

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

This paper is submitted by Osborn Elementary District No. 8 in response to the Arizona School District Redistricting Commission’s preliminary recommendations on consolidation and unification. Our response is based on our understanding that SB 1068 established a 13-person School District Redistricting Commission “to **consider** redistricting to, among many considerations, provide for a more seamless and connected learning experience and alignment of curriculum for the state’s youth, as well as potential savings and efficiencies.” We further understand that the Commission’s recommendations may include:

- *Enlarging or diminishing the size of affected school districts including unorganized territories within recommended districts*
- **Determining that an existing common school district should remain a common school district and not be included in a new unified school district recommendation.**

District Overview

Osborn Elementary School District No. 8

1226 W. Osborn Road
Phoenix, AZ 85013

***Children want knowledge, challenge and recognition.
Parents want independent, passionate learners in a safe environment.
This is our mission***

Enrollment:	3,900
Number of Schools:	Six Schools with School-wide Title 1 programs
Grade Configuration:	3-PreK-6; 1-PreK-3; 1-4-6; 1- 7-8
Labels:	5 Performing Plus Schools; 1 Performing School
Socio-Economic Status:	83% Free & Reduced Lunch
Ethnicity:	Anglo 14.25%; Black 11.86%; Hispanic 62.58%; Native American 9.27%; Asian, 2.04%
Budget:	Operating on a 10% K-8 Override and 5% K-3 Override Passed a \$37million bond issue with 69% voter approval Nov. 2006
Administrative Staff:	Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum; 6 Principals, 1 Assistant Principal, 6 Directors—Special Services, Finance, Maintenance & Transportation, Technology, Child Nutrition, Resource Development
Certified Staff:	249
Classified Staff:	291

Our Focus: Student Achievement

First, it must be understood that increasing student achievement is the top priority in the Osborn School District. We have made steady progress in raising student achievement on each of our campuses by using scientifically based research. In addition, achievement is steadily improving despite our highly diverse and mobile student population because we pay particular attention to both high stakes test data as well as district criterion referenced benchmark data by intentionally targeting and customizing instruction for both individual

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

students and groups. Just as suggested by the recent *Beat the Odds* study, “instead of measuring achievement by grade and by school,” we “measure achievement per student, per classroom, and per teacher.”

The collaborative culture we have developed over the years is a factor that is of critical importance to our functioning as a district and vital to our success. We believe that the level of staff involvement in decisions that affect them and our students is unique in the valley if not the state. We strive for continuous improvement by asking two key questions that drive our daily work -- “Why are we doing this?” and “Why are we doing it this way?”—thus we don’t make change for change sake, but because it will improve some level of operation in the district. We involve all the stakeholders in our Professional Learning Community in constantly addressing these questions and working together to reach consensus on answers that are appropriate to our Osborn community of learners.

Evidence clearly indicates that we have a formula that is working toward continuous progress in the Osborn School District, so it is without reservation that we state at the outset that we do not feel that either of the plans originally proposed for Osborn by the Commission —to join forces under Plan C with Alhambra Elementary, Central High School and Bostrom, with an enrollment of +/-17,000 or to become part of a Unified Phoenix Union, along with all the other partner elementary districts, with an enrollment of +100,000, or the most recent recommendation of the Commission —Alhambra Unified, combining Osborn with Alhambra Elementary, Central and Alhambra Highs, Desiderata for special-needs students and Bostrom, an alternative program for students at risk— would/could help us work more effectively and efficiently, improve student achievement or save significant budget dollars. In fact, we strongly believe that consolidation or unification would be a deterrent to our focus on student achievement. However, being the data driven district that we are, we have moved beyond our own personal and professional biases about consolidation and unification, raised some questions of our own and reviewed current research and literature on the topic.

Saving Dollars- Aligning Curriculum

*We in the Osborn School District understand that the School District Redistricting Commission is to consider redistricting to include among other things, providing for a more **seamless and connected learning experience and alignment of curriculum for students**, as well as **providing potential savings and efficiencies**.* While we know that the following information is not unique to the Osborn District, it does support the fact that we already successfully address these two issues.

