

SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

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SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Two important events have shaped the governance of public education in South Carolina. One was the national school and school district consolidation movement that affected South Carolina in the 1950s, reducing the number of districts from more than 1,200 to less than 100, with 85 in existence today. The other event was the series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions that led to the partial abandonment of the uniquely South Carolina practice of “delegation government”—governing counties and school districts through local legislation passed by the General Assembly at the initiative of the county delegation.
- Although counties have acquired a substantial degree of home rule, school districts remain largely under the control of the county delegation in terms of their governing structure—the size and composition of the school board and the number and configuration of districts within each county.
- All children in South Carolina must be enrolled in a regular public school, a charter school, a private school, or a registered home schooling program. In 2008-09, 1,080 public schools (including charter schools) served 691,371 students in preK through 12th grade. Adult education added another 59,663 students. An estimated 50,000 children attended private schools, and an estimated 6,000-12,000 were home-schooled.
- At the state level, governance is the responsibility of the State Department of Education, led by an elected Superintendent of Education. A state Board of Education is responsible for establishing minimum standards for schools, prescribing and enforcing rules for certifying teachers, prescribing the courses of study for public schools and adopting textbooks and other instructional materials to be used in public schools. The board’s 17 members are elected by the legislative delegations in the judicial circuits, with one member at large appointed by the governor.
- The State Department of Education has both academic and fiscal responsibilities. The Superintendent of Education has general supervision and management of all public school funds provided by the state and federal government.
- The General Assembly provides a significant share of the funding and a fair amount of direction about how it may be used. The General Assembly also sets the parameters for the use of the property tax as the primary local funding source for school districts. Finally, the General Assembly has a significant impact on the structure and governance of school districts through local legislation.
- Like most states, South Carolina carries out its constitutionally mandated obligation for providing public education through local school boards and school districts. There are 85 school districts in South Carolina. Twenty-nine districts serve the students of a single

county, while the remaining 56 districts serve part of a county, with a few crossing county lines.

- School district boards range in size from five to twelve members. The number of members as well as the method of selection (single-member seats or at-large, appointed or elected) is set by the local legislation enacted for each district/county. Most board members in South Carolina are elected, but Clarendon 2 and 3, Dillon 1, 2, and 3, and Marion 1, 2, and 7, they are appointed. Clarendon 1 elects 5 members at-large while the other four are appointed
- Boards of trustees provide school buildings, employ teachers and set their salaries, set scholastic standards and standards of conduct, and establish the calendar. While all boards have these responsibilities, the fiscal authority varies greatly from district to district. Twenty three districts have fiscal autonomy, approving their own budgets and setting their own mill rates. Twenty six districts have no fiscal authority.
- Originally, every county in South Carolina had a county board of education, but once 29 of the 46 counties had consolidated their school systems into a single countywide district, the coordination issue was important only in the remaining 17 counties. Only four county boards remain— Anderson, Marion, Clarendon, and Dillon— although Orangeburg County has had a coordinating entity called a commission since its county board was dissolved in 2005.
- Some single district counties, including Aiken, Charleston and Chesterfield, have geographic divisions within the county that have some of the characteristics of districts, but their boards have limited responsibilities and no budgetary authority. A few multidistrict counties without county boards have some form of coordination or resource sharing among school districts within the county.
- There have been only three school district consolidations in the past 20 years, in Dorchester (1987), Marion (2001) and Orangeburg (1997). Local legislation passed in 2008 called for a consolidation of Sumter's two school districts to be completed July 1, 2011.
- There is little relationship between the size of the county and the number of districts. Marion County has consolidated from four to three districts with a total enrollment of 5,651 in all three districts. Dillon County's three school districts have a combined enrollment of only 5,781. Lexington's five districts contain 50,400 students, while Richland's two districts have 45,683 students.
- The average district in South Carolina enrolled 7,992 students in 2006-07, more than twice the national average of 3,151. However, the average is inflated by the presence of four very large single-district counties. The median South Carolina school district had 4,616 pupils in 2006-07.
- There are four factors that determine the optimal or desirable size of school districts. They are cost (minimum average cost per student), effect of size on student performance, equalization of fiscal resources, and (in changing district lines), respecting history, geography, and the integrity of the affected community or communities.
- According to a number of national studies, optimal size for purposes of cost minimization ranges from 3,000 to 6,000 students. Diseconomies of scale (rising costs associated with bureaucracy) appear to set in past a student enrollment of 15,000.

- Density of student population is also an important cost factor. Small rural districts do not often see large cost savings when they are consolidated, because the scattered student population is not only more costly (per pupil) to transport, but also results in smaller schools and smaller classes so that students do not have to travel long distances to larger, consolidated schools.
- Miley (2003) observed that “the appropriate-sized district in a fiscal efficiency sense may not be the most appropriate for promoting student performance.” Smaller schools seem to improve student performance, especially for low income and minority students. There are some potential student benefits from consolidation in the areas of specialization and innovation. Specialization can result from greater resource-sharing within the district in services such as special education, vocational education, and advanced placement. Learning and innovation may be less costly or easier to provide in a larger district because teachers have more colleagues from whom to learn and the costs of innovation can be spread over more participating students. However, states with many small districts have turned to service sharing as an alternative way to provide access to specialized resources that do not require consolidation.
- Local tax resources are another consideration in district size. Smaller districts are more vulnerable to changing economic conditions that affect their tax base. Larger districts that encompass more economic diversity are more likely to have larger and more stable tax bases.
- Within multidistrict counties, redrawing district lines is one of several options for equalizing educational opportunities. In these 17 counties, there are wide disparities not only in size but also in taxable resources and operating revenue per pupil among the districts in the county. Several multi-district counties practice some form of tax base sharing as a form of resource equalization.
- It is also possible to equalize resources and opportunities by combining districts across county lines. The size of school districts can be changed by consolidation (combining one or more districts) or redistricting (redrawing district lines). Existing legislation only provides for consolidation. The power to make structural changes such as the makeup of the school board or consolidation was vested in either the legislative delegation or, in a few counties, with the county board of education. With the abolition of most county boards of education, the legislative method has become the common method of making changes in either district lines or the composition of school.
- A less frequently used method allows the county board (where one exists) to make such a change under one of three conditions. In general, county boards can alter district boundaries with either written approval from all of the county’s legislative delegation, or written petition signed by at least 80 percent of the qualified electors in each affected school district, or written petition by at least one-third of the qualified electors in each affected school district, followed by a referendum in which the proposed change receives a majority vote in every affected district.
- One alternative to consolidation is service-sharing. Service sharing does equalize resources directly, but it can help to reduce costs and provide access to specialized academic resources. Service sharing has been a popular choice for serving small districts from New York to Georgia, sometimes with a separate entity contracting with multiple

school districts to provide specialized services ranging from special and vocational education to professional development to accounting to grounds maintenance.

- South Carolina can draw on the experience of other states which have explored both consolidation and service sharing. In 2007, the nation had a total of 14,561 school districts, of which 13,951 were independent entities while the remaining 1,510 depended on another local government (city, county or township) for funding. The number of districts has diminished considerably in the last fifty-plus years. In 1948, there were 94,926 school districts. State legislatures have taken the lead in consolidating school districts in most states.
- Five states have primarily dependent school systems that look to the county or municipalities for revenue, including three southern states—North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. A mixture of independent and dependent school districts is the pattern in New England as well as Michigan and California. Most other states have primarily or exclusively independent school districts, as does South Carolina. However, the degree of independence from state control over structure and finances varies greatly from state to state.
- Forty-nine states have some intermediate unit of school administration between the state and the district. In some cases, that intermediate unit reflects the county lines, similar to the Boards of Education created in South Carolina in the 1950s (most of which were subsequently dissolved). In other cases, a board of comprehensive educational services (as in New York, New Jersey, and Georgia) provides various kinds of services to districts on a contract basis. In states where there is no intermediate unit, the school districts are often coterminous with the county.
- The primary purpose of these intermediate units is to provide services to very small districts as an alternative to consolidation, although in some cases they can also work to equalize educational resources within the service area, usually a county.
- Prior to 1974, South Carolina was unique in giving a major voice in local affairs (both county and school) to the legislative delegation. The continuing role of the county delegation in matters of school governance has generated several court tests, which have upheld the practice.
- Another unresolved issue is the challenge of coordination in multi-district counties. Each of the seventeen counties with multiple school districts handles the issue differently, but only a handful of them have an actual coordination agency that has any fiscal authority. This absence of coordination has led to neglect of schools and students in declining areas of prosperous counties. Four multi-district counties—Anderson, Greenwood, Laurens, and Spartanburg—have some limited equalization efforts among their districts to provide more financial resources to their poorer school districts.
- The national experience with shared services that have reduced costs and broadened the resources available to students and schools in small districts has not made much impact on South Carolina. A relatively modest financial investment in service sharing could result in some of the benefits of consolidation or redistricting without the upheaval and resistance and also broaden the array of choices facing students and schools in curriculum, professional development, distance education, and other possibilities.

