A PROPOSAL FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT REORGANIZATION IN SHERIDAN COUNTY, MONTANA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Education degree
in the Department of Education
Montana State College
August, 1963

P378
R669
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Abstract

Ronning, Charles Kermit, A Proposal for School District Reorganization in Sheridan County, Montana, Montana State College, Bozeman, Montana, August, 1963

The primary purpose of this study was to find the trends of reorganization throughout the United States and compare these trends with Sheridan County.

A review of literature was undertaken to find the United States trends and an investigation of the statistical records of the Sheridan County Superintendent of Schools was necessary to make the comparison.

The review of literature revealed that the advantages of reorganization outweigh the disadvantages and the larger districts are pointed to as much more effective in educating the children. Eight basic criteria for a satisfactory educational system were uncovered. They are: (1) an elementary school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least 25 children per teacher; (2) a high school of satisfactory minimum size should have at least three sections of each grade taught; (3) a minimum program in high school should have about 20 teachers; (4) a district should have a large enough tax base to be financially able to provide education from grades one through twelve; (5) school districts no longer have to coincide with county, township or city boundaries; (6) the cost per pupil in a well organized district should be close to the national average of $375; (7) there should be enough transportation so that children do not have to ride for an unreasonable length of time; and (8) the educational opportunities would be more effective for all of the students in the county.

Sheridan County is reorganizing at about the same rate as the United States with about a one-third decrease for both in the past 30 years. Sheridan county is higher in per pupil cost (high school $826.04, elementary $466.88) than both the United States ($375) and Montana ($412). These figures would indicate an inefficiency in Sheridan County Districts.

Evaluating the criteria and other records it was learned that Sheridan County could effectively organize into one unit operating one high school and four grade schools. These schools would all be of satisfactory minimum size employing the required number of teachers, eliminating the multiple class rooms and offering three levels of each class taught in high school. The other necessary criteria could also be met giving all students of Sheridan County an equal opportunity for the best in education.

One conclusion was drawn: Sheridan County would have a better and more efficient educational system through reorganization than it has at the present time.

It is recommended that the criteria for an efficient school plan should be studied and a more thorough approach made in getting pertinent data to replace the estimates given in the study on the bus miles traveled, number of students, teachers, mill levies, and cost per pupil in Sheridan County.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Statement of the Problem	1
	Procedures	2
	Limitations	2
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	4
	Trends in School District Organization	6
	Educating Citizens for Reorganization	9
	Advantages of Reorganization	10
	Disadvantages of Reorganization	12
	Effectiveness of School District Reorganization	13
	Problems of School District Reorganization	15
	Criteria for Satisfactory School Size	16
	Procedures in District Reorganization	18
	Recommendations for District Reorganization	19
III.	STATUS OF PRESENT DISTRICT ORGANIZATION IN SHERIDAN COUNTY	23
	Per Pupil Cost	23
	Operating Schools	25
	Census	28
	Teaching Positions	29
	Transportation	30
	Assessed Valuation	31
IV.	SUGGESTED SCHOOL DISTRICT PROPOSAL FOR SHERIDAN COUNTY AND EVALUATION OF PRESENT DISTRICTS	34
	Evaluation of Criteria for Efficient Operation of Schools of Sheridan County	34
	Summary	38

Chapter Page

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 39

Summary 39
Conclusion 41
Recommendations 41

BIBLIOGRAPHY 42

APPENDIX 44

Map of Sheridan County 1930 45
Map of Sheridan County 1960 46
Map of Sheridan County 1963 47

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Assessed Valuation, Annual Expenditures, Mill Levy, Enrollment, and Per Pupil Costs in the Five High School Districts of Sheridan County, 1960-1961	24
2.	Assessed Valuation, Annual Expenditures, Mill Levy, Enrollment, and Per Pupil Costs in the Thirty Elementary Districts of Sheridan County, 1960-1961	26
3.	Number and Type of Schools Operated by Districts in Sheridan County, 1960-1961	27
4.	Children Under 21 in Sheridan County, 1960-1961	28
5.	Teachers in Each of the Districts of Sheridan County, 1960-1961	29
6.	Children Transported, Annual Expenditures, and Per Pupil Cost in the Districts of Sheridan County, 1960-1961	30
7.	Assessed Valuation Per Pupil, Assessed Valuation Per Teacher, and Assessed Valuation of the Districts in Sheridan County, 1960-1961	32
8.	Status of Present Districts and an Estimate for the Proposed District Using the Criteria Listed in this Chapter	38

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a definite need for school reorganization of the present school districts of Sheridan County, Montana. School districts were set up when the population was sparse and transportation was poor. With the modern mode of transportation there is no longer a need for schools within walking distance. Since this is true, the thing that is of concern is the setting up of districts with improved education. This education should be concerned with educational opportunities of the children, size of the tax base, number of teachers, and number of children.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study was to find the trends of reorganization throughout the United States and how Sheridan County compares with these trends. When the problem of reorganization is considered people in the communities involved wish to know the answers to such questions as:

1. Would the educational program be better under the reorganization?
2. Would the tax burden be equalized under the new system?

3. Would it cost more to operate the schools under the new system?

4. Can satisfactory transportation be established?

These questions concerning reorganization formed the basis for this study which is titled, "A Proposal for School District Reorganization in Sheridan County, Montana."

Procedures

There were three procedures used in the approach to the problem of reorganization of the districts in Sheridan County. The three procedures were:

1. A review of literature to show the trends, advantages, disadvantages, effectiveness, problems, criteria for efficient operation, procedures, and recommendations for school district reorganization.

2. An investigation of the statistical records of the Sheridan County Superintendent of Schools was made to find the organization and the present status of the school districts in Sheridan County.

3. The findings of one and two are presented in a plan for proposed reorganization using as a guide the criteria for a good educational program.

Limitations

The study was restricted to Sheridan County. It was not concerned with the reorganization of other parts of the

state, nor was it concerned with the reorganization procedures that may be necessary to put the plan into effect. The first step in the investigation was a review of literature. The results of this review are presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The sizes of the original school districts were set when areas were new and undeveloped. Many changes have taken place since then and there is now a need for reorganization of school districts. With this in mind a review of literature was undertaken to find the trends, advantages, disadvantages, effectiveness, problems, criteria for efficient operation, procedures, and recommendations for school district reorganization.