The Osborn School District takes full advantage of shared services to help stretch limited budget dollars. Because all purchases involve public money, the district is guided in procurement procedures by several established principles including but not limited to:

1. Conducting all procurement in accordance with Arizona State Law and Osborn Elementary School District Board policies.
2. **Obtaining the best quality for the best price** and in a timely manner.
3. Maximizing and encouraging fair competition, and providing interested and qualified vendors with an opportunity to offer their products and/or services to the District.

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

Osborn Elementary School District is a member of the following **purchasing consortia**:

Arizona State Procurement Office (AzSPO) <http://www.azspo.az.gov/>
Mohave Educational Services Cooperative (MESC) www.mesc.org
Greater Phoenix Purchasing Consortium of Schools (GPPCS) www.mpsaz.org/gppcs/
Strategic Alliance for Volume Expenditures (SAVE) <http://interactive.tempe.gov/save/>
Western States Contract Alliance (WSCA) www.aboutwsca.org
School Medical Insurance Trust, (SMIT)

Our Child Nutrition Department purchases through ASPIN Food Services, which is part of the Mohave Educational Services cooperative and has found their bid prices match or exceed savings obtained by large districts.

We also actively participate in **curriculum consortia** including:

Greater Phoenix Educational Management Systems (GPEMC) for Superintendents and Administrators for Finance and Curriculum
Arizona Assessment Collaborative (AzAC) serving approximately 20 elementary and unified districts

In addition, to assure that we are giving our students the greatest chance of success in high school, we work closely with staff and administration from Phoenix Union High School District and other elementary district partners (formerly referred to as “feeder” districts)

Outcomes of these **collaborative partnerships** include:

1. High quality, standards-based, criterion referenced assessments in mathematics and reading, grades K-8 (a foundation for Osborn’s Trimester Benchmark Assessments)
2. Professional development for teacher leaders and principals—analyzing student achievement data to improve teaching and learning
3. Refinement of 7th and 8th grade mathematics and reading course outcomes that ensure readiness for 9-12 AZ Academic Standards
4. Classroom observations and dialogues between Osborn Middle School, Central and North High School mathematics and reading teachers
5. Creation of a centralized EDesk item bank to provide teachers from participating districts with high-quality, valid mathematics and reading test items for classroom assessment
6. Development of EDesk Support Group—sharing programming and trouble shooting expertise among all users
7. Current development of science assessments predictive of success on the upcoming 4th and 8th grade AIMS Science Test

As a partner in AzAC and GPEMC, Osborn School District has **shared the following products and processes with elementary district partners** working to meet the requirements of NCLB and improve student achievement:

1. Standards-based Report Cards (All AzAC districts)

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

2. Parent Guides to Learning Targets (All AzAC districts)
3. Collaborative Peer Teacher Model—professional development, observation and shadowing (Avondale School District)
4. Professional Learning Communities—professional development, administrative presentation (Murphy and Creighton School Districts)
5. EDesk and Benchmark Assessment Development (Glendale, Avondale, Murphy, Fowler, Madison and Roosevelt School Districts)

Osborn special needs students typically transition into Central and North High Schools in the Phoenix Union High School District. Educational planning and services between our district and those two schools assist students with the transition in a smooth and uninterrupted manner. School and program assignments are reviewed every year for our eighth grade students and all personnel are present representing the two districts. Likewise, we share professional development opportunities/activities for faculty deciding together both topics and venues.

The professional relationships formed through our work together with Phoenix Union High School District and other elementary district partners support ongoing collaboration to improve student achievement for all students. Our **participation in these consortia and partnerships is not mandated. It is sustained because the outcomes of these relationships continue to improve the quality of our service to the students and staff in Osborn.**

Conclusions and Recommendations

*Research clearly supports the Osborn School District belief that **consolidation would have detrimental effects on our student achievement**, given that we are dealing with a high poverty population with 83% of our students on free/reduced lunch. It is apparent from multiple studies that **student achievement for low socioeconomic students is higher in small schools in smaller districts**. In addition, we have a strong collaborative network to assure smooth transition of our students to the high school, thus **Osborn already has programs and procedures in place to provide for a “seamless and connected learning experience and alignment of curriculum between the elementary school and high school.”***

