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Comparative Efficiency of Consolidated and Rural Schools in Canada, 1930.

The increased financial difficulties of rural schools at the present time, particularly in the western wheat-growing provinces, seem to have given a new impetus to consideration of the reorganization of many districts, especially to the possibilities offered by consolidation with the schools of neighbouring towns or villages, or even with other rural schools. It may be of interest, then, to examine comparatively the results that are being produced by one-room rural and consolidated schools. The movement toward consolidation in the western provinces has not been as rapid in the past few years as in the decade preceding, but consistent advances have been made in other parts of the Dominion, notably in the Protestant municipalities of Quebec, where five new consolidations and one enlargement are reported in 1930, and others in each of the years immediately preceding.

Comparative Services.

Manitoba, where consolidation has gone to greatest lengths, shows a very marked advantage in favour of the consolidated school. The table below gives the average grade attained by pupils at each year of compulsory school age in both classes of schools. After starting together at the age of seven each year produces a wider gap between the average pupil in the two kinds of school, until at the age of fourteen the consolidated school pupil is well advanced in the work of grade eight, and the pupil of the one-room school has not completed grade six. Apart from this advantage of distinctly more than a year on the part of the pupil of the larger school, when attendance becomes no longer obligatory, there must be a much stronger incentive for him to remain in school and complete the entrance grade. He is already well started on his final year, while the pupil of the small school sees the entrance examination more than two years distant. Indeed only 45 p.c. of the fourteen-year-olds continue in the small school after they have reached fifteen, whereas in the consolidated school the fifteen-year-olds are 85 p.c. as numerous as those a year younger. This means unmistakeably greater opportunity for the rural children within the larger school unit.

Nor does all the advantage accrue to the rural district. The table below also shows the average attainment of pupils in town, village, and rural schools of more than one room that are not consolidated, and they too are seen to be at a disadvantage compared to those of the consolidated districts. Their average pupil at fourteen has not finished grade seven. True, this is nearer than the rural school comes to producing the consolidated school's results, but there appears to be a definite gain to be made by the central school through amalgamation. Moreover where the drop in enrolment between the ages of fourteen and fifteen is only 15 p.c. in the consolidated schools, it is 27 p.c. in this third group.

Age	Average grade at each year of age		
	Rural	Consolidated	Town and Village not consolidated
7	1.61	1.66	1.66
8	2.12	2.48	2.33
9	3.05	3.39	3.19
10	3.85	4.33	4.01
11	4.68	5.21	4.92
12	5.46	6.17	5.88
13	6.36	7.14	6.83
14	6.95	8.21	7.97
	Enrolment at each year of age		
14	3,165	1,272	2,649
15	1,439	1,087	1,930

Turning to Saskatchewan the same general relations are seen to hold between consolidated and each of the other two classes of schools. The next table presents data for Saskatchewan comparable to that above for Manitoba, except that the "town and village" group includes consolidated as well as non-consolidated town and village districts.

Age	Average grade at each year of age		
	Rural	Consolidated	Town and Village
7	1.70	1.75	1.88
8	2.42	2.63	2.63
9	3.35	3.62	3.59
10	4.20	4.57	4.39
11	5.04	5.49	5.47
12	5.91	6.27	6.34
13	6.79	7.55	7.46
14	7.64	8.52	8.51
	Enrolment at each year of age		
14	11,427	410	5,396
15	6,652	356	4,494

Comparative Costs.

The teacher of the Manitoba one-room school has on the average 3.7 years experience and receives a salary of $867, the consolidated school teacher 6.6 years experience and $1,213 salary. The 40 p.c. higher salary naturally secures not only a more experienced but also a better trained teacher. But in the larger school she teaches 35.6 pupils in comparison with 28.6 in the country school, with the result that her salary means only 13 p.c. more per pupil taught. And since she succeeds in getting her pupils through 7.2 grades in place of the other teacher's 5.9 grades, her cost per year of work successfully completed by her pupils is only 93 p.c. of the cost of the much lower salaried teacher of the ungraded school. In other words, the consolidated school teacher, although she gets a salary 40 p.c. higher actually costs 7 p.c. less in terms of work successfully done. This, of course, should not be construed as derogatory of the work of the rural teacher. Her average pupil attends only 139 days in the year while the consolidated school's pupil attends 167 days. She can not be expected to cover as much work with the pupil in a year that is 28 days (almost a month and a half) shorter. Expressed in terms of attendance the one-room teacher puts her average pupil through each grade in 188 school days, the consolidated school teacher in 185. In other words, the fact that the latter's pupil attains only 5.9 grades and the former's 7.2 in eight years is accounted for practically entirely by poorer attendance; and the greater cost of the former in terms of work accomplished is more than accounted for by this irregular attendance together with her smaller number of pupils.

The teaching staff of the bigger school, then, provides instruction from Grades I to XI or XII at a smaller cost per pupil per grade than the rural teacher is able to do for Grades I to VIII, (in some cases to Grade IX). This much can be said for the comparative costs of teachers, and teachers' salaries represent about one-third of the total expenditure of consolidated schools. While all of the foregoing except the last statement is deduced from Manitoba data, there is no apparent reason why it should differ substantially in other provinces.

There is a marked difference between provinces, however, in the matter of the second major factor in consolidated school outlay,--conveyance costs. In Saskatchewan, where the size of such districts is particularly large, transportation costs practically as much as teachers' salaries, in Ontario only half as much. But economies of operation of the larger school unit, including the saving on salary, heating and maintenance of buildings, etc., go to offset the cost of conveyance, with the result that available data show the total cost of the larger school in terms of work accomplished to be, like teacher's salaries alone, less than the cost of the smaller. To illustrate: In Alberta the annual cost per pupil enrolled in one-room schools is recorded as $61.08, in consolidated schools $86.29,--or 41 p.c. higher. When allowance is made for the rate at which the grades are covered in the two classes of schools (on the basis of what is shown above to take place in the Manitoba and Saskatchewan schools) the cost per pupil per grade is only 18 p.c. higher. Allowing further for the greater proportion of high school students in the larger schools, again on the Manitoba and Saskatchewan basis, (the cost of a year in high school averages more than twice the cost of an elementary year) the expenses of the consolidated schools are less than 98 p.c. of the small ones. The larger school, then, appears at least as cheap in terms of work done, and its added conveniences (such as healthier buildings, absence of the necessity of parents transporting their own children, etc.,) are at the same time obtained.