A sound school district should have at least 25 children per teacher in kindergarten through the sixth grade and a minimum of 300 pupils in grades six through twelve. Cocking brings this out in his criteria for a sound school district:

> It should have sufficient population to provide at least 25 children per teacher for kindergarten through the sixth grade and a minimum of 300 pupils in grade six through twelve, and should be financially able to provide a reasonable foundation program.
>
> It must be remembered that the size of the original school districts was set when the areas were new and undeveloped, population sparse, and the social structure limited in both scope and number of organizations. In the majority of school districts a great

> deal of development has taken place since the original district lines were fixed: populations have increased, financial resourses have been developed, social organizations have multiplied, social and economic patterns have changed, roads and streets have become an intricate network, new businesses of many kinds have developed, standards of living have gone up, and the needs and wants of people have changed.
>
> Indeed, the proper size of school districts is so importantly related to the efficiency of all aspects of the schools work that it becomes of first consideration in the improvement of any part of the program.
>
> It has long been realized that the school district boundaries which are caterminous with county, township, or city boundaries are ordinarily not efficient lines for a school district. More and more school district lines are being drawn about natural trading and social areas which cluster along major streets and roads that lead to the community center.[1]

In the final report of the Committee for the White House Conference on Education there appeared two noteworthy sets of figures with reference to school district organization. The first statistic points out that there are 8,764 school districts in the United States which operate no schools at all: the second (a rule of thumb) suggests that for a maximum operational efficiency, a school district should have at least 1200 pupils and 40 teachers. These two statistics led Roach to make the following statement: "it is fairly well agreed that both sets of figures point to the

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[1]Cocking, W. D. "School District Reorganization," The School Executive, Vol. 74:7, October, 1954.

well-recognized need for more effective district consolidation programs in many states."[2]

School districts should have sufficient population and should be financially able to provide a reasonable foundation program from kindergarten through grade twelve. Most of the studies point to the well-recognized need for more effective district organization.

Trends in School District Organization

The trend in school district organization seems to be to reorganize into large and more efficient units. School districts should have at least 1200 and probably 2000 or more pupils. Dawson points this out in the following statement:

> School administrative authorities are wholly agreed that there have been too many school districts and that consolidation has long been in order. While there may be no inherent value in either bigness or smallness, nevertheless, up to 1200 and probably up to 2000 or more pupils--the better the school opportunities and the greater the economy of operation.[3]

In the ten year period from 1948 to 1958 school districts in the United States decreased 52.9 per cent.

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[2]Roach, S. F. "Board Discretion Concerning District Consolidations," American School Board Journal, 133:31-32, August, 1956.

[3]Dawson, H. A. "Reorganization Story Throughout The Country," National Education Association Journal, 48:11, November, 1959.

This fact is brought out by Shultz in his statement on school district reorganization:

> School districts in the United States in 1948 numbered 101,945 and numbered 48,043 by 1958. There were 17,131 non-operating school districts in 1948 and 6,606 in 1958. The number of operating districts was 84,814 in 1948 and 41,437 in 1958. The per cent of reduction of school districts from 1948 to 1958 was 52.9. The per cent of reduction of districts without schools from 1948 to 1958 was 61.4. The per cent of reduction of operating school districts from 1948 to 1958 was 51.1. There were 74,823 one teacher schools in 1948 and 25,979 one teacher schools in 1958 for a 65.3 per cent reduction.
>
> Operating districts employing 1 to 9 teachers numbered 49,440 in 1948 and 21,054 in 1958. Operating districts employing 10 to 39 teachers numbered 31,045 in 1948 and 12,671 in 1958. Operating districts employing 40 or more teachers numbered 4,329 in 1948 and 7,712 in 1958. There were 959 county units in 1948 and 1,191 in 1958.[4]

Trends in school district organization show that districts with nine or fewer teachers have decreased about 25,000 while districts with 40 or more teachers have increased about 3,000. Some of the states that have eliminated the greatest number of districts still have many districts that are small and inadequate, as pointed out by Fitzwater:

> In spite of all that has been accomplished there remains much to be done. Even some of the states that have eliminated the most districts still have many that

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[4]Shultz, J. G. "Fewer, Bigger, Better," National Education Association Journal, November, 1959, p. 11.

> are small and inadequate. The fundamental question is the ability of the districts to provide modern educational programs. Most today are too small to do so.[5]

The information collected for the White House Conference on Education revealed that the problem of reorganization is by no means confined to states with the most districts. This is brought out by Fitzwater in the following statement:

1. In 23 states more than half of the districts operated elementary schools only.
2. In 22 states more than half of all districts employed 9 or fewer teachers.
3. Only 4 states had no districts employing fewer than 40 teachers.[6]

School districts have been decreasing at an average of about 2.5 per cent yearly since 1928, as pointed out by Rhodes:

> In the 28 years from 1932 to 1960, 117,000 operating school districts have been reduced to a little over 35,000--a reduction averaging almost 3,000 districts or about 2.5 per cent yearly. Furthermore, between 1955 and 1960 the rate of reduction averaged about 6 per cent per year. Clearly, the changes are coming faster.[7]

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[5]Fitzwater, C. O. "Trends in School District Reorganization," Educational Digest, September, 1957, p. 17.

[6]Ibid., p. 19.

[7]Rhodes, A. E. "Changing School Needs in Rural Areas," Educational Digest, November, 1962, p. 41.

These reported studies concerning trends seem to point out that reorganization into larger and more efficient units has progressed more in the last few years than it has in the long period before that time. With the strong trend in the direction of larger units, the next step that must be considered is that of educating the citizens for this reorganization.

Educating Citizens for Reorganization

How to speed reorganization of small, obsolete public school district's into larger, more practical units has proved one of the challenging problems of our time.

If an expert could be hired to draft an ideal plan and get the people to accept it without question it would be quite simple, according to Strolle:

> It could be done quite simply if you could hire an expert to draft an ideal plan and get the people to accept it without question. But American parents have minds of their own, and they are likely to raise a mighty protest if changes they do not understand are made in the school pattern.
>
> Some states have forced reorganization by law. The drawbacks to this method are obvious. It does not change attitudes. But purely voluntary methods are hampered by two bugaboos. One is fear of change. I think we ought to keep our old district, people say. It was good enough for us, and it's good enough for our kids. The other is the dread of urban domination. Once you get those big districts the city folks will run all of us. We'll lose control of our little school.

> The need, then, appears to be to find a way to dispel these fears, which are based on misunderstanding, and to build public opinion that will actually demand reorganization.[8]

Educating citizens could be accomplished by organizing conferences as was done in Michigan. The advantages of reorganization could be pointed out and the people could decide what they wanted. Some of the advantages appear in the following section.