*With an enrollment of 3,900 students, the Osborn School District is considered a medium sized district. Research supports the fact that the **district falls into a size category that already reaps the benefit of economy of scale**. In addition, there is **little or no evidence that increasing district size saves money**. The **district has already taken advantage of purchasing through various consortia so that district size is not an issue in securing the best quality for the lowest possible cost**.*

*Further, based on our review of the literature, **we believe that the Commission is misguided in its recommendation for consolidation**. It seems counterproductive to make **recommendations for consolidation that fly in the face of current research**, to ask districts to work out details as to how consolidation would affect them and then take the question to the voters when the original premise is flawed. It is a natural assumption to think that “bigger is better” but that assumption is not supported in the literature, particularly when one takes achievement into consideration. Valuable time and tax dollars will be spent by the Osborn District, as well as by every district recommended for*

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

consolidation, to hold an election regarding this issue. We contend that these resources are better spent on improving student achievement.

*We are pleased to see that one criterion prescribed as consideration for the Commission in its decision-making process was “relevant academic and scientific research regarding school size, school district size”; however, nowhere in the listing of criteria used do we find anything specifically related to student achievement. We believe that this is a serious oversight and **strongly urge the Commission to carefully review the research included in this report, as well as from other sources, and use student achievement as the number one consideration to drive your final recommendations regarding consolidation.***

Review of Literature on Size of District and Achievement

We have referenced some of the major findings from research as they relate to two key questions--how will consolidation help us further improve student achievement and how might it save dollars to devote to improved student programs and increased teacher salaries due to possible economies of scale? In addition, we looked briefly at alternatives to consolidation. Although we have not done an exhaustive search, nor have we gone back to source documents from the various studies reviewed, the following research findings give us cause to ask the Commission to reconsider consolidation/unification plans related to the Osborn School District specifically and consolidation in Arizona in general.

1. How might consolidation affect student achievement in the Osborn School District, a school community of 3,900 students, 83% of whom are on free & reduced lunch?

The Executive Summary from The Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Small School Districts and Economies of Scale*” May 14, 2003, provides a good summary of the literature available on school districts and economies of scale and highlights consistent emerging themes which are evident in the literature, many of which are included below:

- Ohio University conducted a study and summarized it in a publication of the Rural School and Community Trust: *Small Works in Arkansas: How Poverty and the Size of Schools and School Districts Affect Student Achievement in Arkansas.*

The Arkansas findings were that **“the higher the level of poverty in a community served by a school, the more damage larger schools and school districts inflict on student achievement.** In more affluent communities, the impact of school and district size is quite small, but the poorer the community, the stronger the influence. **The achievement gap between children from more affluent and those from less affluent communities is narrowed in smaller schools and smaller districts and widened in larger schools and larger districts.** Smaller schools are most effective against poverty when they are located in smaller districts; they are less effective when they are located in larger districts. **Poverty dampens student achievement most in larger schools located in larger districts.”**

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

- In addition, researchers from Ohio University analyzed test scores from every Arkansas school on seven state-mandated tests to determine if students from low-income communities do better in small schools and districts or in large ones. Their conclusion is that, **“across the board, smaller schools and smaller districts are most effective in reducing the predictable effects of poverty over student achievement.”**
- In a study of 13,600 schools and 2,300 districts, Howley and Bickel refer to **“excellence effects” of size**, in which **smaller schools and smaller districts with large numbers of economically disadvantaged students are likely to have higher average test scores than their counterparts in larger systems.**

In the six states they studied, Howley and Bickel found a **consistently predictable relationship between smaller schools and school districts and higher test scores.** They also found a pattern called “equity effects” of size. The analysis focuses on the strength of the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and achievement. Generally, the odds of getting high test scores are improved by high SES and reduced by low SES. In smaller schools and districts, Howley and Bickel found that the relationship between aggregate achievement (student achievement averaged for a school or district) and SES was consistently weaker. Replication of the Howley Bickel study in Washington State in 2002 apparently confirmed these findings.

