

NEWS RELEASE

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School Consolidation: Bigger Isn't Always Better

Smaller is better for academic achievement; growth breeds inefficiency.

(WICHITA) – Voters and school board officials in two counties recently voted to consolidate four school districts into two. Will district consolidation be a way to resolve the legal and political disputes over school funding that will play a prominent role in the next legislative session?

A new policy brief from the Flint Hills Center for public policy, "[School Consolidation: An Ineffective Way of Improving Education](#)," looks at the history of school consolidation, and finds that it fails to deliver on promises of academic improvements and cost savings.

Kansas has seen a great deal of consolidation in its history. The number of school districts, which once stood at over 9,200 in 1886, is 300, and getting smaller. Recently, districts in Washington County, USD 221 (North Central) and USD 222 (Washington), as well as Jewell County, USD 104 (White Rock) and USD 278 (Mankato), moved closer to consolidation.

The Flint Hills Center's policy brief, "[School Consolidation: An Ineffective Way of Improving Education](#)," explains that consolidation's value is oversold. "We want children in the state to learn," says John R. LaPlante, education policy fellow of the Flint Hills Center for Public Policy, an independent public policy organization based in Wichita. "But does consolidation help us achieve that? If anything, recent developments suggest that smaller has its advantages."

Advocates of consolidation cite educational and financial advantages, but many of those of those advantages can be achieved through other means, such as technology that broadens the curricular options of small schools. Other claimed advantages, such as cost savings, are easily overstated.

In the words of Fort Hays State University professor G. Edward Mills, students in smaller schools have "higher achievement, better discipline and attendance, and higher graduation rates." Meanwhile, consolidation often leads to administrative bloat, not savings.

"Consolidation," says LaPlante, "weakens the role of competition. It is also a logical outcome of the top-down approach to education. It's time to foster the development of new schools, new choices, and new levels of competition—not go down the same road of thinking that bigger is better."

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The Flint Hills Center for Public Policy is an independent voice for sound public policy in Kansas. As a non-profit, nonpartisan think tank, the Center provides critical information about policy options to legislators and citizens. For more information, please visit our web site at www.flinthills.org or contact us at inquiries@flinthills.org or (316) 634-0218.



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