Advantages of Reorganization

There are many advantages of reorganization. Some of these advantages are: a broader and better educational program, a higher quality of professional leadership, more competent supervisors and teachers, better provisions for individual differences, and more library and audio-visual facilities. Consolidation of districts also increases the size of the tax base and registers a desire for better programs as pointed out by Cocking in the following statement:

> Consolidation of districts increases the size of the tax base, although it doesn't necessarily broaden it. Increasing the size of the tax base ordinarily permits increase of revenues without increasing tax effort.

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[8]Strolle, R. S. "Educating Citizens for Reorganization," Nations Schools, 58:48-49, December, 1956.

> There is a subtle phenomenon also: as people enlarge their district they also register a desire for better programs and hence better schools. This almost always accompanies consolidation.[9]

There is a direct relationship between reorganization and greater educational opportunities at a lower cost per pupil as shown in a study of costs of rural high schools in Kansas by Wright and Pine. This relationship was pointed out by Kreitlow in an article in the Review of Educational Research:

> The analysis was limited to cost of instruction and plant operation in rural high schools of Central Kansas for 1956 and 1957. The detailed cost studies were related specifically to the breadth of curriculum offerings, teacher pupil ratio, and district valuation. This report verified the inverse relationship between the size of school and cost per pupil, and demonstrated the direct relationship between reorganization and greater educational opportunities at lower cost per pupil.[10]

In the Wisconsin study of five reorganized districts as compared with five non-reorganized districts Kreitlow reported that: "the actual cost of instruction per year for elementary pupils in five pairs of communities was $12 more per child in the reorganized districts, and that

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[9]Cocking, W. D. "School District Reorganization," Overview, 2:62, June, 1961.

[10]Kreitlow, B. W. "Organizational Patterns: Local School Districts," Review of Educational Research, October, 1961, p. 383.

the greatest gain in pupil achievement was in the larger reorganized districts."[11]

Research reports clearly show that reorganization of districts into larger and more efficient units should equalize the tax burden and at the same time provide better educational opportunities.

Disadvantages of Reorganization

The reports in literature emphasize that there are two main disadvantages of reorganization. They are (1) that the small community will lose its school and (2) that the policy makers will be more remote from the people.

In small communities the school is the center around which the life of the community revolves. It is a serious blow to their independence, unity, and community life when they lose their schools.

If the community stands to lose its school there must be a lot of information and skillful interpretation of facts to help the taxpayer see the complete financial picture of a larger consolidated school if he is going to be for reorganization. This was clearly brought out by Cocking in the statement:

> The total cost of a large, consolidated school is more than for a small school, even though the financial effort may be the same. Taxpayers require

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[11] Kreitlow, op. cit., p. 387.

> a lot of information and a skillful interpretation of facts to help them see the complete financial picture. When it is forthcoming, the taxpayer is generally convinced that the merits of consolidation will outweigh the difficulties. But the greatest danger in consolidation is that the policy makers are more remote from the people than they are in the small district. Unless the school board and the leadership of the consolidated school take pains to unify all sections of the district and actively work to bring about participation and understanding by all the people of the district, something important is lost. The people, all of them, need to feel that the consolidated school is 'ours' and not 'theirs.'"[12]

If all of the advantages concerning tax advantages and educational opportunities can be skillfully and accurately shown to the taxpayer most of the disadvantages of reorganization can be overcome.

Effectiveness of School District Reorganization

The effect of reorganization shown by the Wisconsin study is that educational opportunities seem to be better in all districts reorganized as compared to non-reorganized districts in the same area.

Has reorganization improved education? This question prompted University of Wisconsin research workers to begin, in 1949, an intensive study to determine whether or not reorganization has changed educational programs in terms of

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[12]Cocking, op. cit., p. 62.

learning opportunities provided for youngsters, actual school achievement, and the relationship between achievement and educational costs. Reorganization does improve the education for boys and girls as is shown by Kreitlow in his statement:

> Boys and girls in reorganized districts had greater educational opportunities, reorganized districts produced higher academic achievement as shown by standardized achievement tests, instruction in reorganized districts cost $12 more per elementary pupil per year, and reorganized districts made no significant changes in social and economic contacts between farmers and the village center.
>
> All in all, this research has piled up a substantial amount of evidence that reorganization of school districts does improve the education for boys and girls--the kind of school district in which children live does make a difference.[13]

In a study of students in Iowa State College in relation to size of high school and courses offered, Lathrop reported that there is a positive relationship between size of high school and academic grades in the first year of college but not much thereafter. This is shown in the following statement by Kreitlow in an article in the Review of Educational Research:

> Academic achievement tests in Iowa showed that single grade load to be much better than the multiple-grade teacher load. An elementary education in a rural

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[13]Kreitlow, B. W. "School District Reorganization," The University of Wisconsin Special Bullitin No. 6, March 1961, 4pp.

> school and secondary of less than 100 pupils really hurt children in Iowa. Lathrop (1960)a also studied college achievement, reporting on academic grades of students in Iowa State College in relation to size of high school and courses offered in the high school. He found positive relationship between size of high school and academic grades in the first year of college but not much relationship thereafter.[14]

The Wisconsin and Iowa studies show two important effects of reorganization. They are: (1) educational achievement is much better and (2) the tax base is much more equalized. Some of the problems in school district reorganization appear in the following section.

Problems of School District Reorganization

One of the more significant developments in American education following World War II has been the nationwide attention given to school district organization. School districts have decreased greatly in the past decade as shown by a statement in the Peabody Report: "in state after state the number of school districts being maintained have been reduced so sharply that by 1958 fewer than 50,000 districts remained of 103,000 districts operated in 1945-1946."[15]

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[14]Kreitlow, op. cit., p. 386.

[15]The Park County News, Peabody Report, October, 16, 1958, p. 3.

In the past decade first and second class districts have increased slightly while third class and nonoperating districts have decreased greatly. This is shown by the Peabody survey team's statement:

> In the past decade (1948-1957) the number of first class districts has increased by 3; the number of second class districts has increased by 6; the number of third class districts has decreased by 149; and the number of nonoperating districts has decreased by 120.[16]

There were seven earmarks for sound district organization listed in the Peabody Report. They were: unity; simplicity; efficiency; economy; effectiveness; area; and population.[17]

School districts were set up when the population was sparse and transportation was poor. With the present mode of transportation there is no longer a need for many small school districts. The often proposed question is "What is a satisfactory school size?"

Criteria for Satisfactory School Size

One of the problems with larger districts and larger schools is that no one knows with certainty how large a

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[16] Ibid, p. 3.