- According to Florence Webb, researchers have fallen into two camps on the question of district size and student achievement: those who see no advantage for big districts and those who find “that achievement drops as enrollment levels rise.” She states that this is even more evident in lower socioeconomic populations. **“There was a strong, consistent negative correlation between district size and student achievement in low income populations.”**
- *Size, Excellence and Equity: A Report on Arkansas Schools and Districts* conducted by the Educational Studies Department of Ohio University (Feb. 2002) extended previous studies in Alaska, California, Georgia, Ohio, Montana, Texas and West Virginia that found that **smaller school/district size mitigates the negative effects of poverty on achievement.** These studies suggest that the **higher the level of poverty of the school, the smaller the school/district size should be to maximize student achievement.** (Howley & Bickel, 1999) Socioeconomic status was determined by the proportion of school/district enrollment receiving free/reduced meals even though there are problems with these measures in that they are subject to conditions that may be unrelated to socioeconomic status—1) willingness of the parent or guardian to apply for the subsidized meals, 2) procedures used by the district to secure applications (some are more assertive or persistent than others) 3) high tendency of high school students to decline participation. [Osborn identifies these same problems and feels that our documented 83% free/reduced lunch, might indeed be higher. In addition, based on our study of a *Framework for Understanding Poverty* by Ruby Payne, Ph.D., quoting the renowned educator, James Comer “No learning takes place without a significant relationship.” Simply stated, critical relationships are easier to form and more likely to happen in a small school/district setting.]

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

Results in Arkansas were consistent with results in the other seven states. **Smaller size facilitates academic performance among schools and districts serving impoverished students and it does so whether the measure of performance is norm-referenced or criterion-referenced test.**

The report goes on to state, “**If making incremental improvements, we advise that education decision makers refrain from adopting policies that enforce widespread consolidations and school closures.** The belief that smaller schools and districts are more expensive to operate is generally given as the reason for consolidation and closure, yet the **existing literature suggests (a) money is not saved and (b) educational outcomes are likely to be harmed.** Smaller schools and districts may be *somewhat* more expensive to operate than larger districts and schools, but that marginally greater expense seems, on the basis of this study and others like it, to be required to improve the adequacy and equity of educational *outcomes*—measured as student achievement on state-mandated tests. Very large districts and schools, however, are both ineffective (they exhibit poor educational outcomes) *and* inefficient (they are more costly.)”

Two of the four recommendations from this study appear pertinent to the Arizona situation: Recommendation No. 1: **Build on the Strength of Smaller District Size--...**“Widespread district consolidation is, on the terms of this study and its predecessors, likely to degrade the adequacy and equity of educational outcomes in the state. Arkansas is not extreme in the number of districts it maintains, but further **district consolidations will likely (1) decrease community and parental involvement in education and (2) erode the excellence and equity of school performance.** Furthermore, **consolidation will not be likely, even at the expense of excellence and equity of outcomes, to save Arkansas much money.”**

Recommendation No. 4: **Create Smaller Districts from Larger Districts—**“According to this report, **benefits to the equity of school performance seems to be maximized most consistently among smaller schools in smaller districts.** Unfortunately, Arkansas has 550 ‘larger schools in larger districts.’ This is nearly 50% of all schools in the state... Maximum benefits to the equity of school performance would be predicted to ensue from making smaller schools *and* smaller districts in these places. Just making smaller *schools* does *not* seem to provide dramatic improvements to school-level achievement equity.”

It appears from the literature that people are beginning to recognize problems inherent in big schools and districts so that the surge to create larger districts has slowed. One has simply to look at the literature available from the various states to see that many are raising the same questions Arizona educators are raising about consolidation—Utah, Arkansas, Louisiana, West Virginia, California, Texas—to name just a few.

Review of Literature on Size of District and Economies of Scale

2. How might district consolidation save Osborn dollars to enhance student programs and teachers’ salaries?

Regarding economies of scale—literature supports the idea that very small school districts face relatively high per-pupil costs, often created by the required minimum level of

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

education inputs. Increased economies of scale can favorably affect the per-pupil cost of administration, building maintenance, support programs and purchasing of equipment and supplies.