- The fundamental question is the appropriate division of responsibility and authority between the state and local officials. The state has much of the power over both fiscal and structural issues, exercised through the legislative delegation and the easily-won consent of their fellow legislators. Much less power is vested in local school boards, who are accountable to local citizens, firms and taxpayers who provide 40% of the operating funds and most of the funds for school construction.
- It is possible to share the control of school districts between the state and local levels in many ways, including the restoration of county boards, the delegation of powers, and the use of referenda in deciding questions of organization and governance such as the makeup of district boards and the redrawing of district lines.

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SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

INTRODUCTION

The governance structure of South Carolina public schools has evolved over the last six decades as a result of two significant events. One event was the extensive consolidation of school districts, in line with national trends toward combining small districts—some with just a single school—into fewer, larger school districts. The number of school districts in South Carolina fell dramatically in the 1950s, from more than 1,200 in 1950 to 108 in 1960, gradually shrinking further through consolidation to the present 85.¹

In many areas of the country, not only districts but also individual schools were consolidated. As a largely rural state, it was difficult for South Carolina to consolidate many schools into a smaller number of larger schools. Many students were scattered across low-density rural areas, and both the time and cost of transporting them to a central location made consolidation of schools in those areas impractical.

The second event affecting school governance in South Carolina was a series of court decisions and resulting legislation that changed the face of local governments. In the 1970s, under the impact of federal court cases about equal representation, South Carolina was forced to abandon the legislative control of counties. Prior to the Home Rule Act of 1975, both counties and school districts were governed by each county's legislative delegation (the senator and representatives elected from that county).

After the court-mandated redrawing of legislative districts to provide equal numbers of constituents for each senator or representative, the newly redrawn House and Senate districts straddled county lines. There were few, if any, counties with a fully resident county delegation to approve the budget, make appointments, and generally manage county and school district government from Columbia. Counties became largely self-governing. Citizens chose from one of several forms of government. County councils were elected and began setting their own mill rates, approving their own budgets, and hiring their own employees, although the county delegation still retains some powers of appointment.

School districts, however, despite their elected boards, are still subject to the authority of the county delegation not only in fiscal matters but also in structural matters—the size of the school board, the method of election or appointment, whether members are chosen by single member area or at large, and whether or not to split, consolidate, or realign school districts within a particular county. While cities and counties were allowed to select their form of

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, South Carolina school district statistics are from South Carolina Department of Education publications located at: <http://ed.sc.gov/>.

government by referendum, and cities can (to a limited degree) change their size through annexation, school districts have no such powers to initiate or carry out any structural changes.

This paper examines the structure and governance of public education in South Carolina at both the state and local levels. We are particularly concerned with the local dimensions: the number and sizes of districts, the size and composition of school boards, and the methods by which either or both can be changed. We also consider the implications of this structure for the ability of school districts to provide an adequate education to all their pupils and to do so in a flexible but accountable manner that reflects and respects the different needs, backgrounds, challenges and opportunities of their student populations.

An understanding of the history and structure of the state's school governance structure and the implications of that structure for local control, accountability, and flexibility should provide useful background for any future discussions of such controversial issues as district consolidation, fiscal autonomy of school districts, selection of school district boards, coordination of districts in multi-district counties, and the meaning of home rule for school district boards as independently elected public officials.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina offers a public educational system that provides instruction for all children starting with kindergarten through 12th grade. There is also some limited public four-year-old kindergarten as well as adult education for those who have not completed a high school diploma. All of these programs are under the jurisdiction of the school superintendents and school boards in the state's 85 school districts. In addition, students may attend private schools or be home-schooled. A limited number of districts offer the opportunity to attend a charter school, which is accountable to but not directly supervised by the district board of trustees.

Public Schools

In 2008-09, 1,080 public schools served 691,371 students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. Adult education added another 59,663 students. In addition to the public schools in the state's 85 school districts, the state also operates five special schools: the Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School in West Columbia, the John de la Howe School in McCormick, the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind in Spartanburg, the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Felton Laboratory School in Orangeburg. South Carolina public schools are projected to serve over 730,000 students by 2013-14.²

Charter Schools

According to the South Carolina Public Charter School District (SCPCSD), a charter school is

² Sievers, Sylvia J. et al., "Membership Projections Report 2008 through 2014 for South Carolina Schools," South Carolina Department of Education, May 2009, <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Data-Management-and-Analysis/old/research/documents/MEMBERSHIP.PROJECTIONS.REPORT.2008-2014.pdf>.

... [a] mission-driven, de-regulated, independent public school of choice, the most accountable form of public education. Charter Schools are tuition-free public schools that operate in South Carolina on a ten-year contract called a "charter". Charter Schools provide educators with flexibility to operate different types of public schools that focus on specific missions ... performing arts, technology, Montessori, construction trades, college prep, international baccalaureate (IB), alternative education, project-based learning, cyber learning, and dual language instruction are a few examples of the wide range of missions that the more than 4,000 operating charter schools in the country have... charter school operators and teachers have the opportunity to be much more flexible in their approach to teaching and learning in a Charter Public School.³

Charter Schools in South Carolina are authorized by either a public school district or the SCPCSD. The charter spells out the accountability standards that will be used in the oversight of the school. Within those accountability standards, there is considerable freedom at the school level in choosing curriculum and staff, setting the hours of operation and the school calendar, and determining the goals and standards of student behavior.⁴

School districts do not directly supervise the charter school's operation. The charter document holds the nonprofit board of directors responsible for meeting the proposed outcomes in the application, but they have flexibility in selecting the means to those ends. It is only when an issue warranting investigation becomes known to the charter authorizer that its involvement as active overseer is necessitated. Certain serious errors (e.g., fiscal mismanagement) do demand that an authorizer take action against the charter school. This accountability to the district is a necessary check on the high degree of autonomy given to charter schools.

Private Schools

In spring 2009, a survey of private schools in South Carolina received responses from 305 schools throughout the state, preschools excluded. About 46,500 children and youth attended these schools, with 62 percent of enrollment in kindergarten through grade eight, and the remainder in grades eight through twelve.⁵ Private school students receive no direct state aid, but efforts have been underway in recent years to either provide tax breaks for parents of these children or divert a portion of property tax revenue to support students in private schools.

Home Schooling

Parents in South Carolina may teach their children at home if the instruction is approved by their district school board. The district board must grant permission if the parent has at least a high school diploma or GED or an earned bachelor's degree, the school day is at least 4.5

³ South Carolina Public Charter School District, "What is a Charter School?" <http://www.sccharter.com/what.asp>.

⁴ South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Public School Choice, "Honoring the Charter School Contract: Guidance for South Carolina School Districts," May 2009, <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Innovation-and-Support/Public-School-Choice/CharterSchools/documents/HonoringtheContractFINAL.doc>.

⁵ South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Data Management and Analysis, "South Carolina Private Schools, 2008-09," <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Data-Management-and-Analysis/old/research/EnrollmentReports.html>.

hours and the school year at least 180 days, and the curriculum includes the required subjects of reading, writing, math, science, social studies, and in grades 7-12, composition and literature. Parents must maintain records of instruction—lesson plans, portfolios, and academic evaluations. Home schooled students must participate in the statewide testing program.

Alternatively, parents may become members of the South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools and teach under their auspices, as long as they meet the educational requirements for parents, the instructional year, and the required curriculum. Individual students may be registered with the district board, or students may be registered through one of the 33 home schooling associations that report to district boards.

School districts are not required to provide home schooled students with instructional textbooks and materials or allow home-schooled students to participate in such public school courses as physical education, orchestra, or band, but may do so if space is available and may choose to charge a fee. In general, home-schooled students are not eligible for team sports and athletics under South Carolina High School League rules.⁶

No recent statistics are available on the number of children that are home-schooled in South Carolina. Based on national survey data from 2007 of two to three percent of all school-aged children, the number may be 20,000 or more.⁷

PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA:THE STATE LEVEL

Public schools in South Carolina (preK-12) as well as adult education (GED and related programs) are accountable to three sets of authorities: the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education, the South Carolina General Assembly, and their (mostly) elected 85 school district boards. Although each authority has a clearly defined role, there is some overlap in their areas of responsibility.

The State Board of Education and the State Department of Education

The State Board of Education deals primarily with academic matters. The board is responsible for establishing minimum standards for schools, prescribing and enforcing rules for certifying teachers, prescribing the courses of study for public schools and adopting textbooks and other instructional materials to be used in public schools. The board consists of 17 members, one from each of the state's judicial circuits, elected by the legislative delegations within the respective circuits, and one member at large appointed by the governor. All members serve four-year terms or until their successors are elected.

⁶ South Carolina Department of Education, Division of Accountability, "Home Schooling," <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Accountability/Federal-and-State-Accountability/Accreditation/HomeSchooling.html>.

⁷ U.S., Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, "1.5 Million Homeschooled Students in the United States in 2007," *IES Issue Brief*, December 2008, (NCES 2009-030), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2009/2009030.pdf>.

The State Department of Education has both academic and fiscal responsibilities. The Department is headed by the State Superintendent of Education, who is elected statewide in the general election. He or she serves as the secretary and administrative officer for the State Board of Education. The State Superintendent of Education has general supervision and management of all public school funds provided by the state and federal government, and is responsible for organizing, staffing and administering the State Department of Education.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly provides a significant share of the funding and a fair amount of direction about how it may be used. The General Assembly also sets the parameters for the use of the property tax as the primary local funding source for school districts. Finally, the General Assembly has a significant impact on the structure and governance of school districts through local legislation, which is discussed in a later section.

PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA: THE LOCAL LEVEL

Like most states, South Carolina carries out its constitutionally mandated obligation for providing public education through local school boards and school districts. There are 85 school districts in South Carolina. Twenty-nine districts serve the students of a single county, while the remaining 56 districts serve part of a county, with a few crossing county lines.

School Boards

The 85 school district boards of trustees in South Carolina range in size from five to twelve members. Forty-one boards have seven members, 24 have nine, and 15 have five members. Larger school districts tend to have larger boards. The state does not set a minimum or maximum number of board members. The number of board members is set by the local legislation that was enacted for each district/county, as is their method of selection.

Most school board members in South Carolina are elected, mostly in nonpartisan elections and mostly for four-year terms. All board members are appointed in Clarendon 2 and 3, Dillon 1, 2, and 3, and Marion 1, 2, and 7. (In Marion County, the County Board of Education is elected and in turn appoints the district boards.) Clarendon 1 elects 5 members at-large while the other four are appointed. Forty-eight school districts elect all board members at large, while 17 elect them from designated single-member areas. Fifteen districts elect their board members with a mixture of at-large and single-member areas, although the School District of Pickens County's at-large seats are being phased out.⁸

Members from single areas bring a particular perspective and represent a clearly defined constituency. However, these board members are not elected by all the voters in the school district, just those in their particular area, so each voter gets to vote for only one school board

⁸ South Carolina School Boards Association, "Board Member Elections and Meetings," May 2009, <http://www.scsba.org/acrobat/forthemedia/bdmemberselection.pdf>.

member. At-large members are accountable to a wider constituency and give voters a chance to pick the entire board, not just one member. At-large members are particularly valuable in larger school districts because shifts in population between censuses mean that growing areas are increasingly underrepresented in a system with single area members.

According to state law, the responsibilities of boards of trustees include to provide school buildings, employ teachers and set their salaries, set scholastic standards and standards of conduct, and establish the calendar.⁹ While all boards have these responsibilities, the fiscal authority varies greatly from district to district.

Twenty-three districts have fiscal autonomy, approving their own budgets and setting their own mill rates. Twenty six districts have no fiscal authority. Of those, twenty must submit their budget to county council for approval, while three have a town meeting to approve the budget (Florence 2, 3 and 5) and the three Dillon County districts have their budget and millage approved by the legislative delegation. The remaining 33 districts have limited fiscal authority. They develop and approve their own budgets but are subject to a variety of restrictions on their ability to raise the mill rate.¹⁰

Coordination in Multi-District Counties

Originally, every county in South Carolina had a county board of education, but once 29 of the 46 counties had consolidated their school systems into a single countywide district, the coordination issue was important only in the remaining 17 counties. Only four county boards remain— Anderson, Marion, Clarendon, and Dillon— although Orangeburg County has had a coordinating entity called a commission since its county board was dissolved in 2005. In Clarendon and Dillon and Marion Counties, the county board appoints the school district boards: three in Dillon, two in Clarendon, and three in Marion. Anderson and Marion Counties are the only counties with elected county boards of education. The county legislative delegation appoints county board members in Clarendon and Dillon Counties.

Some single district counties have geographic divisions within the county that have some of the characteristics of districts. Aiken County has five administrative areas with appointed advisory councils. Charleston County has eight elected constituent boards serving distinct geographic areas, and Chesterfield County has six elected advisory councils. These advisory boards and councils have limited responsibilities and no budgetary authority.¹¹

Even without a county board, there is often some coordination or resource sharing among school districts within a county. Laurens County's two districts have a tax sharing arrangement that attempts to equalize per pupil resources between the two districts. Spartanburg County, with seven school districts, no longer has a county board but does some limited tax sharing among its seven districts.

⁹ South Carolina General Assembly, Code of Laws, Sections 59-19-10 to 59-19-580, <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c019.htm>.

¹⁰ South Carolina School Boards Association, "Fiscal Authority," May 2009. <http://www.scsba.org/acrobat/forthemedia/fiscalauthority.pdf>.

¹¹ South Carolina School Boards Association, "Board Member Elections and Meetings," May 2009, <http://www.scsba.org/acrobat/forthemedia/bdmemberselection.pdf>.

School Districts

According to Campbell et. al,

A school district is the basic governmental unit through which the exercise of local control of schools is effected. It is a unit of government, possessing quasi-corporate powers, created and empowered by state law to administer a public school or a public school system. A school district is controlled by a governing board; it has taxing power, the right to make contracts, and the right to sue or be sued.¹²

South Carolina's school districts fall under this definition.

South Carolina currently has 85 public school districts. Twenty-nine of the state's 46 counties have a single school district. The 17 multidistrict counties in South Carolina contain from two to seven districts with an average of three to four districts per county. Seven counties have only two districts. Spartanburg County has the largest number of districts with seven, followed by Anderson, Lexington, and Florence with five each.

Most of these districts have had the same boundaries for decades. There have been only three school district consolidations in the past 20 years, in Dorchester (1987), Marion (2001) and Orangeburg (1997). Local legislation passed in 2008 called for a consolidation of Sumter's two school districts to be completed July 1, 2011.¹³ This legislation was passed and signed by the governor despite reports of polls showing a large majority of the county's residents opposed.

Consolidation discussions are ongoing in several other counties, including Spartanburg and Anderson. State Representative Ralph Davenport drafted legislation in 2008 to reduce the number of Spartanburg County school districts from seven to four.¹⁴ The Anderson County Board of Education examined options for its five districts that might include realigning districts to make them fewer in number and more equal in size and tax bases.¹⁵

School District Size

There appears to be little correlation between the size of the county and the number of districts, whether measured by population or square miles. Tiny Marion County has consolidated from four to three districts with a total enrollment of 5,651 in all three districts. Dillon County's three school districts have a combined enrollment of only 5,781. Lexington County's five districts contain 50,400 students, while Richland County's two districts have 45,683 students. Table 3 shows the range of district enrollments as well as spending per pupil

¹² Campbell, Ronald F. et al., *The Organization and Control of American Schools*, 6th edition (1990: MacMillan, NY), p. 116.

¹³ South Carolina General Assembly, Act No. 387, Session 117, 2007-2008.

¹⁴ Dalton, Robert W., "School District Consolidation, Bill would put CEO in charge," *Greenville News*, (February 21, 2008).

¹⁵ Ulbrich, Holley H., Ellen W. Saltzman and Catherine E. Watt, "Options for Anderson County School Districts," (June 1990, Strom Thurmond Institute, Clemson University).

and tax bases, both total and per pupil, for South Carolina. Data are for fiscal year 2006-07, the most recent year for which financial data on all South Carolina districts is available.¹⁶

The average district in South Carolina enrolled 7,992 students in 2006-07, more than twice the national average of 3,151.¹⁷ However, the average is inflated by the presence of four very large single-county districts: Greenville, Charleston, Horry and Berkeley. The median South Carolina school district is a more accurate measure of size, with 4,616 pupils in 2006-07. Union County was the median district that year—smaller than 42 other districts and larger than 42 other districts.

Table I. South Carolina School District Comparisons, 2006-2007

District	Pupils (135-day ADM)	Total Revenue Per Pupil	Operations Expenditures Per Pupil	Mills for School Operations* TY 2006	Assessed Value Per Pupil TY 2006
Smallest					
Marion 7	792	\$12,903	\$12,425	171.0	\$13,015
Dillon 1	809	9,864	9,330	155.5	11,124
Barnwell 19	840	11,114	10,230	150.0	11,109
McCormick	888	13,538	9,211	127.9	42,939
Bamberg 2	899	12,696	11,814	248.0	14,017
Largest					
Aiken	24,199	\$8,442	\$7,880	126.9	\$19,744
Berkeley	27,140	9,746	8,084	143.0	20,103
Horry	34,749	11,095	9,270	107.3	46,695
Charleston	40,555	11,975	10,338	91.8	44,187
Greenville	66,239	9,508	8,029	113.9	25,762
SC Average	7,992	10,318	8,963	156	26,055
SC Median	4,616	9,977	9,042	161.7	16,889

There are two important measures of the size of a school district. One is the number of students (ADM, or average daily membership). The second is the size of the geographic area that the district serves. A district with students scattered thinly over a large area will have higher transportation costs and lower average class size than a district with higher student density. For the state as a whole, the range of school district size in land area is from only 49

¹⁶ South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Finance and Operations, "Historical Finance Data," <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Finance-and-Operations/Finance/old/finance/HistoricalData.html>.