[17] Ibid, p. 3.

school should be. A school of 3,000 is too big; a school of 30 is too small. An elementary school should have at least one teacher per grade and a high school should have at least three sections of each grade. According to the Peabody report two rules of thumb have received widespread acceptance among the states:

1. An elementary school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least one teacher per grade (about seven teachers in a six-grade school). Maximum size should be in the neighborhood of 16-20 teachers or 500-600 pupils.

2. A high school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least three sections of each grade taught. This provides about twelve teachers in a Grades 10-12 senior high school: three in Grade 12 (75 students), three in Grade 11 (85-90 stuents), and about four in Grade 10 (100 students), for a total of ten academic teachers for an enrollment of about 250-275, a four-year high school would have about sixteen teachers. A desirable maximum size for a secondary school should be between 750 and 1,500 students, possibly from 1,000 to 1,200.[18]

Most of the studies seem to agree that elementary schools should have a maximum of from 500 to 600 pupils and a high school should have a maximum of from 1,000 to 1,500 pupils at the most.

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[18] Ibid, p. 3.

Procedures in District Reorganization

There are usually two choices of procedures to follow in district reorganization. They are: (1) to have local districts bring about consolidation or (2) to have legislation for all of the districts within the state.

The legislature has adopted all laws under which Montana school districts have been organized. It also has adopted the laws under which reorganization may be effected. It has made provisions for merging, dividing and abolishing school districts within a county, and for operating districts in parts of two or more counties. All of these provisions are on a permissive basis and reorganization has been slow. The Peabody survey team indicated a need for legislative pressure when it stated that: "the basic issue confronting the Legislative Assembly is whether reorganization is to be accomplished by legislation or whether existing laws are to be revised to require local groups to effect it."[19]

There are three basic steps recommended by the Peabody survey team in reorganizing districts in Montana. These three steps are:

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[19] Ibid, p. 3.

1. A simple ultimatum that all districts not operating any schools are forthwith abolished would immediately reduce the number of administrative units from 1,160 to 953.

2. A statute which requires every elementary school district to merge with its high school district so that one board governed all education in an area would reduce the number of districts to 171, of which at least 14 would automatically be county-wide school districts.

3. A mandate that state policies and regulations withdraw accreditation and financial support from nonisolated schools which cannot justify their existence (in terms of subjects offered, size of staff and enrollment, nearness to a larger school, etc.) would reduce the number of school districts still further.[20]

The Peabody report in its recommended steps for reorganizing districts takes the stand that reorganization is going to have to come from the state level. The recommendations given by the Peabody survey team are given in the following section.

Recommendations for District Reorganization

The Peabody Report gives eleven recommendations that should be kept in mind in the reorganization of school districts of Montana. These recommendations were arrived at by a comprehensive study of the schools of Montana during 1957-58. They are:

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[20] Ibid, p. 3.

1. The Legislative Assembly should legalize only one kind of school district to provide all public school services in a given area.

2. The general school code should be culled of special legislation so that the school law would apply uniformly throughout the state.

3. The state should require all school districts to operate schools from Grade 1 through Grade 12.

4. A single school board should be made responsible for all school operations in the reorganized district.

5. Boards of Trustees should consist of five lay citizens elected at large by popular vote for overlapping terms of five years.

6. The remaining members of a board should fill all vacancies as they occur, making interim appointments until the next election.

7. The powers and duties of the board of trustees should be much the same as those now divided between high school and common school district boards.

8. Boundaries of the reorganized school districts should be required to conform to some established geographical, governmental, or sociological subdivision of the state.

9. The state should revise upward its definition of desirable minimum sizes for schools, and should then evaluate all schools below the minimum on the basis of isolation.

10. The legislature should direct the state educational agency to prepare the criteria for defensible school attendance areas, and then to establish in every county a local school study commission.

11. The Montana Taxation - Education Commission should seriously consider a recommendation that the legislature initiate a constitutional amendment to remove all reference to the county school superintendency.[21]

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[21] Ibid, p. 4.

The review of literature points out that the trend in school district organization seems to be to reorganize into larger units. The advantages of reorganization seem to outweigh the disadvantages and ~~that~~ the larger districts seem to be much more effective in educating the children. There is no question but that reorganization is just around the corner. Authorities say that these are the criteria for a satisfactory educational program:

1. An elementary school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least one teacher per grade with at least 25 children per teacher. A desirable maximum size should be between 500 and 600 pupils.

2. A high school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least three sections of each grade taught. A desirable minimum number of students for a good educational program should be: about 75 in grade 12, 85-90 in grade 11, 100 in grade 10, and 125 in grade 9. This would be a total of about 400 students. A desirable maximum should be between 750-1500 students.

3. At least one teacher per grade and 25 children per teacher in elementary schools. A minimum program in high school would have about 20 teachers.

4. A district should have a large enough tax base to be financially able to provide education from grades one through twelve.

5. School districts no longer have to coincide with county, township or city boundaries. Many are being drawn about natural trading and social areas. School districts should have sufficient population to warrant the financing of an educational program.

6. The cost per pupil in a well organized district should be close to the national average of $375.

7. There should be enough transportation so that children on the route do not have to ride for an unreasonable length of time.

8. Educational opportunities will be greater in a larger district. A larger district could better provide for individual differences, provide more library, audio visual, health, and guidance services, offer a broader and better educational program, and attract a higher quality of professional leadership and teachers, thus offering a better education and more opportunities to all students at a lowered cost.

A study of the Sheridan County school district organization was undertaken by investigating the records of the Sheridan County Superintendent of Schools. The data from this investigation are presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III

STATUS OF PRESENT DISTRICT ORGANIZATION IN SHERIDAN COUNTY

There were 52 school districts in the county in 1930. This number had been reduced to 30 in 1962 and with the statutory abandonment law in July of 1963 this number was further reduced to 19 districts. The 19 districts operated 17 elementary schools and 5 high schools in 1963. Of the 17 elementary schools only 5 are classified as town schools and 12 are rural schools. There are 20 teachers in the 12 rural schools teaching 245 students. Eight of these 12 rural schools have less than 15 students.

The above figures seem to point out that even though Sheridan County has reduced its districts considerably there is still much to be accomplished. Maps showing the size and location of the school districts of Sheridan County in 1930, 1960, and 1963 appear in the Appendix.

Per Pupil Cost

The average per pupil cost was about $412 in Montana and about $375 in the United States in 1960-1961. The average per pupil cost was $466.58 in the Sheridan County elementary schools and $826.04 in the Sheridan County high

schools. This shows that the Sheridan County per pupil cost is higher than Montana and is twice that in the United States.