- Some authors conclude that for certain sized schools and districts; there is evidence of economies of scale. Imerman and Otto (2003) studied district expenditures with respect to district size in Iowa. They report “**expenditures per student generally rise as district sizes fall below about 750 students and expenditures per student are relatively constant at enrollment levels above 1,000 students.**”
- Cox (2002) reports when examining Utah’s administrative cost per pupil, **showed little difference between large and small districts unless the enrollment dropped below 1,000 students; below 1,000 students, administrative costs rise.**
- The Center for Policy Research, Syracuse University (Feb. 1994) addressed the issue of consolidation or reorganization of school districts due to the perception that there are significant cost savings from consolidation of small school districts due to economies of scale. They find “**little consistent evidence on whether school district consolidation saves money while maintaining educational quality.**” The results of their analysis indicate **potentially sizeable cost savings from consolidation of small school districts--those with fewer than 500 pupils and relatively small diseconomies of scale even for the largest districts in the sample (50,000 pupils.)** They go on to state, “our findings suggest that **states interested in studying possible reorganization of school districts for efficiency reasons, should focus their attention on districts with 500 or fewer pupils.**”

Duncombe and Yinger (2001) studied New York’s extensive consolidation efforts from 1985-1997 to determine whether or not consolidation cut costs. They indicate that central administration has to exist whether or not the district has 100 or 5,000 students and this central administration may be able to serve a significant range of enrollments; therefore, increasing student enrollment by consolidation will result in an output at a lower average cost. Holding student performance constant, however, they found “**evidence that district consolidation (using New York state districts) substantially lowers operating costs. Larger districts are able to negotiate bulk purchases of supplies and equipment or by using their monopsony power to impose lower wages on their employees to lower their operating costs.**” Williams (1990) reports that **large districts can gain economies of scale in busing and purchasing power and can attract more grant money.**

While there is research that supports the notion of economies of scale, there is also an abundance of literature that discredits the notion.

- A Nevada Policy Research Institute Analysis (2004) – *Does School District Size Matter?* Found that “**School district size does matter, and students, teachers, parents and taxpayers all do better in smaller school districts with smaller schools.**” It seems clear that large school districts arose in an era dominated by large-scale manufacturing and their resulting efficiencies. Most people believed

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

that economies of scale would exist in large school districts, making for more efficient delivery of educational services. As a result, consolidation of small school districts has been one of the most dramatic changes in public education during the last century. We began with 150,000 school districts in the US—there are now less than 15,000.

The study referred to statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics website that supports the fact that, **“as the size of the district increases, the percentage of budget spent on teachers, books and materials actually tends to decline.”**

- Even though Duncombe and Yinger, (2001) report economies of scale in consolidating small districts, they also express that **“despite widespread consolidations of school districts in the United States, there exists little direct evidence on how consolidation actually affects school districts in the medium or long run.”**
- Williams (1990) discussed the term **“diseconomies of scale”** that he defines as **the act of ignoring the additional capital expenditures, salaries and operating costs associated with greatly increased transportation required by consolidation.**
- Webb and Ohm (as cited in Cox, 2002) **found smaller districts are “more efficient than larger ones in both dollars per student and number of administrators per student”**
- Antonucci (as cited in Cox, 2002) found there are **“penalties of scale.”** Instead of making up a larger percent of the budget **as school district size increase, the percentage spent on teachers, books and teaching materials decreases. “Paradoxically, the larger a student district gets, the more resources it devotes to secondary or even non-essential activities.”**

Antonucci also writes, “And let’s not forget the labor implications. Which district is more likely to have difficult contract negotiations or work stoppages? The district with 15 bus drivers or the one with 677 bus drivers?”