¹⁷ National Education Association, (NEA Research Division), "Rankings & Estimates; Rankings of 2006 and Estimates of School Statistics," Washington, DC (December, 2007): 69, <http://www.nea.org/edstats/images/07rankings.pdf>.

square miles in Sumter 17 (before consolidation) to 1,227 square Berkeley's single school district.¹⁸

Optimal Size of School Districts

In reviewing the history of district consolidation across the nation, Strang (1987, p 353) notes that

From a central perspective, large, bureaucratic organizations make sense. They are big enough and standardized enough for information and influence to flow smoothly to and from the center...From the local point of view, the reverse is true. Smaller and less formally organized districts facilitate linkages to the community and match the heterogeneity of local conditions, while large, bureaucratic organizations are difficult to penetrate.¹⁹

How large should a school district be? Are there districts that are too large as well as too small? This question has received a great deal of recent attention in South Carolina as well as in other states. Proposals have been put forth by the governor and others to mandate one school district per county, and to require a minimum size of 10,000 students, which would significantly reduce the number of districts in the state.²⁰ At present, only 20 of the state's 85 districts meet that size standard. A commission created by Governor Sanford in 2005 to explore ways to improve educational outcomes recommended that existing district boundaries be reevaluated from the perspective of improving district structure and funding.²¹ A committee created in the same year by the legislature was directed to evaluate school district size and its relationship to spending in the classroom.²²

There are three considerations that enter into determining the optimal size of school districts, or a range of optimal sizes. The first, and the one that attracts the most interest, is cost. What size minimizes average cost per student? A second consideration is the effect of district size on student performance. A third issue is equalization of fiscal resources, especially among districts in multi-district counties. Finally, in redrawing district lines, an important consideration is history, geography, and the integrity of the community of which the school district is a part. Any efforts to erase or redraw district lines must take into account the significance for local residents of the existing political, geographic, and community entities that share that school district.

¹⁸ Miley & Associates, Inc., "School District Organization in South Carolina: Evaluating Performance and Fiscal Efficiency," (Prepared for the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, Columbia, SC), January 16, 2003, p. 18.

¹⁹ Strang, David, "The Administrative Transformation of American Education: School District Consolidation, 1938-1980," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 32/3 (September), p. 353. Johnson Graduate School of Management, Cornell University, 1987, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2392909>.

²⁰ South Carolina General Assembly, House Bill 3262, Session 117, 2007-08.

²¹ South Carolina Office of the Governor, South Carolina Education Reform Council, "Report to the Governor," February 26, 2006, <http://www.scgovernor.com/NR/rdonlyres/8FF12F91-7F44-414F-992D-DA1FB0D31F21/0/SouthCarolinaEducationReformCouncilReport.pdf>.

²² South Carolina General Assembly, Appropriations bill 2005-06, Part 1B, Section 1 H63, Proviso 1.82, <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/html-pages/research.html>.

District Size and Operating Costs. There are numerous national studies of the relationship between district size and operating costs per pupil. Duncombe and Yinger found that operating costs per pupil can drop sharply when very small districts consolidate, but the savings dwindle with larger consolidating districts. In their study, savings began to dwindle substantially when the districts being consolidated each had more than 1,500 students.²³ A study by Cox, likewise, for Utah school districts showed no significant difference among districts in cost per student once the district size exceeded 1,000 students.²⁴ Only 13 South Carolina school districts had an average daily membership of less than 1,500 in 2008-09, and only seven had less than 1,000.

Optimal size is actually a range of sizes that may reflect lowest costs or best outcomes or both. Most studies focus on minimizing average operating cost per student as the primary determinant of optimal size (usually excluding capital costs). The optimal size is usually a range from minimum to maximum. Beyond that maximum, costs per student start to rise.

A summary of studies of this issued carried out by Bard, Gardener and Wieland found a number of estimates of optimal size based on cost minimization. Most of these studies found that the minimum average cost is achieved in a range from 3,000 to 6,000 students.²⁵ Lawrence *et al.*, looking at all relevant factors, suggested that an optimum size recommended a 4,000 to 5,000 pupil range.²⁶ Augenblick and Myers, who have consulted with a number of states on educational cost issues (including South Carolina), suggest that an optimum is in the size range of 3,000 pupils.²⁷

Another study by Andrews, Duncombe and Yinger claims that, while substantial cost savings in instructional and administrative costs may result from moving from a district with less than 500 students to a district of 2,000 to 4,000 students, there are fewer gains after that point. They also found that diseconomies of scale (rising costs associated with bureaucracy) appear to set in past a student enrollment of 15,000.²⁸ In fact, a consolidation study for Michigan argued that there might actually be greater potential savings from breaking up large districts than consolidating small ones. In any case, the study argues, gains from consolidation are likely to be modest, since district size accounts for only about two percent of the variation in per pupil spending across Michigan districts. The study suggests that 2,900 may be about the most efficient district size in terms of spending per pupil.²⁹

²³ William Duncombe and John Yinger, "Does School District Consolidation Cut Costs?" American Education Finance Association, 2007, <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/edfp.2007.2.4.34>.

²⁴ David Cox, "Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Rethinking Super-Size Schools and Districts; Focus on Utah," (Sutherland Institute, Salt Lake City, UT, 2002). Available through ERIC, #ED 462 221.

²⁵ Bard, Joe, Clark E. Gardener and Regi L. Wieland, "Rural School District Consolidation," Empirical Research, Vol. 4, No. 2 (February 12, 2007), <http://www.academicleadership.org> (originally prepared under the aegis of the "NREA Consolidation Task Force" for the National Rural Education Association Executive Board, April 1-2, 2005).

²⁶ Lawrence, Barbara K. *et al.*, "Dollars & Sense: The cost effectiveness of small schools," (Knowledge Works Foundation, Cincinnati, OH and the Rural School and Community Trust, Washington, DC,) 2002, <http://www.ruraledu.org>.

²⁷ Augenblick, John, John Myers and Justin Silverstein, "A comprehensive study on the organization of Kansas school districts," (Prepared for the Kansas State Board of Education in response to RFP No. 00241), Augenblick and Myers, Inc., 2001.

²⁸ Andrews, Matthew, William Duncombe and John Yinger, "Revisiting economies of size in American education: are we any closer to a consensus?" *Economics of Education Review* 21: 245-262, 2002.

²⁹ Coulson, Andrew J., "School District Consolidation, Size and Spending; an Evaluation," (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Midland, MI, 2007).

Other studies found similar results for district size. Deller and Rudnicki found that minimum efficient scale for total cost in Maine districts was 2,000 students.³⁰ Duncombe, Miner, and Ruggiero found that the minimum efficient scale for total cost in New York districts was 6,500 students, with much lower minimum efficient sizes for just instructional costs (1,800 students) or transportation costs (1,200 students). That figure of 6,500 for total cost per student was one of the highest in all the studies reviewed.³¹

Research for Arkansas, using 2001-02 data, found that small districts generally have lower costs, and that districts with higher costs have a higher proportion of high risk students, so that the composition of the student population matters more than district size.³² Another Arkansas study found a minimum efficient scale of 3,500 pupils in order to minimize total costs, 1,850 pupils to minimize teacher salary costs, and 525 pupils to minimize supply costs. The difference in savings with larger districts between total costs and teacher salary and supply costs is attributed to spreading the overhead cost of district administration over more students.³³

That study also found that transportation costs were highly variable across districts, but seem to meet a minimum efficient scale between 500 and 1,000 students. However, the density of student population is also an important cost factor. Small rural districts do not often see large cost savings when they are consolidated, because the scattered student population is not only more costly (per pupil) to transport, but also results in smaller schools and smaller classes so that students do not have to travel long distances to larger, consolidated schools.

Most of these studies are based on comparing performance in districts of different size. Seven studies from 1960 through 2002 took a different approach, examining cost changes before and after consolidation. These studies consistently found that consolidation did not lead to appreciable costs savings. In general, consolidation resulted in lower fiscal benefits and greater fiscal costs than had been predicted. Some administrative costs fell, but spending on transportation rose.³⁴ A 2006 report also noted that follow-up studies of consolidation found few if any cost savings.³⁵

The 2003 Miley study for the South Carolina legislature's Education Oversight Committee summarized a number of other studies concerning the relationship between school district size and fiscal efficiency. In general, Miley's findings are consistent with ours, that the minimum size for fiscal efficiency is fairly low. Most studies find that size to be in the 1,000 to 6,000 student size range.³⁶

³⁰ Deller, Steven C., and Edward Rudnicki, "Production Efficiency in Elementary Education," *Economics of Education Review*, 12(1) 45-57, 1993.

³¹ Duncombe, W., J. Miner, and J. Ruggiero, "Potential Cost Savings from School District Consolidation: A Case Study of New York," *Economics of Education Review*, 14(3), 1995, 265-84, 1995.

³² Rural School and Community Trust, "School District Consolidation in Arkansas," Rural School and Community Trust, Washington, D.C., 2003a, <http://www.ruraledu.org>.

³³ Marvin E. Dodson, III and Thomas A. Garrett, "Inefficient Education Spending in Public School Districts: A Case for Consolidation," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Working Paper # 2002-010C, revised April 2003.

³⁴ Rural School and Community Trust. "The Fiscal Impacts of School Consolidation," Rural School and Community Trust, Washington, D.C., 2003b, <http://www.ruraledu.org>.

³⁵ Rural School and Community Trust, "Anything but Research-based – State Initiatives to Consolidate Schools and Districts," *Rural Policy Matters*, (March, 2006.), <http://www.ruraledu.org>.

³⁶ Miley, 2003.

The answer to the size question is more complex than just dividing costs by the number of pupils (average cost) and comparing that to district size. Quality factors may enter into the equation. The cost drivers may be different for smaller, low-density districts (small schools and class sizes, higher transportation costs) than larger, more densely populated districts where there may be inefficiencies associated with large size, urban problems that generate more special needs students, demand for more non-instructional services, or other factors.

