clubs, and the cost is shared by all of the schools. However, this new payroll rule would make that impossible for Summit High School. At a time when budgets are extremely tight, this adds another burden for the teachers to take on more responsibility within their own schools.

These and other requirements added unnecessary layers to a system that should be more supportive in helping small schools in the first few years of existence. The issues with WPS hampered teachers of Summit's abilities to act autonomously and make decisions that were right for their school, their staff, and their specific circumstances. The district reverting to a "sameness" mentality resulted in Summit remaining stagnant in many areas, and being forced to develop an activist approach to simply get things done.

Activist Approach. Small schools are about creating schools that fulfill the promise of what education can be, and sustaining a democratic environment in which families can choose the right school for their children. To continue to envision, fight for, and sustain these schools and environments, teachers and leaders in small schools have an ongoing battle. Simple survival is a constant preoccupation for many small schools, and even well-established small schools are notorious for the breathtaking demands placed on those that work within them (Mohr, 2000). Leaders find themselves spending long hours crafting plans to counteract the ongoing resistance from district policies that just do not make sense.

Dave took on an activist role to fight for the programs and concessions that he felt were necessary for Summit to be successful. The Innovative Schools Calendar was an example. The Innovative Schools Calendar was a collaborative effort that used a shared calendar and resources to provide more student contact time, shorter vacation time, more time for professional development, and collaboratively operated project-based enrichment and credit recovery intersessions (school document, March 17, 2009). Dave's proposal requested US\$1,714,000 in funding for the 2-year program. Dave suggested that the government "stimulus funding provides us with the opportunity to do something bold" (school document, March 17, 2009) and this program will garner the results that the district would want, namely, increased academic achievement, as well as increased teacher retention rates, increased graduation rates, and decreased suspensions and disciplinary actions. The innovative school calendar was eventually approved but not without a fight.

Analysis of Findings. Restructuring a large high school into a smaller learning community is a challenging process. The

literature does not offer much about this process in terms of the political struggles that occur within the school building and between the schools and the district offices, nor does the literature talk about the culture clashes that exist in and complicate the physical spaces shared by new small schools. The personal sacrifices that small schools demand from their creators are tremendous. Few realize this until they are already knee-deep in the reform effort:

There are some pitfalls that await unsuspecting small school designers. A small school is not merely a change of scale; it is a change of intensity and it requires a whole new set of responses. If that is not realized by everyone embarking on the journey, there will be a terrible lot of energy expended with little gain. (Mohr, 2000, p. 141)

A significant factor in creating small learning communities is strong, caring leadership that keeps everyone focused throughout the change process. There must be someone in charge, someone who can anticipate the dangers, read the terrain, collect the wisdom, and inspire confidence, especially when not feeling very confident (Mohr, 2000).

This research study explored the ways in which one new small high school, born out of a sweeping initiative to downsize existing schools in a midwestern state, has experienced this reform movement.

Theoretical Framework Discussion. Fine's (2005) research on small school reform provided a framework to compare the evolution of Summit Montessori High School with the processes of other small schools that have proven successful based on her research. Fine stated that new small high schools need to focus on several elements, including access, participation and democracy, commitments to equity, sophisticated systems of assessment that support better teaching and learning, and social justice and social responsibility. By focusing on these elements, institutions are organizing themselves as schools that are designed to make a difference in the lives of their students, rather than just calling themselves "small schools" while engaging in practices that do not support the true intention of the reform movement.

Fine (2005) referred to "access, participation, and democracy," as the process of providing education to the students who need it most, for example, those from poor urban cities enrolled in schools with the least amount of resources. According to Fine, small schools were designed to counteract this trend, primarily in urban centers, by developing schools where students felt like they belonged while also being challenged academically. Wealthier communities provide their students an educational environment in which students typically flourish, move onto college, and become contributing members of society. The statistics presented on Weston School District suggest that students in Weston are suffering from the same disparity in education between wealthier and poorer communities. The number of students

who graduate from suburban schools in Weston is 82.5%, while only 54.5% graduate from urban schools (Thomas, 2008). Affluent families can make a choice between public school with advanced college-preparatory tracks or small private schools, some with a traditional orientation, some organized around a theme such as technology, and some with a particular educational approach (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2003). All students should have the same opportunity, regardless of color or socioeconomic background, to pursue a rigorous education and attend college. These are the beliefs that began the original grassroots efforts around creating smaller schools for students in urban cities. Small school reform efforts, therefore, should not be driven by private funding in an attempt to transform schools into entities that do not equally offer education to all types of students, or work any differently than large comprehensive schools.