A comparison of the assessed valuations, annual expenditures, mill levy, enrollment and per pupil costs of the high schools of Sheridan County in 1960-1961 are given in Table 1. The highest cost per pupil was $1152.54 in District 29 (Outlook) and the lowest cost per pupil was $659.27 in District 3 (Westby). All of the high school districts in the county are above the Montana and the National average in per pupil costs.

TABLE 1. ASSESSED VALUATION, ANNUAL EXPENDITURES, MILL LEVY, ENROLLMENT, AND PER PUPIL COSTS IN THE FIVE HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SHERIDAN COUNTY, 1960-1961

H.S. District	Assessed Valuation	Annual Expenditures*	Mill Levy	Enrollment	Per Pupil Cost
3	$ 2,731,530	$ 56,039	28.26	85	$ 659.27
7	8,544,702	95,740	25.82	100	957.39
19	3,595,239	27,749	13.15	41	676.79
20	9,698,671	160,787	35.08	201	799.93
29	5,009,997	43,797	12.43	38	1,152.54
Total	$29,580,139	$384,112		465	
Average					$826.04

*Rounded to the nearest dollar

The assessed valuation, annual expenditures, mill levy, enrollment, and per pupil costs of the thirty elementary schools of Sheridan County in 1960-1961 are given in Table 2. The highest cost per pupil was $890.13 in District 46 and the lowest cost per pupil was $320.21 in District 21. In 16 of the districts the per pupil cost was higher than the Montana average and in 18 districts the per pupil cost was higher than the National average.

Operating Schools

The number of operating schools in the districts of Sheridan County are getting to be fewer every year. In 1930-31 there were 39 districts operating 68 one-room schools, 5 districts operating two-room schools, and there were 8 districts operating town schools. This had decreased so that by 1940-41 there were 29 districts operating 36 one-room schools, 5 districts operating two-room schools, and there were 7 districts operating town schools. In 1950-51 there were 15 districts operating 17 one-room schools, 5 districts operating two-room schools, 1 district operating a three-room school, and there were 6 districts operating town schools. By 1960-61 there were 11 districts operating 14 one-room schools, 3 districts operating two-

TABLE 2. ASSESSED VALUATION, ANNUAL EXPENDITURES, MILL LEVY, ENROLLMENT, AND PER PUPIL COSTS IN THE THIRTY ELEMENTARY DISTRICTS OF SHERIDAN COUNTY, 1960-1961

Elem. District	Assessed Valuation	Annual Expenditures*	Mill Levy	Enrollment	Per Pupil Cost
1	$ 205,348	$ 4,269	22.95	9	$474.34
2	1,209,581	20,989	32.45	36	583.03
3	660,071	47,498	19.75	136	349.25
4	1,240,353	10,281	22.52	23	447.01
7	2,631,075	71,573	41.02	168	426.03
8	1,471,287	12,331	20.31	29	425.19
11	220,693	4,337	35.26	9	481.88
19	862,726	32,033	47.30	76	421.49
20	5,712,180	186,008	48.85	472	394.08
21	987,290	12,168	20.50	38	320.21
24	164,893	4,358	19.61	7	622.57
29	3,101,695	51,578	21.43	85	606.79
30	770,482	7,048	11.10		
31	274,453	4,157	25.80		
33	227,789	3,301	11.25		
34	780,882	6,911	16.60	13	531.64
37	595,544	3,712	8.16		
38	987,144	13,491	23.42	24	562.11
41	696,858	5,238	29.62	12	436.48
42	327,748	4,307	23.83	13	331.32
43	638,283	8,760	8.05	14	625.72
46	456,081	11,572	58.93	13	890.13
49	1,193,141	25,011	19.71	49	510.43
51	487,431	2,634	5.89		
56	364,036	3,536	12.96		
58	494,645	5,102	27.93	13	392.46
65	653,883	5,782	15.78		
66	557,311	450			
69	1,297,639	16,492	32.00	22	749.63
72	309,579	3,431	19.50		
Total	$29,580,121	$588,359		1261	
Average					$466.58

*Rounded to the nearest dollar

room schools, 2 districts operating three-room schools, and 5 districts operating town schools. The number and type of schools operated by each of the districts in 1960-61 are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. NUMBER AND TYPE OF SCHOOLS OPERATED BY DISTRICTS IN SHERIDAN COUNTY; 1960-1961

District	Schools Operated	
	Number	Type
1	1	1 room
2	1	3 room
3	1	town
4	2	1 room
7	1	town
8	1	2 room
11	1	1 room
19	1	town
20	1	town
21	1	2 room
24	1	1 room
29	1	town
34	1	1 room
38	1	2 room
41	1	1 room
42	1	1 room
43	2	1 room
46	1	1 room
49	1	3 room
58	1	1 room
69	2	1 room
Total 21	24	

Census

In 1960-61 the census of children under 21 in the county was 2791. This is larger than the 1950-51 census which was 2695, smaller than the 1940-41 census which was 3261, and smaller than the 1930-31 census which was 4518. Table 4 shows the number of children under 21 in each of the districts of the county and the total number of children under 21 in the county in 1960-61.

TABLE 4. CHILDREN UNDER 21 IN SHERIDAN COUNTY, 1960-1961

District	Children Under 21	District	Children Under 21
1	13	34	67
2	77	37	24
3	148	38	49
4	61	41	52
7	269	42	41
8	80	43	41
11	20	46	47
19	89	49	112
20	946	51	26
21	75	56	48
24	8	58	35
29	210	65	43
30	25	66	39
31	16	69	94
33	19	72	17
Total			2,791

Teaching Positions

The teaching positions in the elementary schools have decreased from 111 in 1930-31 to 64 in 1960-61. In 1930-31 there were 33 high school teachers in 8 schools and in 1960-61 there were 43 high school teachers in 5 schools. Table 5 shows the number of teachers in each district in 1960-61.

TABLE 5. TEACHERS IN EACH OF THE DISTRICTS OF SHERIDAN COUNTY, 1960-1961

District	Number of Teachers	
	Elementary	High School
1	1	
2	3	
3	4	6
4	2	
7	5	10
8	2	
11	1	
19	4	4
20	21	17
21	2	
24	1	
29	4	6
34	1	
38	2	
41	1	
42	1	
43	2	
46	1	
49	3	
58	1	
69	2	
Total 21	64	43

Transportation

School districts in Sheridan County spent $93,661.97 transporting 529 students for a county average of $177.34 per pupil in 1960-61. The highest cost per pupil was $466.42 in District 69 and the lowest cost per pupil was $30 in District 66. Table 6 shows the per pupil cost of transportation in each of the districts in 1960-61.