In 2005, the South Carolina legislature created a temporary committee to “...study the size of school districts in South Carolina and the number of teacher work days and make recommendations on the school district size which will allow for more direct spending on teacher salary and instructional support.”³⁷ The School District Study Committee found significant differences in spending per pupil at the district management and program management level (but not in classroom instruction) between the 20 smallest and 20 largest districts in the state. The estimated average difference in that group of costs was \$277 per pupil.

The committee calculated potential savings from having one district per county by taking lowest district per pupil expenditure in each multidistrict county and multiplied that figure by the number of districts in the county. Based on this rather simplistic methodology, the committee anticipated savings of \$1.1 million or \$1,022 per teacher, \$46 per pupil.³⁸ However, this study does not take into account the higher cost of serving rural areas in terms of higher transportation costs per pupil and smaller schools and smaller classes that are dictated by the distribution of students in space, not by the size of the district.³⁹

District Size and Student Performance. Miley observed that “the appropriate-sized district in a fiscal efficiency sense may not be the most appropriate for promoting student performance.”⁴⁰ Most of the literature on student performance is related to school size rather than district size, but there have been some studies that focus on the district as the relevant unit.

A Utah school district study found that after adjusting for difference in the socioeconomic status of students, the smallest districts (1,200 students or less) scored highest on performance tests for grades five and eight within their expected range, followed by medium size districts, (1,200-6,000), then medium large (6,000-15,000), with the largest districts (15,000 students or

³⁷ South Carolina General Assembly, Appropriations Bill 2005-06, Part 1B, Section 1 H63, Proviso 1.82, <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/html-pages/research.html>.

³⁸ School District Study Committee, 2006.

³⁹ Arizona Department of Education, School District Redistricting Commission (SDRC). <http://www.ade.az.gov/sdrc>.

If the state of South Carolina intends to pursue consolidation, they might benefit from the experience of Arizona (School District Redistricting Commission 2008). Arizona used a redistricting commission to carry out school district consolidations, similar to the procedure in many states for redrawing precincts, legislative districts and Congressional district following the decennial census.

⁴⁰ Miley, *op.cit.*, 2003.

more) coming in last. The results were not as clearly in favor of small districts at the high school level.⁴¹

Another study suggested that the higher dropout rates for larger schools and larger districts may have led to better test results for the remaining student cohort in larger districts.⁴² The same researcher found that small schools seem to particularly benefit minority students and students of low socioeconomic status.⁴³ Plucker *et al.* found that most studies indicate that student achievement is best served by smaller schools (300 to 500 students), smaller class size in elementary schools, and a challenging curriculum and highly qualified teachers. Larger schools and districts tend to lead to lower student achievement.⁴⁴

A study of consolidation of rural school districts in New York identified some possible student benefits from consolidation in the areas of specialization and innovation. Specialization can result from greater resource-sharing within the district in services such as special education, vocational education, and advanced placement. Learning and innovation may be less costly or easier to provide in a larger district because teachers have more colleagues from whom to learn and the costs of innovation can be spread over more participating students.⁴⁵

However, states with many small districts have found ways to provide access to specialized resources that do not require consolidation of districts. The service sharing alternative to consolidating districts is discussed in a later section of this paper.

District Size and Resource Equalization. A third factor in determining the optimal size of school districts is the tax base per pupil. Larger districts that encompass more economic diversity are more likely to have larger and more stable tax bases. So one of the reasons offered for reducing the number of school districts in South Carolina is to provide more equalization of fiscal resources within districts and reduce the pressure on the state to equalize across districts.

There is some state-funded equalization of fiscal resources, primarily through the Education Finance Act. Schools in South Carolina are currently funded from three sources: state aid (including Education Finance Act and Education Improvement Act funds, property tax relief funds, and state grants), local contribution (primarily from the property tax); and Federal aid, which is primarily directed to special needs and specialized programs rather than funding

⁴¹ Cox, David, "Big Trouble: Solving Education Problems Means Rethinking Super-Size Schools and Districts; Focus on Utah." (Sutherland Institute, Salt Lake City, UT, 2002). Available through ERIC, #ED 462 221.

⁴² Cotton, Kathleen, "School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance," Close-Up #20. *School Improvement Research Series*, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, OR (May, 1996). <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c020.html>.

⁴³ Cotton, Kathleen cited in Murray, Vicki and Ross Groen, "Competition or Consolidation? The School District Consolidation Debate Revisited," (Policy Report No. 189, Goldwater Institute, Phoenix, AZ, 2004).

⁴⁴ Plucker, Jonathan A. *et al.*, "Assessing the Policy Environment for School Corporation Collaboration, Cooperation, and Consolidation in Indiana." Education Policy Brief, Vol. 5: No. 5, (Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Indiana University, Bloomington summer, 2007).

⁴⁵ Duncombe, William and John Yinger. "Does School District Consolidation Cut Costs?" American Education Finance Association, 2007, <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/edfp.2007.2.4.341>.

general operations. In 2007-08, the state supplied about 50 percent of operating revenue, with local funding accounting for 41 percent and federal aid the remaining 9 percent. The local tax base also must support most if not all of the cost of school construction, which is usually but not always funded out of separate debt millage levied on the same tax base.

State funds provide some redistribution of funds from richer to poorer districts in two ways. First, the funds distributed through the Education Finance Act require a local match. The average local match is 30 percent of base student cost, with the state providing the other 70 percent. The required EFA local match is higher in school districts with a higher index of taxpaying ability, which measures the ability of the district to raise revenues from its property tax base. Districts with a lower ITA are not required to raise as much per pupil as a local contribution, so the state's contribution per pupil will be higher. In 2007-08, EFA funds ranged from \$2,948 per pupil in Lee County to \$136 per pupil in Beaufort County, with a median of \$2,517 per pupil. Only eight districts received less than \$1,900 per pupils in EFA funding in 2007-08. Some state grant funds are also distributed on the same basis as EFA funds.

The second source of redistribution, which has somewhat less impact, is Education Improvement Act funds, which come from one cent of the six cent sales tax. EIA funds are distributed on a per pupil basis, but they are restricted for use on certain programs that change over time. The median school district received \$926 per pupil in EIA funds in 2007-08, but 10 small, poor districts received over \$1,500 per pupil from this revenue source. In general, more of the sales tax is collected in the wealthier, more urban counties, so distributing EIA revenue to school districts on a per pupil basis has some modest redistributive effect.

The third source of redistribution, however, has the opposite effect. The property tax relief program under Act 388 of 2006 and earlier legislation provides more revenue per pupil to counties with larger tax bases than those with smaller tax bases, especially if homeowner property is a significant share of the tax base.

How can the configuration or reconfiguration of districts address the distribution of taxable resources? One answer lies within counties, where redrawing district lines is one of several options for equalizing educational opportunities. The other, more complex method would require combining districts across county lines, as has been proposed by some legislators. (One recently introduced bill would reduce the number of school districts to 40, each serving about 16,000 students.) Such a restructuring of districts would significantly alter the governance structure of districts and the role of the county legislative delegation. We will consider this idea in more detail in a later section.

Within many of the 17 multi-district counties, there are wide disparities not only in size but also in taxable resources and operating revenue per pupil among the districts in the county. Table 2 shows the rather large spread on both these resource measures for districts in the four counties with the largest number of school districts—Anderson, Florence, Lexington, and Spartanburg. Together, these four counties contain 22 school districts, or slightly more than one-fourth of all school districts in South Carolina. Clearly, their districts vary not only in student population but also in tax resources and operating spending per pupil.

Table 2. Disparities Within MultiDistrict Counties, 2006-2007

District	Pupils (135-day ADM)	Operations Expenditures Per Pupil	Assessed Value Per Pupil TY 2006
Anderson 1	8,706	\$15,697	\$7,615
Anderson 2	3,645	\$13,301	\$9,120
Anderson 3	2,544	\$13,637	\$8,938
Anderson 4	2,771	\$28,782	\$10,649
Anderson 5	11,886	\$20,262	\$9,418
Florence 1	14,908	\$21,529	\$9,418
Florence 2	1,173	\$11,976	\$9,825
Florence 3	3,626	\$12,187	\$9,835
Florence 4	973	\$13,893	\$11,235
Florence 5	1,441	\$9,877	\$10,229
Lexington 1	19,707	\$18,386	\$10,124
Lexington 2	8,662	\$24,862	\$11,251
Lexington 3	2,062	\$18,313	\$11,713
Lexington 4	3,406	\$8,384	\$9,542
Lexington 5	16,567	\$23,140	\$10,368
Spartanburg 1	4,766	\$15,742	\$9,198
Spartanburg 2	9,219	\$15,614	\$7,361
Spartanburg 3	2,994	\$18,024	\$10,657
Spartanburg 4	2,967	\$14,178	\$7,539
Spartanburg 5	6,806	\$23,250	\$9,797
Spartanburg 6	9,725	\$22,214	\$8,749
Spartanburg 7	7,377	\$23,919	\$12,960

Unless consolidation reduced the number of districts in a county to one, consolidation (combining one or more districts) would not necessarily result in substantial resource equalization within the county. Instead, it might be necessary to redraw district lines, probably creating a smaller number of districts in the process but redistributing students and tax bases among those districts. Both student enrollment and tax resources would be important considerations in equalizing across districts through redistricting, although other factors—attendance areas, geographic, barriers, transportation issues, growth projections, and utilization of existing facilities would also play a role in such decisions.

