



BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

10 Reasons Why Small Schools Work

Have you wondered if children in small schools are receiving the quality of education that they could get in the larger schools? If you have, then you need to read the following paragraphs.

1. *Flexibility* Teachers in small schools largely escape red tape and administrative pettiness. This enables them to implement improved ideas with a minimum of delay. Field trips, and use of the playground or pieces of school equipment can fit into the actual flow of the learning experience.

2. *Individualization* Since the teacher has fewer students, they have more time for each one. The lower pupil-teacher ratio allows for more careful assessment of the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of each student. The teacher has a better opportunity to see each as a person having unique abilities, rather than as just one of many students working on the same lesson.

3. *Instructional Flexibility* In a multigrade classroom a teacher has the possibility of allowing a child to read with students in higher grades while, for example, the same child does math with the lower grades. One can more easily gear the work to the individual needs. In a five-year study, Dennis Milburn found that “multi-age grouping enables youngsters to work at different developmental levels without obvious attention being brought to the remediation — a situation that can cause emotional, social, or intellectual damage. It also made acceleration possible without special attention or notice to special arrangements.”

4. *Social Skills* John I. Goodlad, former dean

of UCLA's School of Education, has noted that one of the difficulties of single-grade classrooms is that they cause “each group to lose some of its perspective on human experience by narrowing the social atmosphere within which the children live.” A classroom having children of several ages enables students to gain a perspective on what is happening in the lives and education of children both younger and older. It helps them gain a more accurate sense of the past and future in terms of experiences and interests and stimulates the entire learning environment. Goodlad reported that single-grade levels encourage “an unhealthy attitude within each age group toward other age groups, especially those who are younger and...have less status.” Several studies have found that multigrade classrooms improve personal and social development, improve attitudes toward school, and help students become more cooperative and less competitive.

5. *Peer Tutoring* In a multigrade classroom, the children generally have more opportunity to help one another than in single-grade classrooms. Such peer teaching aids the slower and younger children in ways often beyond the communicative ability of adults, since adults have generally forgotten the problems they had in learning a particular concept or skill in the remote past. By way of process and can often explain a difficulty in a way that makes sense to a younger classmate. Not only does such an interchange aids the younger student, but there is evidence that the older children learn even more than their tutors. Alan Gartner and his colleagues found that the older students were

“turned on” by helping teachers. This stimulated their own interest in the learning process. As a result, they made striking gains in achievement.

6. Develops Independence & Responsibility

Research has found that members of small schools report greater feelings of responsibility by developing independent work habits, and assuming responsibility for their own activities.

7. Family Atmosphere Small schools provide a stable family atmosphere. Research has shown that students learn better in a stable environment.

8. Academic Achievement Value Genesis studied the test results from the Adventist school system in the across North America and came to several conclusions. First, the average achievement level of Adventist students tested ahead of the national average. Second, they found only small differences between children from larger schools. The differences, surprisingly enough, were most often in favor of the smaller schools. Third, they discovered that the more years students had been in Adventist schools, the higher their achievement levels were. Dennis Milburn found similar results except in the areas of vocabulary. Here students in multigrade classrooms were significantly more advanced. In his five year study he found little other variation between students in multigrade classrooms and those in single grade classrooms.

9. Georgia-Cumberland's Small School

Program Since 1981 the Georgia-Cumberland Conference has been on an aggressive program to improve the achievement of students in small schools. The conference average score on the ITBS national achievement test at that time was at the 62nd percentile rank—twelve percentile ranks above the national average. By 1986 the

conference scores had risen to the 82nd percentile rank. They continue to rise into the 90th percentile ranks today. Through curriculum changes, intensive teacher training and additional leadership at the conference level, building test averages have risen to 32 percentile ranks above the national average.

10. Constant Improvement The small school English, spelling, and Social Studies curriculum are only a few ways the Georgia-Cumberland Conference Education Department continues this intensive program of improving the learning opportunities of our children in small schools.

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