TABLE 6. CHILDREN TRANSPORTED, ANNUAL EXPENDITURES, AND PER PUPIL COST IN THE DISTRICTS OF SHERIDAN COUNTY, 1960-1961

District*	Children Transported	Annual Expenditures	Per Pupil Cost
3	55	$10,006.19	$181.93
7	114	21,001.97	184.22
19	12	2,594.34	216.11
20	77	14,084.90	182.92
29	27	7,741.68	286.72
30	18	5,085.00	282.50
31	10	2,565.00	256.50
33	14	2,142.45	153.03
37	23	3,203.52	139.28
38	24	1,962.41	81.76
46	25	4,686.44	187.45
49	44	5,040.00	114.54
51	16	2,578.90	161.18
56	27	3,100.50	114.83
65	13	2,261.74	173.98
66	12	360.00	30.00
69	7	3,264.94	466.42
72	11	1,981.99	180.18
Total	529	$93,661.97	
Average			$177.34

*Districts not listed did not transport any children.

Assessed Valuation

The assessed valuation of Sheridan County in the year 1960-61 was $59,160,260. The elementary district with the largest assessed valuation was District 20 with $1,518,918 and the district with the smallest assessed valuation was District 24 with $40,066. The high school district with the largest assessed valuation was District 20 with $9,698,671 and the district with the smallest assessed valuation was District 3 with $2,731,530. Table 7 shows the assessed valuation per pupil, the assessed valuation per teacher, and the assessed valuation of each of the districts in the county for the year 1960-61.

In chapter 4 proposals will be given for the reorganization of Sheridan County school districts using the following criteria for a satisfactory educational program:

1. An elementary school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least one teacher per grade with at least 25 children per teacher. A desirable maximum size should be between 500 and 600 pupils.

2. A high school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least three sections of each grade taught. A desirable minimum number of students for a good educational program should be: about 75 in grade 12, 85-90 in grade 11, 100 in grade 10, and 125 in grade 9. This would be a total of about 400 students. A desirable maximum should be between 750-1500 students.

TABLE 7. ASSESSED VALUATION PER PUPIL, ASSESSED VALUATION PER TEACHER, AND ASSESSED VALUATION OF THE DISTRICTS IN SHERIDAN COUNTY, 1960-1961

District	Assessed Valuation		
	Per Pupil	Per Teacher	District
1	$ 5,468.00	$ 49,212.00	$ 49,212
2	9,797.61	117,571.33	352,714
3	1,231.75	41,879.50	167,518
4	15,946.56	183,774.00	366,771
7	3,811.67	128,072.50	640,361
8	11,575.31	167,842.00	335,684
11	5,297.66	47,679.00	47,679
19	3,171.21	60,253.00	241,012
20	3,218.04	72,329.42	1,518,918
21	5,952.65	113,100.00	226,201
24	5,723.71	40,066.00	40,066
29	17,212.52	365,766.25	1,463,065
34	14,130.69	183,699.00	183,699
38	8,660.16	103,922.00	207,844
41	15,621.41	187,457.00	187,457
42	5,729.84	74,488.00	74,488
43	11,400.54	79,804.50	159,609
46	8,015.76	104,205.00	104,205
49	5,979.24	92,661.00	277,983
58	7,873.07	102,350.00	102,350
69	13,131.22	144,443.50	288,887
3*	32,135.64	455,255.00	2,731,530
7*	85,477.02	854,470.20	8,544,702
19*	87,688.75	898,809.75	3,595,239
20*	48,252.09	570,510.05	9,698,671
29*	131,842.02	834,999.50	5,009,997
30			770,482
31			274,453
33			227,789
37			595,544
51			487,431
56			364,036
65			653,883
66			557,311
72			309,579
Total			$59,160,260

*High Schools

3. At least one teacher per grade and 25 children per teacher in elementary school. A minimum program in high school would have about 20 teachers.

4. A district should have a large enough tax base to be financially able to provide education from grades one through twelve.

5. School districts no longer have to coincide with county, township or city boundaries. Many are being drawn about natural trading and social areas. School districts should have sufficient population to warrant the financing of an educational program.

6. The cost per pupil in a well organized district should be close to the national average of $375.

7. There should be enough transportation so that children on the route do not have to ride for an unreasonable length of time.

8. Educational opportunities will be greater in a larger district. A larger district could better provide for individual differences, provide more library, audio visual, health, and guidance services, offer a broader and better educational program, and attract a higher quality of professional leadership and teachers, thus offering a better education and more opportunities to all students at a lowered cost.

CHAPTER IV

SUGGESTED SCHOOL DISTRICT PROPOSAL FOR SHERIDAN COUNTY AND EVALUATION OF PRESENT DISTRICTS

Authors in literature revealed certain criteria as measures of an effective educational system. When present school district organization of Sheridan County was evaluated against these it seemed inadequate and thus led to the following proposals for district reorganization:

1. Sheridan County should be reorganized into one school unit.

2. There should be one high school located in Plentywood.

3. There should be four elementary schools located in Medicine Lake, Outlook, Plentywood, and Westby.

This proposed reorganization plan is evaluated in terms of each of these criteria in the following section.

Evaluation of Criteria for Efficient Operation of Schools of Sheridan County

In the following sections the present organization of Sheridan County school districts will be evaluated with the criteria as revealed in the review of literature. Using available figures and the criteria presented in this chapter an estimate was arrived at. The status of the present districts and the estimate for the proposed district are shown in Table 8.

Minimum Size of School. One of the criteria of a sound school district is that it should have at least 25 children per teacher in the first six grades and a minimum of 300 pupils in grades six through twelve. If Sheridan County organized into one district operating one high school and four grade schools this requirement would be maintained.

Per Pupil Cost. One of the main criteria is that a district should have a large enough tax base to be financially able to provide education from grades one through twelve. Reorganization will equalize the tax base and provide better educational opportunities at a lowered cost to the taxpayer. There are 16 districts in Sheridan County with a higher per pupil cost than the Montana average and 18 districts operate above the national average. The average per pupil cost in Sheridan County would be reduced to a level closer to the national average by eliminating 19 school plants now in existance and thus duplication of teacher duties. The average mill levy in the county was about 23.50 mills. This would be decreased by the equalized tax base.

Number of Schools. By reorganizing into one school unit, Sheridan County would eliminate nineteen rural or town elementary schools and four high schools.