Fine's (2005) concept of small school reform is truly focused on students' needs and democracy. Fine's research suggests that small schools must move cautiously and ensure that the schools are defined with a clear concept that focuses on students' needs. Students and their parents should have a choice between many high school programs that offer unique curriculum ideas when it comes time to choose a high school. Students, along with their parents, can decide which high school's program matches their own career aspirations. Small schools that focus on the talents of the individual student, assess the student with creative alternate methods, and resist using the typical "high-stakes" testing promote better teaching and learning for their students (Fine, 2005). Districts randomly assigning students to schools that they do not want to attend defeats the purpose of what small schools are trying to accomplish. Students who are forced to attend one school rather than another will not work because they do not connect with the school's concept and vision.

This research study suggests that Summit High School did not achieve many of the small school elements that have defined Fine's (2005) work. For example, student access to Summit is still being manipulated by the district office. The district office continues to assign students to Summit High School that does not have a Montessori background or an interest in a Montessori or an IB curriculum focus. This policy undermines the ability of families to make the choice to participate in a particular school's program. In addition, it is difficult for staff members to work with students and families that do not want to be part of the school community. Weston's district office also has strict enrollment requirements that negatively affected Summit High School. These policies mandate that schools within the district must have a specific number of students enrolled by a specific date in the fall of each academic year or sanctions will follow. Sanctions have included loss of teaching staff and loss of financial resources and programming. This policy forces teachers, leaders, or principals to fill open seats with any student willing to attend regardless of his or her curriculum focus or previous educational background. These practices have affected the ability

of Summit's leaders to fill their school with students interested in teaching and learning within a Montessori/IB focus.

Authentic assessment, another positive element of small schools, is missing at Summit High School. Summit's staff members have not created authentic assessments that reflect their unique curriculum, because the majority of them are not trained in the Montessori philosophy. Alternate forms of assessment ensure that student's progress is being monitored in multiple ways instead of relying on high-stakes testing. Research suggests that student work that involves an active mode of acquiring knowledge is linked to heightened student achievement (Newman, Marks, & Gamoran, 1995). Teachers who seek alternate ways to assess student's understanding of the curriculum are better equipped to alter the curriculum, if needed, to ensure that critical learning is occurring.

Furthermore, the district office in Weston needed to redesign its current policies to reflect the unique needs of new small schools as they shape and implement their new programs. If these practices are not altered or changed by the district office, Summit High School will continue to flounder as it has for the past 3 years. If Weston is going to allow the High School Redesign Initiative to occur, then they need to be flexible in changing their accountability structures to reflect the new school environments. Until Summit can address these issues with student access, curriculum, enrollment, and alternate forms of assessment, it will continue to struggle in its evolution as a new small high school.

Discussion

The research at Summit High School revealed that there were multiple pieces that were not held together. Ultimately, this lack of cohesion hindered Summit High School's evolution from its initial concept, to a program, and finally to a new small school. More specifically, a lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers and school leaders on the school's concept and vision, curriculum focus, and leadership models often conflicted with the staff's ability to negotiate with other building and district personnel, and with themselves and their own community, which resulted in a fragmented learning environment. In addition, operating within a multiplex complicated the ability of Summit High School's staff to create a school culture that reflected their vision of what the school should be. Although Summit struggled for autonomy from the other schools within their multiplex and from the district, it floundered and was prone to many pressures to conform and operate like a traditional comprehensive high school. Moreover, teaching and learning did not evolve because of school leaders' lack of knowledge of small schools and limited information on Montessori curriculum practices. All of these challenges hindered the ability of Summit's staff to define their school's vision and identity and ultimately to move the school forward. The findings challenge some current assumptions about small school reform and offer school leaders, teachers, and policy makers'

suggestions for making small school reform more successful. The research findings have identified that the ways in which small schools handle their implementation processes, program planning, and district policy requirements as key components to future reform success.