Several multi-district counties practice some form of tax base sharing as a move in the direction of equalization. Anderson County's Board of Education levies a countywide 14.7 mills which is

shared equally per pupil among the five districts, although as Table 2 indicated, wide disparities remain in tax base and operating revenue per pupil.

Laurens County has been redistributing tax revenue on a per-pupil basis from the wealthier to the poorer of its two school districts for more than 40 years, with a goal of equal operating revenue per pupil. However, Laurens County has encountered obstacles in the state's formula for distributing EFA and other state funds on the basis of the index of taxpaying ability. The county's attempt to equalize resources is partly offset by the higher per-pupil funding received by the poorer district from the state. (Laurens 55 and 56 have switched "richer" and "poorer" roles with each other several times over the many years that this tax equalization program has been in effect.)

The rationale for Laurens County's equalization effort was the county's role in promoting economic development. New industrial property resulted from countywide recruitment efforts, so county and school officials agreed that a new plant or other major business in the tax base should benefit all children in the county, not just the one in which the firm was located. The same situation exists in other multi-district counties.

Spartanburg County, with seven school districts, also does some limited tax base sharing on a per pupil basis. A levy of 13 mills is applied to all property in the county for school operations (excluding homeowner property after Act 388 took effect in 2007). This 13 mil levy is collected by the treasurer and placed in a separate account. The County Board of Education distributed the revenue to school districts prior to its dissolution. Since Spartanburg County does not have a county board, District 6 calculates the distribution based on total number of pupils in the county and the average daily attendance in each of the seven districts and the treasurer distributes funds to the districts each quarter.

Greenwood County has a somewhat simpler tax sharing arrangement. Revenue from four mills levied in large, urban Greenwood 50 and small but relatively wealthy Greenwood 52 is transferred to Greenwood 51, a small district with a low tax base. This redistribution helps to keep the mill rate down in Greenwood 51, where one mill raises much less revenue than in the other two districts. It also allows that district to share somewhat in the tax base elsewhere in the county.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGING SCHOOL DISTRICT LINES: CONSOLIDATION AND/OR REDISTRICTING

In redrawing district lines, an important consideration is history, geography, and the integrity of the community of which the school district is a part. Any efforts to erase or redraw district lines must take into account the significance for local residents of the existing political, geographic, and community entities that share that school district.

The term consolidation is used loosely to cover a variety of methods of recombining schools and school districts into larger units. Because this paper is concerned with issues of organization and governance, our focus is on district size, not school size. A simple

consolidation would take two or more districts and combine them into one. Redistricting might either increase or decrease the number of districts in a given area or leave the number the same but would result in a change in the district lines.

Redistricting is less common but potentially more useful in adjusting district service area boundaries to reflect changes in population distribution and tax bases. Redistricting is more similar to the decennial adjustment in the boundaries of political districts from Congressional seats all the way down to precincts. In most of this section we will use the term consolidation to cover both kinds of changes.

The Legal Framework for Consolidation

The legislation that provides for consolidation of school districts dates back to the pre-Home Rule era.⁴⁶ Home rule came to South Carolina counties and municipalities (but not school districts) as a result of federal court decisions that required both Senate and House districts in the state to be apportioned by population rather than by county lines. The result of that reapportionment was that there was no longer a clearly defined county delegation to manage county and school district affairs. Some counties did not have a resident senator, others had more than one. Representatives found themselves in districts that cut across two or sometimes three counties. Constitutional amendments passed in 1974 provided for the creation of county governments and also set forth the structural options for municipal governments.

After 1974, counties were required to choose from among alternative structures via referenda that established the size of their councils, the mix of at-large seats and single member districts, and whether to have a manager, an administrator, or (for counties) a supervisor and (for cities) a mayor who was also chief executive officer. Municipalities already had considerable fiscal home rule, but counties began managing their own fiscal affairs for the first time instead of being governed by the county delegation.

Because school districts receive a substantial share of their revenue from the state, they were treated differently from other elected local governments. Even with the change in district lines across counties (and school districts), legislative delegations still retain considerable power over the makeup and fiscal operations of school boards.

In particular, school districts did not receive structural home rule in determining the size of the school board, the mix of at-large seats and single member districts, and other governance matters, including alteration of district boundaries to reflect changes in population and/or tax bases. The power to make such structural changes was vested in either the legislative delegation or, in a few counties, with the county board of education. With the abolition of most county boards of education, the legislative method has become the common method of making changes in either district lines or the composition of school boards.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ South Carolina Code of Laws, sections 59-17-20 to 59-17-90.

⁴⁷ South Carolina School Boards Association. Website updated 2008. Info: School Board Facts <http://www.scsba.org/board>.

Local Legislation

A change in the law governing school districts, school boards, or county boards of education takes place when members of the county's legislative delegation introduce local legislation—an act of the General Assembly that only applies to the particular county or school district or districts, introduced by members of the county legislative delegation. Usually such legislation passes routinely if endorsed by a majority of the delegation in each house.

In the Senate, if the county contains parts of more than one Senate district, the votes are divided according to the proportion of the county that each Senator represents. The governor sometimes signs such legislation, but even if he does not, the General Assembly generally overrides his veto. The most recent such legislation, passed in 2010 over the governor's veto, added legislative appointees to the Fairfield County school board and transferred fiscal authority to a financial council appointed by the legislative delegation.

The County Board of Education

The less frequently used method allows the county board (where one exists) to make such a change under one of three conditions. In general, county boards can alter district boundaries with

- EITHER written approval from all of the county's legislative delegation
- OR written petition signed by at least 80 percent of the qualified electors in each affected school district
- OR written petition by at least one-third of the qualified electors in each affected school district, followed by a referendum in which the proposed change receives a majority vote in every affected district.⁴⁸

The difficulty of altering district boundaries provides important protections for minority concerns under the petition or referendum method, but offers less protection when the local legislation approach is adopted.

SERVICE SHARING AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO CONSOLIDATION

While service sharing does not address the issue of equalizing resources, it can help with the other two goals of consolidation, reducing costs and providing access to specialized academic resources. Service sharing has been a popular choice for serving small districts from New York to Georgia, sometimes with a separate entity contracting with multiple school districts to provide specialized services ranging from special and vocational education to professional development to accounting to grounds maintenance. A comprehensive study of shared educational service options by a national accounting firm stated that:

“...consolidation may not be the most effective strategy to help districts direct more money into the classroom....Small districts can band together to share everything from transportation services to building gymnasiums, creating the purchasing power

⁴⁸ South Carolina Code of Laws, Section 15-17-20(2).

and economies of scale of medium-sized districts...Sharing services is a technique that both the private and public sectors have employed for decades and has been growing rapidly in popularity in recent years due to its proven ability to reduce costs....The way the consolidation debate is often framed, parents and school districts are left with the false choice of strong local control and high per-student costs by keeping school districts small or potentially lower per pupil costs but having to give up local control through school district consolidation....It's possible to educate students like a small district and still have the economies and buying power of a large district. How? By implementing shared services."⁴⁹

There is no single model for shared service provision. Meyers identifies several models, including:

- A new entity that provides services to others,
- One agency or district selling services to others, and
- One agency or district buying from the private sector and reselling to others, to a co-operative that buys from private sellers, or to a joint venture.⁵⁰

Examples of innovative service sharing arrangements in several states are described below.

New Jersey

Districts in New Jersey use local educational service commissions to share transportation, child study team services, special education, and purchases of gas, oil and office equipment. Some of these commissions are set up on a regional basis, while others serve just a few districts. For example:

- Monmouth County districts share academic services, data processing, purchasing cooperatives, special education and transportation management through a regional arrangement. A particular concern in this district has been placement of students with disabilities, because the district has a rate of separate placements that is three times the national average.⁵¹
- Morris County created an independent authority to address issues across school districts and to act as an independent economic catalyst for the area. The school focus has been on capital savings, both refinancing debt and managing equipment leasing. According to the authority's website, the authority seems to address about four school district projects of varying sizes each year. The authority states that its independence increases its flexibility and increases savings to participants.⁵²

New Jersey school districts also partner with municipalities for some services. Sharing includes recreation programs, textbook purchases, after school care, administrative offices, website design and maintenance, electrical, plumbing, custodial and computer technician services, lawn

⁴⁹ Deloitte Research, "Driving More Money into the Classroom: The Promise of Shared Services," 2005,

http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/DTT_DR_SS_Education_Nov05.pdf, p10.

⁵⁰ Meyers, Jim, "Exploring Shared Services Option," *Government Technology* (December 6, 2007), and Meyers, Jim, "Shared Services: Obstacles and Solutions," *Government Technology* (January 9, 2008), <http://www.govtech.com/gt/208827>.

⁵¹ Hiller, Stephen C. and Terry E. Spradlin, "An Analysis of Purchasing and Cooperative Agreements among School Corporations, Charter Schools, and Education Service Centers," (Special Report, Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Bloomington, IN, 2007).