Teaching Positions. In the reorganized district there would be fewer high school teachers because of the elimination of duplication of positions. There are four commercial, science, and mathematics teachers in the four small high schools teaching classes of five to ten students. In the reorganized district there would be one teacher in each of these fields taking care of all of the students. The elementary positions would not be decreased noticeably but the multiple classroom would be eliminated.

Transportation. The bus routes of 1084 miles traveled at the present could be more efficiently handled as children would all be going in the same direction and not awaiting another bus to take them to another school. The high school students would add perhaps 110 miles per day being transported into Plentywood.

Educational Opportunities. The criteria for an efficient educational program is that a school have a minimum of 400 students. The new district would have about 150 freshmen, 125 sophomores, 100 juniors, and 90 seniors. A school of this size could better provide for individual differences by grouping the students in each of the four grades. Those students interested in college could so prepare by taking advanced classes in math, science, English, and etc. In the present small high schools of Sheridan County there are not enough students in most cases to justify

the cost of these advanced courses. Those students not interested, or mentally unable to attend college could be prepared for the life they choose by the various courses that can be offered such students in the larger, more efficient high schools. The new district could provide better remedial, library, audio visual, health and guidance programs.

The elementary schools will also be able to offer a better education to more students than at present. There would be about 300 pupils in Medicine Lake with about 13 teachers, about 175 pupils in Outlook and Westby with about 9 teachers each, and about 600 pupils in Plentywood with about 26 teachers. This is one teacher per 25 pupils or at least one teacher per grade.

The elementary schools will also be able to provide all the students with the remedial, library, audio visual, health and guidance programs necessary for our mode of education.

As pointed out in the evaluation a new system in Sheridan County would offer better and more educational opportunities to all of the students at a lowered cost.

TABLE 8. STATUS OF PRESENT DISTRICTS AND AN ESTIMATE FOR THE PROPOSED DISTRICT USING THE CRITERIA LISTED IN THIS CHAPTER

Criteria	Present Districts	Estimated Proposed District
Number of Districts	30	1
Number of Elem. Schools	24	4
Number of High Schools	5	1
Number of Elem. Students	1261	1261
Number of H. S. Students	465	465
Number of Elem. Teachers	64	50
Number of H. S. Teachers	43	25
Elem. Cost Per Pupil	$466	$400
H. S. Cost Per Pupil	$826	$600
Average Mill Levy Elem.	24.22	20.00
Average Mill Levy H. S.	22.95	20.00
Bus Miles Traveled Per Day	1084	1194

Summary

Reviewing the criteria indicates that Sheridan County would be able to offer more efficient educational opportunities thru reorganization than it can under the present system of operation. The summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study will follow in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to find the trends of reorganization throughout the United States and how Sheridan County would compare. A review of literature and an investigation of the statistical records of the Sheridan County Superintendent of Schools was conducted to gain the necessary information.

Summary

From the review of literature it was learned that the trend in school district organization was to reorganize into larger units. Reports on the advantages of reorganization outweigh the disadvantages and the larger districts are pointed to as much more effective in educating the children. Literature revealed eight basic criteria for a satisfactory educational program. They are: (1) an elementary school of satisfactory minimum size should provide at least one teacher per grade with at least 25 children per teacher; (2) a high school of satisfactory minimum size should have at least three sections of each grade taught; (3) a minimum program in high school should have about 20 teachers; (4) a district should have a large enough tax base to be financially able to provide education from grades one through twelve; (5) school

districts no longer have to coincide with county, township or city boundaries; (6) the cost per pupil in a well organized district should be close to the national average of $375; (7) there should be enough transportation so that children on the route do not have to ride for an unreasonable length of time; and (8) the educational opportunities would be more effective for all of the students in the county.

The findings in the investigation showed that reorganization is progressing in Sheridan County at about the same rate as in the United States for the same period. The districts in the United States have decreased to about one-third as many as there were 30 years ago, while Sheridan County has decreased its districts to fewer than one-third of the districts of 30 years ago.

The statistics show that Sheridan County is higher in per pupil costs than both Montana and the United States in the 1960-61 school year. The average was about $412 in Montana and about $375 for the United States. The Sheridan County average per pupil cost was $466.88 in the elementary districts and $826.04 in the high school districts.

The figures given in Chapter 3 indicate that there are still many inadequate districts in Sheridan County.

After evaluating the criteria for an efficient school operation it was learned that Sheridan County could reduce their present districts of 30 to 1 district operating 1 high

school and 4 elementary schools. These schools would all be of a satisfactory minimum size employing enough elementary teachers to eliminate the multiple classrooms and the high school would be able to offer three sections of each grade taught. Remedial classes would be offered to all who were in need of them and a sound program of library, audio visual, health, and guidance could be offered to all of the students. The tax base would be equalized and in most of the present districts lowered since the per pupil cost could be brought down to nearer the national level. The transportation would be more effectively run by eliminating the double routes now taken by some buses.

Conclusion

As a result of this study one conclusion was drawn: Sheridan County would have a better and more efficient educational system thru reorganization than it has at the present time.

Recommendations

As a result of this study one recommendation is made: The criteria for an efficient school plan should be studied and a more thorough approach made in getting pertinent data to replace the estimates given here-in on the bus miles traveled, number of students, teachers, mill levies, and cost per pupil.