Implementation Processes

To implement a new program, such as small school reform, time and planning are important. Weston, like many other urban cities across the United States, has felt the pressure to make changes in its failing high schools; as a result, there has been a tendency to rush the pace and push reform to multiple locations at once. The Weston High School Initiative called for more than 30 schools to be restructured over a 5-year period. Starting small school reform in just a few schools, concentrating on the internal infrastructure first, is a more organized approach as compared with overhauling multiple locations simultaneously.

The notion of starting small in a few locations first is supported and documented in the literature. Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow, and Sebring (1993) conducted a study in Chicago that made an overarching suggestion that urban schools and urban districts try to implement too many programs too soon, and that schools initiate programs on the basis of what is needed rather than on the basis of what they are capable of handling. The study referred to this scenario as the “Christmas tree” effect, that is, the schools adorned themselves with program after program without carefully planning and making sure that the programs were up and running before moving on. Bryk et al. (1993) found that elementary school principals implementing reform acted with a more entrepreneurial attitude, which led them to introduce programs into the school at a pace that made no sense for their level of organizational development. Schools with no track record of successful implementation, the authors suggest, should not be attempting to implement three or four new programs simultaneously. This study involved a teacher-led group at the high school level attempting multiple implementations at once, 16 years after this research was done, and the results were very similar. Trying to fix many things at once did not work in 1993 and still does not work today.

After so many years, why haven’t school districts learned from their mistakes? Why do reform efforts continue to be implemented in this manner over and over again? One explanation that this research study revealed is the notion of fairness. Most districts attempt to operate under a policy of fairness between schools and this was evident in the Weston School District. Dave commented how difficult it was to get approval for new initiatives for Summit unless the initiatives were universal to most of the schools in the district. His attempts to implement an innovative school calendar at Summit High School provide a perfect example. When Dave initially submitted the proposal for Summit’s new school calendar, it was rejected. The district did not want one high

school following a different academic calendar than the rest of the district. The fairness policy is in place to allow equal opportunities for all schools; if one school applies for funding for a new program or initiative, then all schools should have the same opportunity. The problem is that all schools are not operating under the same organizational structures. Small schools require different support mechanisms than large comprehensive schools or even private schools. For example, small schools might need to share resources or afterschool activities, as well as sharing teaching staff, or in some cases, need leeway with enrollment numbers. However, the fairness attitude pressures districts to begin programs or initiatives on a much larger scale than they are able to support. Allowing multiple locations to begin new programs or initiatives simultaneously without being able to support them sufficiently has the potential to cause these initiatives to fail. The findings from this research project support this claim. The superintendent in Weston felt pressured to “fix” the failing high schools and began a large-scale initiative of transforming large comprehensive high schools into smaller learning communities without first figuring out how to support the reform initiative features, or to ensure that its teachers, students, and communities would be successful throughout the process. Weston began its initiatives without knowing what to expect.

Based on the research findings, schools should pilot a reform in one or two schools for a 3-year period before allowing a large-scale reform movement to occur throughout the entire school district. School districts would then better understand the pitfalls, problems, and nuances of the reform before taking it to multiple locations. Moreover, the school districts would have more time to develop the necessary support functions before schools begin the reform process, which would be extremely helpful to everyone involved in the reform effort.

Program Planning

Small schools are small learning communities, first and foremost. The benefits of teaching and learning in small schools have been discussed and established in the literature. The research base supports the transformation of large comprehensive schools to smaller learning communities that focus on specific unique curriculums. A challenge facing the small schools movement as it becomes more popular is keeping restructuring efforts true to the philosophy of small schools (Hendrie, 2004). To be successful, small schools need to take advantage of the benefits that this environment offers. Program planning is intertwined in all facets of small schools, including school organization, curriculum, and instruction. All of these components are mutually supportive practices, dependent on one another to realize their desired effect on student learning (Cuban, 1998; Eisner, 1997). In this study, staff members of Summit High School were not able to effectively plan their teaching and learning practices or

develop the school's vision during the first 3 years. In fact, planning was lacking in many areas, including curriculum, student assessments, school concept, professional development, and school and student identities.

