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The School-within-a-School Model. ERIC Digest.

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In an age of reform and restructuring, educators are seeking new models to improve their schools. One approach is to replicate the qualities, and hopefully the advantages, of a small school by creating a "school-within-a-school." This approach establishes

within the school a smaller educational unit with a separate educational program, its own staff and students, and its own budget. Several cities, including New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago, have experimented with this as a method for downsizing (Raywid, 1995). This Digest briefly introduces the school-within-a-school concept, summarizes existing research on school-within-a-school models, and reviews some of the advantages and disadvantages.

DOWNSIZING AND THE SCHOOL-WITHIN-A-SCHOOL MODEL

A great deal of research suggests that smaller schools contribute to student achievement, attainment, and sense of well-being (Cotton, 1996a; Fowler, 1995; Howley, 1994; Howley & Bickel, 2000; Lee & Smith, 1995; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Rutter, 1988). To capture some of the benefits of small-scale schooling, educators are increasingly looking for ways to downsize, including dividing large schools into subschools or subunits. This approach is especially useful given the large number of schools that have been built recently based on the assumption that "bigger is better." The literature on school downsizing has been inconsistent in its descriptions of how large schools are divided into subunits. The most precise definition of a school-within-a-school model comes from Mary Anne Raywid (1995):



A school-within-a-school is a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education and/or superintendent. It plans and runs its own program, has its own staff and students, and receives its own separate budget. Although it must negotiate the use of common space (gym, auditorium, playground) with a host school, and defer to the building principal on matters of safety and building operation, the school-within-a-school reports to a district official instead of being responsible to the building principal. Both its teachers and students are affiliated with the school-within-a-school as a matter of choice (p. 21).

Large schools have implemented a myriad of programs to downsize or downscale: house plans, minischools, learning communities, clusters, charters, and schools-within-schools. Each model differs from the others on a range of factors, including how separate the subunit is from the larger institution and how much autonomy it receives to manage its own education program. The models also differ in terms of programs and organizational structure and practice (Raywid, 1995). Some simply group cohorts of students together while maintaining a symbolic and administrative identification with the larger school. The school-within-a-school model has the greatest levels of autonomy, separateness, and distinctiveness. Students follow a separate education program, have their own faculty, and identify with their subschool unit. Because the school-within-a-school model replicates a small school more closely than the other forms of downsizing, it is most likely to produce the positive effects of

small-scale educational organization.

A review of the literature suggests that implementing the school-within-a-school model has met with varying degrees of success in different settings. The most critical factor for success is a commitment to implementing the program fully, allowing for complete administrative separation of the subschool and the creation of a separate identity (McCabe & Oxley, 1989; McMullan, Sipe, & Wolfe, 1994; Raywid, 1996b). Without full implementation, many of the benefits of small-scale schooling, such as establishing community and symbolic identity, cannot be realized. Staff and student support is also important, and the strengths or weaknesses of a particular plan may vary over the years with personnel changes. Obtaining the support of the superintendent, school board, and school principal is also essential.

OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE SCHOOL-WITHIN-A-SCHOOL MODEL

While considerable data exists on outcomes associated with small schools, there is much less evidence about outcomes associated with school-within-a-school programs (Cotton, 1996b). In part, this is because very few school-within-a-school models have been fully implemented. A growing body of literature does suggest that downsized school models can have a positive impact on students, including improved attendance rates, improved behavior, greater satisfaction with school, and greater self-esteem (Aschbacher, 1991; Corcoran, 1989; Fouts, 1994; Gordon, 1992; Raywid, 1996a; Robinson-Lewis, 1991; Tompkins, 1988). Additionally, there is a positive impact on teachers, who have reported enhanced morale (Fouts, 1994; Robinson-Lewis, 1991). Some case studies suggest that a school-within-a-school can contribute to a greater feeling of "community" among participants, which facilitates student attainment. Greenleaf's research (1995) suggests that "creating learning communities for young people ... increased their social commitment to one another and to their teachers, thereby increasing their personal investments in school" (p. 46). Evidence related to educational achievement is less clear. Several studies provide evidence that school downsizing models can contribute to increased educational achievement and attainment (Crain, Heebner, & Si, 1992; McMullan, Sipe, & Wolfe, 1994; Robinson-Lewis, 1991). Some research, however, suggests that subschools produce only moderate or mixed gains in achievement (Robinson-Lewis, 1991; Jokiel & Starkey, 1972; Morriveau, 1975). Other research has identified fiscal and organizational advantages and disadvantages of the school-within-a-school model. Aside from the advantages of replicating the qualities of a small school, the school-within-a-school appears to be a cost-effective approach to school reform in terms of start-up costs, and in some cases is less expensive to maintain (Moffett, 1981; Public Education Association [PEA], 1992a; PEA, 1992b; Raywid, 1995). Among the disadvantages, research suggests this model can sometimes create divisiveness in schools because it tends to realign organizational structures and fracture preexisting relationships. Conflicts can arise concerning

allegiances to the larger school versus the smaller school unit, thus creating rivalries (Muncey & McQuillan, 1991; Raywid, 1996b). Other critics maintain that subschool groupings can lead to inequitable tracking if only one population is targeted for a subschool (Raywid, 1996a; McMullan, Sipe, & Wolfe, 1994). Another critique argues that the school-within-a-school model may negatively affect school coherence and the role of the principal, two areas of concern in the literature on effective schools.

CONCLUSION

The school-within-a-school model may be an effective and affordable way to capture the benefits of smaller-scale schooling within larger school buildings. While research results are limited, the school-within-a-school model has the potential to contribute to a greater sense of student well-being, a sense of student community, and higher student achievement and educational attainment. This model seems to hold promise especially for disadvantaged students, who are affected positively by smaller schools but are more likely to attend larger schools (Jewell, 1989; Lee & Smith, 1996). Because a subschool model can be adopted in an existing building structure, it is a cost-effective approach to school reform; however, the challenge lies in successful implementation. As Raywid (1985) observed, "The major challenge to schools-within-schools has been obtaining sufficient separateness and autonomy to permit staff members to generate a distinctive environment and to carry out their own vision of schooling" (p. 455).

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