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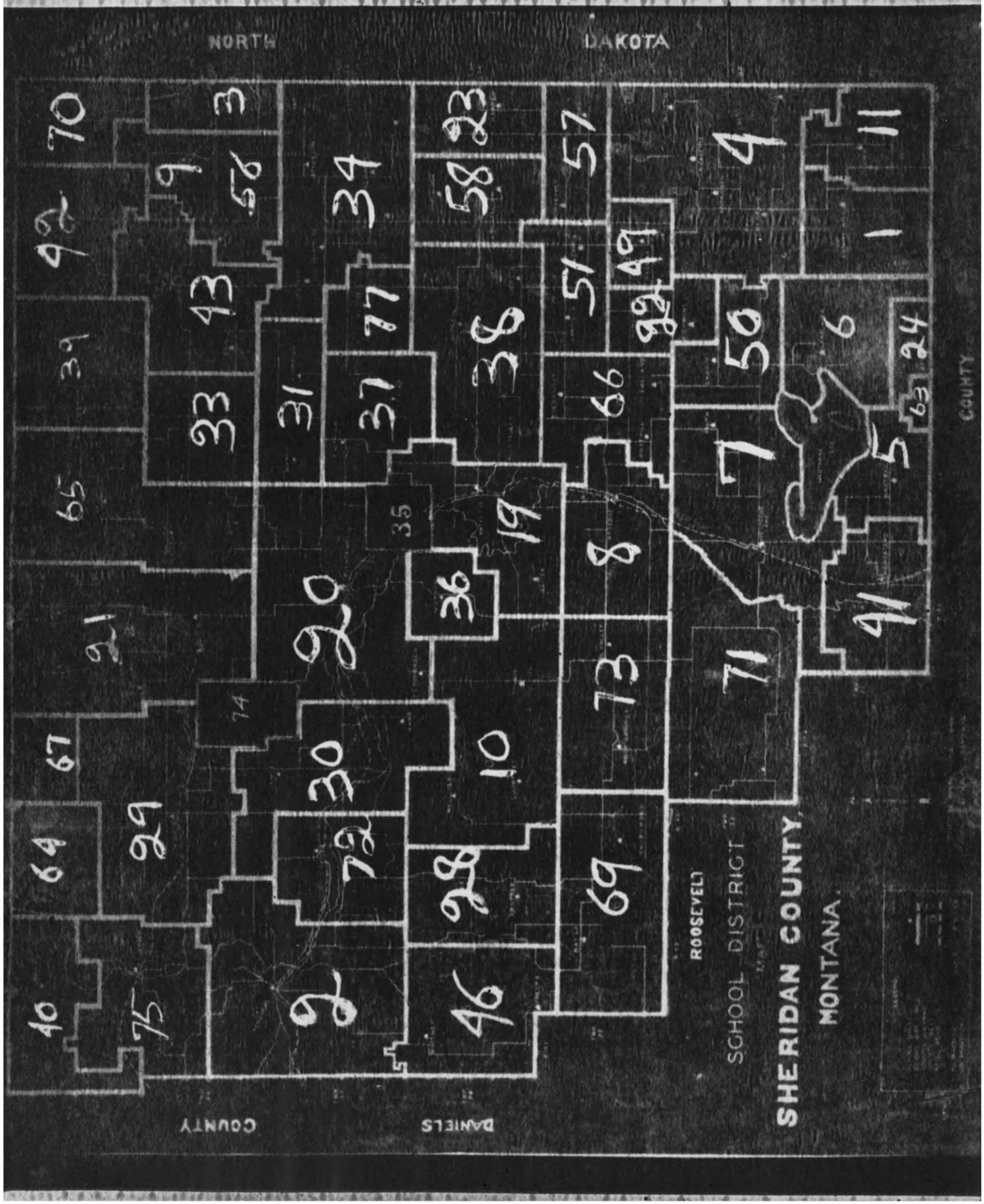
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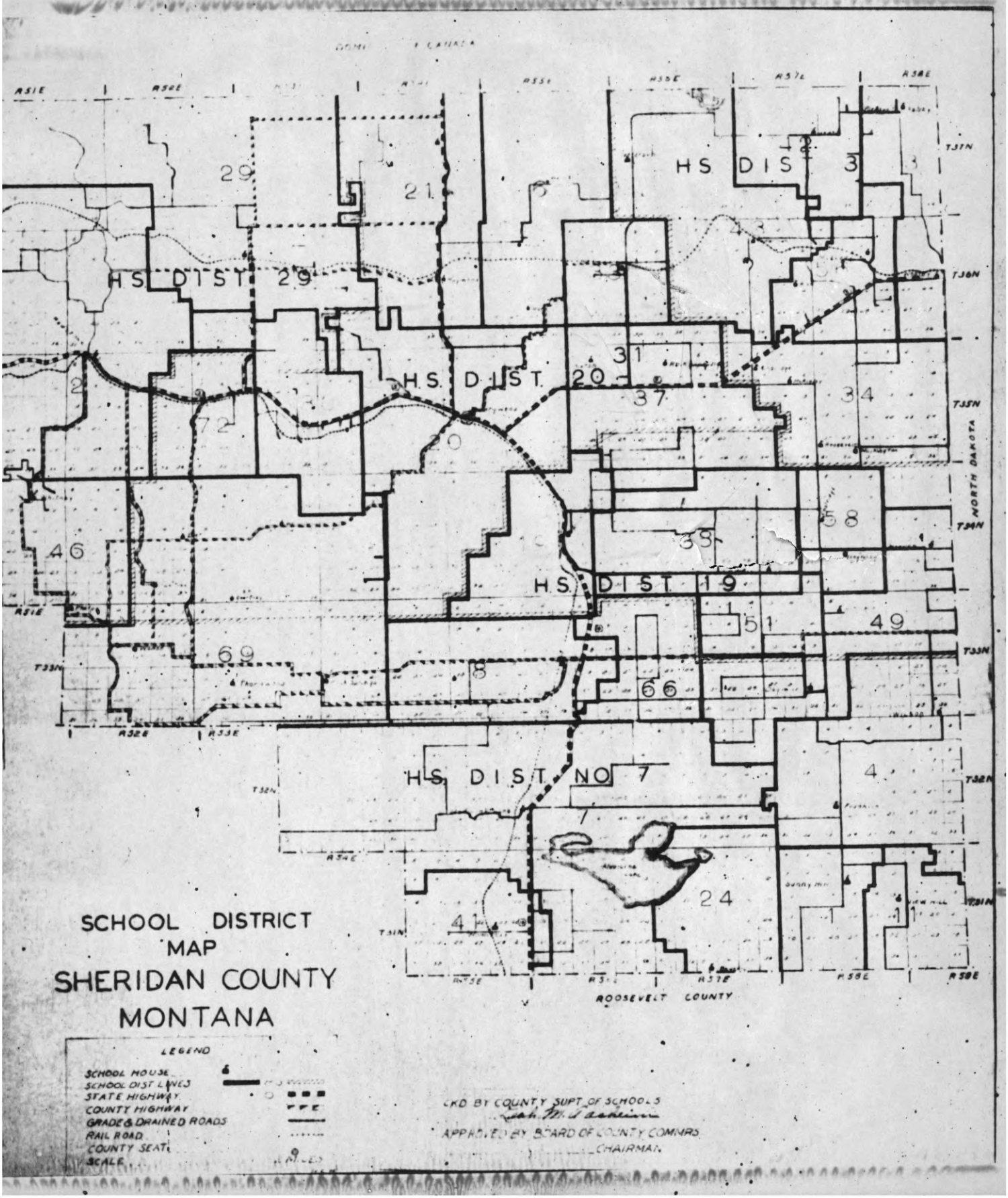
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APPENDIX

Sheridan County 1930



Sheridan County 1960



Sheridan County 1963