The concept of a small school and its curriculum is often intertwined. For Summit, a big part of the school concept was centered on the unique Montessori curriculum. However, only three teachers at Summit were certified in the full scope of the curriculum program that defined their school. This lack of training and knowledge made it impossible for them to develop relevant instruction or make any decisions about changing their own method of teaching. Professional development opportunities for these teachers were limited because of a lack of funds and district travel policies. The opportunity to create personalized learning for students is one of the benefits of smaller learning communities; unfortunately, the staff at Summit was not able to capitalize on this benefit.

Another important element in program planning for small learning communities is developing a clear vision of the school. As administrators and teachers rush to restructure schools, they may only take the time to understand reform superficially; defining what the school is early on is vital to its staying true to reform philosophies. Mohr (2000) suggested that everything in a small school has an amplified impact: "Large schools are ocean liners on a steadier course—for better or worse, they keep on going. Small schools are little sailboats, maneuverable but easily tipped" (p. 144). This was certainly the case at Summit High School; they were barely able to stay afloat.

Developing a statement that defines the vision of the school is of critical importance as the small school is being formed. The vision is a critical step because it provides focus and stability for a new small school, and keeps the small school on course. According to Feldman, Lopez, and Simon (2006), most small school conversion efforts get bogged down in the daily decisions that staff members face when time and resources are truly limited. They explain,

When a group of people are attuned to their collective vision, they are more likely to stay connected to the students' needs and their long-range conversion goals. They are less likely to be derailed by the day-to-day challenges conversion presents along the way. Vision gives those involved a sense of purpose, identifies compelling reasons, defines understandable goals for each action. (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 18)

Summit High School floundered for many years because the school leaders and teachers lacked a clear vision of the school. A school's vision defines its unique design, including its structure, culture, and instructional approach. "A solid pedagogical foundation and vision for the school makes design more effective" (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 84). The staff of Summit struggled in creating a vision.

Fundamentally, program planning in small schools must focus on developing a strong school identity that is rooted in

innovative curriculum and program offerings. This research study indicated that from the beginning the schools sharing space in the Summit multiplex were competing against each other for their school identities and overall school dominance. This competition moved from battling to enroll students to meet district enrollment numbers to outright rivalries and fights between the students. This situation escalated partly due to the breakdown of the building council as well as the other school leaders not fully buying into the small school reform idea. Other school leaders were not as invested in their own schools changing into a new small structure, as not all of the leaders supported small school reform. In the early days, there was a lot of antismall school chatter among some leaders in Old Summit. According to one assistant principal, small schools do nothing more than "transition kids in and out" (L. Blake, personal communication, January 16, 2009), or simply shuffle people around. "Small schools are hard to fund and hard to run properly; there is not enough selection of interested students or good teachers" (L. Blake, personal communication, January 16, 2009). Lucinda, who clearly does not support small schools stated, "Education is not a priority for this group [urban high school students], and the statistics show that small school reform efforts usually don't last more than 2 years" (L. Blake, personal communication, January 16, 2009).

This type of viewpoint does not lend itself to cooperation between the schools. It was clear that two competing forces were at play almost constantly. On one hand, there seemed to be a need to retain the positive image of Old Summit, the former large comprehensive school, and on the other hand, the need to establish separate school identities. The actual processes by which small schools are created are important to the success of each individual school program and can affect the relationships between the small programs, particularly if they share larger multiplex spaces (Mohr, 2000). The schools sharing the space of Old Summit never developed a sense of a shared community, and deeper relationships between all of the multiplex leaders and entire student body at Old Summit never evolved. This clearly affected the students at Summit High School. Summit's students did not connect with students from other schools in the building and often felt the need to shift their identities to fit in.

For Summit High School, the shared space became a complicated space for the students to maneuver on a daily basis, and as a result, suspension rates soared. In 2008, there were 242 students enrolled in Summit High School, and 90 students were suspended for a total of 249 times (school document, December 15, 2008). It appears that the shared space configuration had a detrimental effect on the students. Mohr (2000) suggested that small schools view behavior issues more broadly in an attempt to change the behavior:

Small schools that are not prepared to see student conflicts or acting-out behavior as a signal for a community-wide response will suffer far greater consequences and can find

themselves with ever-increasing disruptions. The typical course corrections—increased attempts to control and be controlled—will result in an escalation of tension and anger. Small schools must use the community as a vehicle for dealing with issues and not revert to familiar and inappropriate consequences, such as automatic suspension. (pp. 144-145)