⁵² Morris County (NJ) Improvement Authority, <http://www.co.morris.nj.us/mcia/about.html>.

and athletic field maintenance, office furnishings, and parking lot and sidewalk maintenance.⁵³ A shared facility for a youth center in one district/municipality provided additional classrooms for pre-kindergarten, freeing up space for special education in district facilities.⁵⁴

New Jersey also relies on shared services among districts. Services include purchase, storage and distribution of gas and diesel fuel; road, parking lot, sidewalk repair; office repair/construction; purchase of office furniture; use and maintenance of athletic fields and lawn maintenance; computer technician services; safety/D.A.R.E. programs; vehicles/vehicle maintenance; electrical, plumbing, and custodial services; website design and maintenances; transportation; shared office space; energy conservation; cable/telephone; facility planning; recycling electronics; recreation programs; and before and after school programs.⁵⁵

New York

New York State has had extensive experience with shared services, and relies heavily on shared services centers that are independent from the school districts they serve. New York State has created Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, or BOCES, which are regional education service providers for small districts. Each BOCES has its own board, made up of past school board members from the districts it serves. Initially created in 1955, there are currently 37 BOCES in existence.⁵⁶ Shared services provided through BOCES include:

- Special education
- Career and technical education
- General education
- Instructional support and technology
- Itinerant personnel
- Administrative management

Shared service contracts with participating districts govern the delivery of these services. Different districts contract for different combinations of services.

The most widely used BOCES service is special education (38 percent), followed by instructional support (18 percent) and occupational education (14 percent). Special education and occupational education are both areas that require teachers with special training and usually special equipment. Particularly for occupational therapy, coordination of programs allows for an exceptional experience for students rather than a more limited program that would result from individual (and more costly) programs.

⁵³ Librera, William L., "School Districts and Shared Services; Reducing Costs and Improving Quality," (Interlocal Advisory Center, New Jersey State League of Municipalities, *New Jersey Municipalities*, 82/5, Trenton, NJ, May, 2005), <http://www.njslom.org/interlocaladvisorycenter.html>.

⁵⁴ South Bergenite, "Shared services need hard sell," Hackensack, NJ, Oct. 31, 2005, http://southbergenite.coolerads.com/news_details.php?news=1744&sea.

⁵⁵ (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Institute on Education Law and Policy, *Shared Services in School Districts: Policies, Practices and Recommendations*," (Newark, NJ, Institute on Education Law and Policy, September 2007).

⁵⁶ Deloitte Research, "Driving More Money into the Classroom: The Promise of Shared Services." 2005, http://www.deloitte.com/dtt/cda/doc/content/DTT_DR_SS_Education_Nov05.pdf.

General education, including summer school, alternative education, interactive and non-interactive distance education, arts education and gifted programs, is about 8 percent and growing, although recent growth in BOCES shared services has been fastest in the technology area. There is also substantial use of non-instructional support services for district management and operations such as payroll, accounting, student census, scheduling, risk management, transportation, and contract negotiations.⁵⁷

BOCES operate from limited state funds but also from district funds, put into the organization in return for coordinating services, which each district could choose annually. In fact, that was one unique part of the organization – that services chosen could change based on district needs.

Texas

Texas also has with considerable experience in service sharing. Shared services include business services for most districts--accounting, purchasing, invoice processing, bank reconciliations, fixed asset management, preparing financial reports, investing funds, cash flow analysis, food service accounting, PEIMS reporting, board reporting, payroll processing, benefits reporting, state aid calculations, grant reporting, student enrollment projections, budgeting, student activity fund accounting, personnel reporting, long range budgeting, managing and supervision, tax assessing and collecting.

Schools and school districts have the option of providing their own services, having business services provided by a regional education service center or on a multiregional basis, using shared personnel, or outsourcing to the private sector.⁵⁸

Regional Service Center 17 in Lubbock, Texas provides payroll and accounting services to several small districts. Services offered include transportation, technology, library services, food services, curriculum development, teacher training, special education, academic programs, custodial services and purchasing. Some districts share personnel, including administrators, teachers, health care professionals, and technical experts. Sharing takes place not only between schools and districts but also with various public, government and private sector entities.⁵⁹

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania's Common Cents program used a professional consultant to examine options for service sharing. The areas recommended for consideration included instructional services, transportation, food services and nutrition, safety and security, administration, purchasing,

⁵⁷ New York, State Education Department; Orange-Ulster BOCES, Office of School District Organization and BOCES Services, January 2001, "Financial and Statistical Outcomes of the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services," pp. 31-36, http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/mgtserv/602_Report/pdf/2001_98-99_99-00_sixth/6-602_report.PDF. Orange-Ulster Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES); "What is BOCES?" <http://www.ouboces.org/about>.

⁵⁸ Texas, Comptroller of Public Accounts, "Texas School Performance Report (TSPR) for Grape Creek Independent School District," – Chapter 3, August, 2001, <http://www.window.state.tx.us/tspr/grapecreek/ch03d.htm>.

⁵⁹ Chris Patterson, "School District Consolidation and Public School Efficiency: What Does the Research Say?" (Policy Perspective, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Austin, TX, February, 2006).

human resources, finances and payroll, technology series, facilities and real estate, and health services.⁶⁰

Indiana

The state has nine education service centers that serve multiple districts, funded by a mix of state education funds, membership fees and entrepreneurial activities. According to their annual reports, the most common consolidated purchases were natural gas, insurance, educational/office supplies, food supplies/services, and school buses. The most common shared services were special education and vocational education.⁶¹

Indiana University's Center for Evaluation and Education Policy studied the possible benefits of school consolidation and sharing services for the state. Researchers determined that there was neither achievement nor financial benefit to consolidation. However, they did find financial benefits to sharing services across districts. Two of the areas highlighted in the report were insurance and bulk purchasing.⁶²

South Carolina

The Western Piedmont Education Consortium (WPEC) is a limited shared services organization. This consortium of 10 districts in seven counties in upper western South Carolina has been operating for more than 10 years. One purpose of the consortium is to host meetings of professionals with similar responsibilities, such as special education, to discuss issues and, in some cases, standardize responses to state reporting mandates. WPEC also lobbies on behalf of its constituent school districts. WPEC has not progressed to sharing services as a group beyond its lobbying function, although there are some shared teacher services and also shared services among some of its member districts, primarily where more than one district serves a single county.⁶³

Other scattered examples of service sharing can be found in South Carolina school districts. Two examples in the upstate are the shared community-high school library in Ware Shoals, a partnership between the school district and the county; and the cafeteria/gymnasium at Clemson Elementary School, partly funded by the City of Clemson and used for city summer day camps as well as physical education and school nutrition programs during the school year.

⁶⁰ Pennsylvania, Department of Education, "Common Cents-Making Every Dollar Count," www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/common_cents/8781.

⁶¹ Stephen C. Hiller, and Terry E. Spradlin, "An Analysis of Purchasing and Cooperative Agreements among School Corporations, Charter Schools, and Education Service Centers" (Special Report, Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Bloomington, IN, 2007).

⁶² Jonathan A. Plucker, et al., "Assessing the Policy Environment for School Corporation Collaboration, Cooperation, and Consolidation in Indiana." (Education Policy Brief, Vol. 5: No. 5., Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Indiana University, Bloomington, summer, 2007).

⁶³ Personal communication.

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN OTHER STATES

Across the nation, school districts are the most numerous form of local government and the major source of demand for local government revenue. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, in 2007 there were a total of 14,561 school districts, of which 13,051 were independent entities while the remaining 1,510 depended on another local government (city, county or township) for funding. Total funding for these school districts came to \$559 billion.⁶⁴ The number of school districts nationwide has diminished considerably in the last fifty-plus years. In 1948, there were 94,926 school districts.⁶⁵

Hawaii has a single statewide school system; the District of Columbia has only two school districts that look to the city government for their funding. Five states have primarily dependent school systems that look to the county or municipalities for revenue, including three southern states: North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. A mixture of independent and dependent school districts is the pattern in New England as well as Michigan and California. Most other states have primarily or exclusively independent school districts, as does South Carolina.

The degree of independence from state control over structure and finances varies greatly from state to state. Some states classify districts on the basis of size or other characteristics and have different regulations or degrees of autonomy for different classes.⁶⁶

State legislatures have taken the lead in consolidating school districts, although Campbell notes that they have been reluctant to act arbitrarily in altering district lines or creating new districts. "The existence of hundreds of small, inefficient districts is testimony to the fact that legislators have been slow, in many states at least, to reorganize their districts."⁶⁷

Legislative action may be permissive, semi-permissive, or mandatory. Permissive legislation generally results in few consolidations or reorganizations. Semi-permissive legislation took the initiative from the districts with deadlines for proposals to reorganize in ways acceptable to the state. Financial incentives helped, but this type of legislation was also not very successful. In the post World War II period, with the greatest waves of redistricting and consolidation, mandatory reorganization laws were passed in many states with local committees, time schedules, review by a state agency, citizen votes, and financial incentives of both a positive and negative nature.⁶⁸

Thirty-nine states have some intermediate unit of school administration between the state and the district. In most cases, that intermediate unit reflects the county lines, similar to the Boards of Education created in South Carolina in the 1950s (most of which were subsequently dissolved). In states where there is no intermediate unit, the school districts are often coterminous with the county. Generally, that intermediate unit is elected. Intermediate units

⁶⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table I, Summary of Public School System Finances for Elementary-Secondary Education by State: 2006-2007," www.census.gov/govs/school.