- “Despite substantial literature on economies of scale in education, there is **little consistent evidence on whether school district consolidation saves money, while maintaining educational quality.**” (Duncombe, Miner & Ruggiero, 1994)
- Other researchers conclude that “Accumulated evidence points to the clear conclusion that, **except for consolidations of very small districts, there are no economies of scale to local education**” (Walberg & Fowler; as cited in Galles & Sexton, 1995)
- Looking at the broader scope of things and not just on economics, Lawrence et al. (2002) report that there are **several other subtle costs that discredit the economies of scale cost savings ideals.** The **other costs of larger schools and districts are lower graduation rates, higher dropout rates, high rates of violence and vandalism, higher absenteeism and lower teacher satisfaction.**

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

- Walberg and Fowler (1986) report that **“it appears that the smaller the district, the higher the achievement when the socioeconomic status and per-student expenditures are taken into account because the superintendent and central staff awareness of citizen and parent preferences, the absence of bureaucratic layers and administrative complexity, teacher involvement in decision making, and close home-school relations.”** These may account for the efficiency of small districts. Overall, research indicated that **school district consolidation and reorganization should not be founded on only opportunities to reduce costs.**
- The Goldwater Institute Policy Report (2004) states **“economists find little evidence that economies of scale improve school district efficiency and empirical consolidation research indicates smaller, decentralized school districts are significantly more efficient than larger, centralized districts. Likewise, in Arizona, data show that small and medium districts consistently spend as much as or less on administration than the state’s largest districts.”**

There is no universal consensus on what constitutes a large school district or a small school district, nor universal agreement on the ideal size for schools or districts. Florence Webb, in a 1971 Education Research Service study of 26 reports completed between 1939-1969, stated the most common recommendation for district size was 10,000 students (as cited in Cox, 2002).

- More recent research indicates that 4,000-5,000 students in a district is a reasonable threshold (Lawrence et al., 2002).
- Duncombe & Yinger, (2000) suggest that the optimal district enrollment is approximately 6,000.
- Augenblick & Myers (2001) reported that researchers and practitioners believe that to offer an appropriate curriculum, extra-curricular activities and a safe/nurturing environment, a district should enroll at least 260, but no more than 2,925 students.
- Literature suggests a workable definition of a small district as between 400-600 students and diseconomies of size begin to occur as district size exceeds 6,000 students. (Vicki Murray 2004 and Louisiana Dept of Education 2003).

A “brief” Review of Literature on Alternatives to Consolidation

We completed a cursory review of literature related to alternatives to consolidation—specifically things a school district can do to, as a Deloitte Research study, *Driving More Money into the Classroom: The Promise of Shared Service* states, “educate students like a small district and still have the economies of scale and buying power of a large district.”

- The Deloitte study reports that consolidation can “have some serious downsides: it is politically unpopular, reduces local control, can negatively impact educational outcomes and eventually can lead to even higher costs due to the dead-weight of bureaucracy. In short, **consolidation may not be the most effective strategy to help districts direct more money into the classroom.” Their answer is shared**

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

services, a technique that has been employed in both the private and public sectors for many years and is apparently growing rapidly due to its proven ability to reduce costs.

The study further indicates that **shared services can “yield very real operational efficiencies** around facilities, transportation, food service, real estate management, procurement, human resources, information technology, security and even instruction.” They divide shared service opportunities into two general areas: 1) Direct services to students and 2) indirect services to staff or infrastructure. **Two of the seven major benefits of sharing services include saving money and gaining economies of scale.**

- As early as 1988, Rincones explored alternatives to district consolidation and found that “shared services such as personnel, programs, equipment, instructional materials, teachers, ancillary services, transportation, staff development, counseling services, special education and vocational education allows school districts to remain separate, while gaining additional curricular programs of higher quality. These alternatives build on strengths of smaller districts, do not rely on reconfiguration, but are focused on sharing or contracting services in efforts to reduce costs while bringing needed services to students thus allowing states to retain existing smaller schools and districts.”