Conflict resolution is not just about stopping fights but connecting the negative behavior more broadly to the curriculum and the lives of the students. “When effectively woven throughout the culture of the school, the resulting curriculum will include and be about everything going on in both the school and the world” (Mohr, 2000, p. 152). Summit’s leaders were not able to foster a sense of community with the other schools, and as Mohr (2000) stated, “A true community values each of its members and makes them feel valuable” (p. 153). Students need to be supported and valued within their schools and teachers need to help create environments where conflict resolution is a primary component in building “productive and high-functioning learning environments” (Mohr, 2000, p. 153). In the end, the Summit teachers became somewhat complacent to this growing problem. They accepted this type of behavior as a large part of their daily activities.

Leadership Model

The research revealed that the leadership model at Summit was not developed in a way that allowed the school to function properly, either as a separate entity or as a part of the multiplex. Teachers share leadership tasks in small schools that are spread across the entire school rather than being centrally located with one person. Teachers must take on more responsibility, but often have less training and guidance on how to be successful, within this new leadership model. The teachers at Summit were clearly not prepared for or supported in their new capacity as school leaders.

The distributive leadership model might be a better option for new small schools and would benefit from garnering the talents of their individual teachers by distributing the leadership based on skills rather than on convenience. Spillane’s (2006) research on distributive leadership demonstrates that this method would work well with Summit’s leadership model because it is also rooted in collaboration, and relies on mutual trust, support, and inquiry from its members. Evidence suggests that it is difficult for teachers to create and sustain the conditions for improved pupil learning if those conditions do not exist for their own learning (Silns & Mulford, 2002). When teachers share good practice and learn together, they increase the possibility of securing better quality teaching overall. The collaboration and collegiality fostered through distributed leadership has been shown to lead to an enhanced capacity for change and improvement at the school and classroom levels. Research also shows that teachers who work together in a meaningful and purposeful way are more likely to remain in the profession because they feel

valued and supported in their work (Barth et al., 1999). Distributed leadership, therefore, would provide the glue for Summit in accomplishing more common tasks or goals, and aid in creating a culture of expectations supported by individual skills and abilities.

Small schools need to capitalize on the specific talents and expertise of their teachers and other staff members. Blending the distributive leadership methods with Summit’s teacher-cooperative model would create a stronger foundation of leadership for the staff operating within a small school as well as provide a direction for mutual collaboration.

District Policies

In addition to the organizational elements of small schools, district policies need to change to support new smaller learning communities. Curricular and instructional reorganization cannot be fully achieved unless the larger system of which it is a part also changes to accommodate the new practices (Cuban, 1998; Elmore, 2000). The organizational structures of small schools are completely different than those of large comprehensive schools, and yet this research concluded that Summit was still expected to operate within old policies that did not support its new structure. In fact, this research uncovered that Summit had additional layers of accountability to WPS regarding its Charter status. Small learning communities need the autonomy necessary to act in ways that support their vision and their goals, and imposing old policies on new small schools is inevitably going to undermine the success of new small schools.

Staff members of new small schools often lack the knowledge teachers at larger schools glean from years of working in a larger system (Dentith et al., 2007). This lack of knowledge can negatively affect newly formed programs. Policy makers need to embrace bottom-up reform methods, which allow teachers the necessary room to create and maintain successful small schools (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Meier, 2000). Without drastic, systemic change in the larger system, small schools will fail, and the innovation and creativity sparked by them will be lost.

Final Thoughts

Small schools have come a long way over the past decade, but the risks of these schools failing or reverting back to comprehensive school practices are very real. Small schools need to provide opportunities that are different than the larger comprehensive schools they are replacing. Fine’s (2005) quote suggests that small schools must operate as small schools, being mindful of the best practices identified for those environments to flourish: “At times, I have lauded these schools as ‘sites of possibility,’ criticized some as ‘large schools in drag’ and others for ‘confusing hugs for calculus’” (Fine, 2005, p. 11). New schools have so many challenges to meet: developing leadership models, negotiating

shared space, gaining access to resources, recruiting committed teachers, training staff, dealing with district paperwork and outdated policies, performing state-mandated testing, and meeting countless other challenges. Most, if not all, of these issues were faced by the creators of Summit High School.