Summary

The evidence is compelling—**consolidation is detrimental to student achievement and does not save dollars except for very small districts.** As a result, we in the Osborn School District not only have serious concerns about the recommendations that are being made for consolidation and its effect on student achievement, we have serious concerns for the process used as well. Given that the literature clearly states that consolidation is a detriment to student achievement, particularly for students in poverty, and raises serious questions about the size of the district before diseconomies of scale occur, **we strongly urge the Commission to reconsider its recommendations.** The legislative guidelines clearly allow for the Commission to enlarge, diminish or **make no changes in common school districts** around the state. Research supports the latter option except for very small districts. The Osborn School District is dedicated to continuing to improve student achievement. This requires our full attention and intentional focus. **Spending time and tax dollars responding to recommendations that have no basis in research will seriously impact our ability to focus on student achievement—our top priority.**

David Cox, in focusing on problems in Utah, summarized his study by stating, “Big districts and schools, which promised better education for less money, have not delivered on their promise and may in fact provide worse education for more money... Utah’s smaller districts seem to perform better than their larger counterparts, not because teachers and principals in big districts don’t care or don’t try, but because the bureaucracy, which a large district must have for control, ties their hands.” His comments speak volumes to our situation in Arizona.

Cox adds, “School administrators cannot afford to ignore this problem, not only because providing quality education is their chief responsibility, but because if they don’t deal with

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

the problem, the public will find ways to deal with it for them. Bigness alienates citizens toward our educational institutions, depleting local support.”

A report conducted by The Rural School and Community Trust (2003) on school district consolidation in Arkansas, summarized their findings by making several key statements that again have implications for Arizona: “It is a shame that Arkansas is wasting a lot of time and energy in so acrimonious debate on school consolidation. **Time would be better spent taking the obvious first steps needed to improve schools of all sizes in Arkansas.**”

The report continues, “The consolidation debate is wasteful because there simply is **little if anything to be gained—financially or academically—by consolidation.** “.....moreover, a consolidation strategy flies in the face of scientific research that shows children from impoverished communities do their best in small schools and small districts. **The shortest and best pathway to school improvement is to improve small schools operating in small districts in the poorest communities in the state. The current challenge is to get past the debate over school consolidation and get to things that matter.**”

Finally, we ask the Commission to consider one of the key messages from the *Beat the Odds* study that states: “ **‘Fixing’ the school doesn’t usually come from ‘out there’—not from the almost daily onslaught of flavor-of-the-month education reform programs or from the changes imposed from the outside by the school district, the state legislature, or from the Federal government.** We do need to fix disparities and systemic problems at the policy level, but much of **what it takes is actually in the hands of the people within the schools.**”

We believe that the same can be said for “fixing” the school district. Meaningful, long lasting change must come from within. We in the Osborn School District, along with our colleagues in districts around the state, are attempting to do just that.

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

REFERENCES

Abbott, Martin, et al., "The Influences of District Size, School Size and Socioeconomic Status on Student Achievement in Washington: A Replication Study Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling." *Washington School Research Center. Technical Report #3*, November 2002.

Antonucci, Michael, "Mission Creep: How Large School Districts Lose Sight of the Objective: Student Learning," in *Alexis de Tocqueville Institution Issue Brief No 176*, 1999.

Augenblick, John, Myers, John, & Silverstein, Justin. "A Comprehensive Study on the Organization of Kansas School Districts." *Prepared for the Kansas State Board of Education in response to RFP Number 00241*. Augenblick & Myers, Inc., January 10, 2001.

Cox, David. "Focus on Utah: Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Rethinking Super-Size Districts and Schools", *Sutherland Institute*, Jan. 2002.

Cox, David. "Smaller Districts." www.smallersch.com

Duncombe and Yinger, "Does School District Consolidation Cut Cost?" *Center for Policy Research, working Paper No. 33*. Syracuse, University, January 2001.

Duncombe, William, Miner, Jerry; Rubbiero, John. "Potential Cost Savings From School District Consolidation: A Case study of New York", *Center for Policy Research, Syracuse University*, February 1994.

Eggers, William; Wavra, Robert; Snell, Lisa and Moore, Adrian. "Driving More Money into the Classroom: The Promise of Shared Services." *Deloitte Research*. 2005.

Galles, Gary & Sexton, Robert. "Diseconomies of School District Size." *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, 20 (2), 241-245. (1995.)

Howley, Craig and Bickel, Robert. "The Influence of Scale on School Performance: A Multi-Level Extension of the Matthew Principle" *Education Policy Archives*, Volume 8, Number 22. May 10, 2000.

Howley, Craig and Bickel, Robert. "Results of Four-State Study: Smaller Schools Reduce Harmful Impact of Poverty on Student Achievement," March 2002.