This research provides a glimpse into how small high school reform is being carried out in a large, public urban school district, and these findings add to the growing body of literature surrounding this fast-moving reform movement. This research study shines light on the complexity and messiness of small high schools sharing space and the repercussions this arrangement has on its students and school leaders. It also reveals the power struggles that school leaders face in an attempt to build a community of learners. Change is difficult and not always embraced.

At their core, small schools can provide equitable education to students seeking to learn in an environment that promotes democracy, if small schools are supported in the ways that allow them to flourish. District, state, and federal policies need to support small schools, allowing them the necessary breathing room to get their programs up and running.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Notes

1. A pseudonym for the midwestern state where the study took place.
2. A pseudonym for the midwestern city where the study took place.
3. All of the names mentioned in this article are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

References

- Ancess, J. (1997). *Urban dreamcatchers: Launching and leading new small schools*. New York, NY: National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Ancess, J. (2003). *Beating the odds: High schools as communities of commitment*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Ayers, R. (2000). Social justice and small schools: Why we bother, why it matters. In W. Ayers, M. Klonsky, & G. Lyon (Eds.), *A simple justice* (pp. 95-109). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Barth, P., Haycock, K., Jackson, H., Mora, K., Ruiz, P., Robinson, S., & Wilkins, A. (1999). *Dispelling the myth: High poverty schools exceeding expectations*. Washington, DC: Education Trust.
- Bearman, L., & Ahmed, N. (2012). Learning from our students. In M. Hantzoopoulos & A. R. Tyner-Mullings (Eds.), *Critical small schools: Beyond privatization in New York City urban educational reform* (pp. 103-119). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2003). *High schools for the new millennium, imagine the possibilities*. Retrieved from <http://www.stemcareer.com/richfeller/pages/library/Documents/High%20Schools%20for%20the%20New%20Millennium.pdf>
- Borsuk, A. (2007, September 26). *Reading gap is nation's worst: Average ability of state's black students ranks lowest*. Retrieved from <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=667387>
- Borsuk, A. (2008, April 4). State black 8th-graders rank worst in nation in writing. *Journal Sentinel*. Retrieved from <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=667387>
- Bryk, A. S., Easton, J. Q., Gladden, R. M., Kochanek, J., & Luppescu, S. (1999). *Elementary school size: Its effect on academic productivity in Chicago elementary schools*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research, The University of Chicago.
- Bryk, A. S., Easton, J. Q., Kerbow, D., Rollow, S. G., & Sebring, P. A. (1993). *A view from the elementary schools: The state of reform in Chicago. A report of the Steering Committee, Consortium on Chicago School Research*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- Cook, A., & Tashlik, P. (2005). Standardizing small: How testing and top-down reform can undermine small schools. *Rethinking Schools, 19*, 15-17.
- Copeland, M., & Boatright, E. (2004). Leading small: Eight lessons for leaders in transforming large comprehensive high schools. *Phi Delta Kappan, 85*, 762-770.
- Cotton, K. (1996). *School size, school climate, and student performance* (Close-Up No. 20). Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Cuban, L. (1998). *Interview with Larry Cuban*. Retrieved from <http://www.futureofeducation.com/main/search/search?q=larry+Cuban>
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn: A blueprint for creating schools that work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dentith, A., Bronson, C., Beachum, F., & Schneider, G. (2007, November). *From large to small: Processes of organizational and leadership change in the "small school" reform movement*. Paper presented at the meeting of the University Council of Educational Administrators, Richmond, VA.
- Eisner, E. (1997). The promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation. *Educational Researcher, 10*, 5-9.
- Elmore, R. (2000). *Building a new structure for school leadership*. Washington, DC: The Albert Shanker Institute.
- Feldman, J., Lopez, L., & Simon, K. (2006). *Choosing small*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fine, M. (1991). *Framing dropouts*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Fine, M. (2005). Not in our name: Reclaiming the democratic vision of small school reform. *Rethinking Schools, 19*, 11-14.
- Fowler, W. J., Jr. (1995). School size and student outcomes. *Advances in Educational Productivity, 5*, 3-26.
- Heard, B. (2002). *Does school size matter? Schools within a school*. American Association of School Administrators. Research Matters: News From the Senate Research Center, NY, pp. 1-2.
- Hendrie, C. (2004). High schools nationwide paring down. *Education Week, 23*, 28-31.
- Howley, C. (1994). *The academic effectiveness of small-scale schooling (an update)* (Report No. RC-94-1). Charleston, WV:

- Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED372897)
- Howley, C. (2002). *Small schools. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools*. Retrieved from <http://mirror.eschina.bnu.edu.cn/Mirror1/accesseric/www.ael.org/eric>
- Howley, C., Strange, M., & Bickel, R. (2000). *Research about school size and school performance in impoverished communities* (Eric Digest). Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. (ED448968)
- Klonsky, M. (2000). Social justice and small schools: Why we bother, why it matters. In W. Ayers, M. Klonsky, & G. Lyon (Eds.), *A simple justice* (pp. 95-109). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1994). *Effects of high school restructuring and size on gains in achievement and engagement for early secondary school students*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.
- Lee, V. E., Smith, J. B., & Croniger, R. (1995). *Understanding high school restructuring: Effects on the equitable distribution of learning in mathematics and science*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.
- Meier, D. (2000). The crisis of relationships. In W. Ayers, M. Klonsky, & G. Lyon (Eds.), *A simple justice* (pp. 33-37). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Meier, D. (2002). *The power of their ideas: Lessons from a small school in Harlem*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Meier, D. (2005). Creating democratic schools. *Rethinking Schools*, 19, 28-29.
- Merriam, Sharan B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mitchell, S. (2000). Jack and the giant school. *The New Rules*. Retrieved from <http://www.ilsr.org/jack-and-giant-school/>
- Mohr, N. (2000). Small schools are not miniature large schools. Potentials pitfalls and implications for leadership. In W. Ayers, M. Klonsky, & G. Lyon (Eds.), *A simple justice* (pp. 139-158). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Newman, F., Marks, H., & Gamoran, A. (1995). Authentic pedagogy: Standards that boost student performance. *American Journal of Education*, 104, 280-312.
- Oxley, D. (1994). Organizing schools into small units: Alternatives to homogeneous groupings. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 3, 521-526.
- Ravitz, J. (2010). Beyond changing culture in small high schools: Reform models and changing instruction with project-based learning. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85, 290-312.
- Raywid, M. A., & Schmerler, G. (2003). *Not so easy going: The policy environments of small urban school and schools-within-schools*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Senge, P. M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Silns, H., & Mulford, B. (2002). Leadership and school results. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 561-612). Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Press.
- Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Supovitz, J., & Christman, J. (2003). *Developing communities of instructional practice: Lessons from Cincinnati and Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education.
- Thomas, K. (2008, April). *17 big cities' grad rates under 50%*. Associated Press. Retrieved from <http://www.madison.com/archives/read.php?ref=/tct/2008/04/01/0804010269.php>
- Toppo, G. (2006). *Big-city schools struggle with graduation rates*. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2006-06-20-dropout-rates_x.htm#grad
- Visher, M., Emanuel, D., & Teitelbaum, P. (1999). *Key high school reform strategies: An overview of research findings*. Berkley, CA: New American High Schools.
- Wallach, C. A. (2010). The complexities of operating multiple small schools in a high school conversion. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85, 264-275. doi:10.1080/016956X.2010.491429
- Wasley, P. A., Fine, M., Gladden, M., Holland, N. E., King, S. P., Mosak, E., & Powell, L. (2000). *Small schools, great strides: A study of new small schools in Chicago*. New York, NY: Bank Street College of Education.
- Wasley, P. A., & Lear, R. J. (2001). Small schools, real gains. *Educational Leadership*, 58, 22-27.
- White, K. (1982). The relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91, 461-481.
- Williams, J. (2007). Revolution from the faculty lounge: The emergence of teacher-led schools and cooperatives. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89, 210-216.

Author Biography

Carroll E. Bronson received her PhD in urban education, specializing in administrative leadership from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Currently, she is an assistant professor in the doctoral leadership department at Cardinal Stritch University and teaches many different research courses to doctoral students. Her areas of expertise and research interests include small school reform, leadership and organizational change, and partner teaching.