Howley, Craig and Bickel, Robert, "The Matthew Project: National Report, August 25, 1999. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 433 174)

Imerman, Mark and Otto, Dan. "A Preliminary Investigation of School District Expenditures with Respect to School District Size in Iowa." *Department of Economics Iowa State University*, January 24, 2003.

Johnson, Jerry; Howley, Craig and Howley, Aimee, "Size, Excellence and Equity: A Report on Arkansas Schools and Districts." *Educational Studies Department, College of Education, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio*, February 15, 2002.

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

Johnson, Jerry, Howley, Craig, Howley, Aimee. "Small Works in Arkansas: How Poverty and the Size of Schools and School Districts Affect School Performance in Arkansas." Athens, OH: *Ohio University, College of Education Educational Studies Department, Rural School and Community Trust* web site. March 2002.

Lawrence, Barbara K, Bingler, Steven, Diamond, Barbara M., Hill, Bobbie, Hoffman, Jerry L. Howley, Craig B., Mitchell, Stacy; Rudolph, David, & Washor, Elliot. (September, 2002). "Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools". [From The *Rural School and Community Trust Web site*: <http://www.ruraledu.org>

Murray, Vicki and Groen, Ross. "Competition or Consolidation? The School District consolidation Debate Revisited" *Policy Report Goldwater Institute*, No. 189, January 12, 2004

Rincones, Rodolfo; Schmidt, Robert and Schlottmann, Alan. "Does School District Size Matter" in *Nevada Policy Research Institute Analysis*. 2005

Rural School Consolidation Report, NREA Consolidation Task Force, National Rural Education Association. April 2001.

Payne, Ruby. "A Framework for Understanding Poverty." RFT Publishing, 1998.

"School District Consolidation in Arkansas. <http://www.ruraledu.org>

Schmidt, Robert and Schlottmann, Alan. "Does School District size Matter? *Nevada Policy Research Institute Analysis*, 2004.

"Small School Districts and Economies of Scale", *Louisiana Department of Education*, Presented to the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education at the May 2003 strategic Planning Study Group Committee.

Waits, Marybeth, "Beat the Odds—Why Some Schools with Latino Children Beat the Odds and Others Don't"; *Center for the Future of Arizona and Morrison Institute*, 2006.

Walberg, H., & Fowler, W. (1987). "Expenditure and Size Efficiencies of Public School Districts." *Educational Researcher*, 16(7), 5-13.

Webb, Florence, "A District of a Certain Size," *Education and Urban Society* (1989) 127-128.

Williams, Davant. (1990, December). *The Dimensions of Education: Recent Research on School Size: Strom Thurmond Institute, December 1990.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Andrews, Mathew; Duncombe, William and Yinger, John. "Revisiting Economies of Size in American Education." *Economics of Education Review*, vol. 21, no 3 (March 2002)

OSBORN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 8

Bailey, J. "The Case for Small Schools." Walthill, NE: *Center for Rural Affairs*, January, 2000.

Berry, Christopher. "School District Consolidation and Student Outcomes: Does Size Matter? Prepared for the conference, "School Board Politics" Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Oct. 25-17, 2003.

Cotton, Kathleen. "School Size, School Climate and Student Performance. *School Improvement Research Series*. Northwest Regional Laboratory: #20, May 1996.

Ehrenhalt, Alan. "The Consolidation Divide." *Governing: The Magazine of States and Localities*, 16 (6), 6-8. March, 2003.

Howley, C. 1996. "The Academic Effectiveness of Small-Scale Schooling (An Update)," *Eric Digest* EDO-RC-94-1.

Howley, C. 1996. "Compounding Disadvantage: The Effects of School and District Size on Student Achievement in West Virginia." *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 12 (1), 25-32.

Howley, Craig; Bickel. Robert. "The Matthew Project: National Report." Ohio State University. 1999.

Viadero, Debra. " Research: Smaller is Better." *Education Week* from www.edweek.org, November 28, 2001.

Walberg, Herbert. "District Size and Student Learning," *Education and Urban Society* (1989) 128.