⁶⁵ Campbell et al., 1990, p. 116.

⁶⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Local Governments and Public School Systems by Type and State: 2007," 2007 Census of Governments, www.census.gov/govs/cog/gororgtab03ss.html.

⁶⁷ Campbell et al., p. 115.

⁶⁸ Campbell, p. 116-7.

were more common prior to the waves of consolidation in the latter half of the twentieth century. Its primary purpose is to provide services to very small districts as an alternative to consolidation, although in some cases they can also work to equalize educational resources within the service area, usually a county.⁶⁹

SCHOOL GOVERNANCE LEGISLATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Prior to 1974, South Carolina was unique in giving a major voice in local affairs (both county and school) to the legislative delegation, as was discussed earlier. The continuing role of the county delegation in matters of school governance is a continuing bone of contention. While local legislation (bills affecting only one or a few targeted cities, counties, or special purpose districts) is no longer allowed since the Home Rule Act in 1975, court tests have found the practice to be legal in matters involving for school districts.

Unless there is existing county or district-specific legislation to the contrary, members of the county delegation for the county in which the school district or districts are located can introduce legislation to consolidate or split school districts, redraw district lines, change the size or composition of school boards, create or dissolve county boards, and take other action without requiring citizen consent. Many of the members of these delegations are not resident in the county or district affected by their actions, because both Senate and House districts cross county lines.

Two court cases and one attorney general's opinion addressed the constitutionality of the General Assembly's involvement with school districts. The most significant was the case of *Ben R. Moyer v. Ben Caughman et.al.* The case involved Act 1181, enacted in 1974, which changed the method of electing the school boards for Lexington County. The plaintiff argued that this local legislation violated Article VIII Section 7 of the South Carolina Constitution, which reads:

The General Assembly shall provide by general law for the structure, organization, powers, duties, functions, and the responsibilities of counties, including the power to tax different areas at different rates of taxation related to the nature and level of governmental services provided. Alternative forms of government, not to exceed five, shall be established. No laws for a specific county shall be enacted and no county shall be exempted from the general laws or laws applicable to the selected alternative form of government.⁷⁰

The plaintiff cited a case that involved creating a special purpose district for recreation in Dorchester County after the constitutional provision for county home rule had been ratified. The trial judge found that this case did not apply to school districts because public education is not the duty of counties but of the General Assembly. The trial judge was upheld by the state Supreme Court.

There was a somewhat more peripheral case in 2001, *Horry County School District v. Horry County and the City of Myrtle Beach*). This case challenged the county council's allocation of revenues from a multicounty business park among the taxing entities in Horry County. The court upheld

⁶⁹Campbell, p. 132 and 137-8.

⁷⁰ The most significant was case *Ben R. Moyer, appellant v. Ben Caughman et.al., defendants.*

the allocation determined by the County Council even though the schools received less than their normal share of the revenue.

Finally, a more recent challenge that never got to the filing stage took place in Pickens County in 2008 when the county delegation stripped the Pickens County school board of its three at-large members by special legislation. This contentious issue in this case was the weighting of votes in the delegation. In 1999 a question had been raised in *Vander Linden v. Hodges*, 193 F.3rd 268 (4th Cir. 1999) about using weighted voting in local matters, rather than giving each member of the delegation one vote. Since legislative districts cross county lines, some legislators represent only the voters of the affected county, others have only a small percentage of their voters in the county affected by the proposed legislation, so their constituencies within the county are of different size.

In the Pickens case, the two Senators representing parts of Pickens County 81 percent (Martin, all Pickens) and 19 percent (Alexander, all of Oconee and 19 percent of Pickens, including the Clemson-Central-Six Mile area). Therefore there is no possibility for that part of the county represented by Senator Alexander to have its preferences heard and its residents are essentially unrepresented in local legislation. However, a legal opinion by Attorney General Henry McMaster held that the vote is in fact taken by the entire Senate (or House), not just the delegation. It is true that it is the custom and practice for legislators from other counties to defer to the wishes of the delegation from that county, but that is custom rather than law.

Current Issues in South Carolina School Governance

While the State Department of Education and the General Assembly have focused more attention on financing and accountability than organizational and structural issues in education in recent years, there is a continuing undercurrent of discontent about governance issues. Protests from districts or counties that experienced governance changes through local legislation, the governor's push for one district per county, and the continuing dialogue about consolidation all suggest that there is a need and an opportunity to revisit the governance structure of public education in South Carolina.

We have identified four particular issues that deserve more public attention:

- the practice of local legislation
- collaboration within multi-district counties
- service sharing among districts both within and between counties
- increased resource-sharing or equalization among districts within counties.

A final issue is one of ownership. Whose schools are they? Do they belong to the citizens of the state, the county, or the district within the county?

The General Assembly and Local Legislation

As indicated above, the role of the legislative delegation in school governance is unique to South Carolina. The delegation has both a statewide role and a local role. While legislation

affecting only one county or one school district is technically passed by the entire General Assembly, custom calls for deferring to the majority of the legislative delegation in each House, which gives particular power to a single senator in many cases. While delegations usually listen to the voices of local citizens in these matters, there is no formal provision for citizen input into any decisions affecting the structure of school boards or the redrawing of district lines. The South Carolina School Boards Association (2008) strongly urges that a referendum be a part of any consolidation or redistricting process. According to the association:

“SCSBA supports consolidation or deconsolidation of school districts provided that in each district affected a referendum is held and a majority of the voters voting in the referendum in each affected district authorizes consolidation or deconsolidation. Each district shall have equal voice in the consolidation or deconsolidation question.”⁷¹

Coordination in Multidistrict Counties

A second issue that has been left in some disarray over the last thirty years is the challenge of coordination in multi-district counties. Each of the seventeen counties with multiple school districts handles the issue differently, but only a handful of them have an actual coordination agency that has any fiscal authority to go with a countywide perspective.

There is always a tension over what is the appropriate constituency being served, the citizens and children of the county or of the particular district. Districts that are rich in tax base are often unwilling to share the wealth with their less fortunate neighboring districts in the same county, even when their wealth has been created in part with countywide tax dollars that build the supporting infrastructure and attract the industrial and commercial development that is the basis of that taxable wealth.

This absence of coordination has led to neglect of schools and students in declining areas of prosperous counties. The rationale for the recommendation cited earlier for one district per county in South Carolina, however questionable from a standpoint of economic efficiency and/or student outcomes, does make sense from a fiscal perspective of a shared county tax base.

Facilitating Inter-district Collaboration

The national experience with shared services that has reduced costs and broadened the resources available to students and schools in small districts has not made much impact on South Carolina. There is some service sharing among districts within a county, but except for the limited efforts of the Western Piedmont Education Consortium, there has been little if any effort to extend that concept across county lines.

Developing such service sharing opportunities, perhaps along the lines of the services providing entities in New York, New Jersey and Georgia with separate entities providing a menu of services to multiple districts, is a concept that needs to be explored at the state level. A

⁷¹ South Carolina School Boards Association, (2008); www.scsba.org.

relatively modest financial investment in such entities could result in some of the benefits of consolidation or redistricting without the upheaval and resistance and also broaden the array of choices facing students and schools in curriculum, professional development, distance education, and other possibilities.

The Challenge of Equalization within Counties

Four multi-district counties—Anderson, Greenwood, Laurens, and Spartanburg—have some limited equalization efforts among their districts that attempt to provide more financial resources to their poorer school districts. Some kind of coordinating model in multi-district counties might facilitate that kind of intra-county sharing in the other 13 multi-county districts.

Within-county equalization occurs naturally in a single district county, but it takes effort, commitment and leadership to bring it about in multi-district counties. The state does provide some equalization across districts (not counties) through EFA and related programs, although some of that equalization has been undone by the impact of Act 388 that sent more property tax relief funds to higher-income, more urban counties than to the poor, rural districts that make up much of the I-95 corridor but also can be found in small district pockets of Spartanburg, Anderson, Lexington, and other multi-district counties. Greater state equalization efforts would take some of the pressure off multi-district counties for internal revenue sharing, although the need for coordination would remain.

Whose Schools Are They?

The final question is a broad issue of governance. To whom do the schools belong—the state, the county, the district? Or, more precisely, which group of citizens should have the greatest influence over how much is spent and how school districts are organized and managed—the citizens and taxpayers of the state, the county, or the district? In South Carolina, the answer is the state. In fiscal matters, the state provides much of the funding and regulates the property tax, including assessment and mill rates. At the local level, fiscal decisions are exercised in a variety of different ways. Some school boards have a large degree of fiscal autonomy, while others are answerable to the county council, the county board of education, or the legislative delegation.

However, the focus in this paper is not fiscal governance but structural questions about how school districts are organized and managed. Decisions about structural issues are exercised through the legislative delegation and the largely automatic consent of their fellow legislators. Legislative delegations often choose to seek input from their constituents but are not required to do so. Recent controversial decisions about the structure and authority of the school board have been made in this manner in Pickens, Sumter, and Fairfield Counties.

There is some merit in giving the state a larger degree of control since they finance about 50% of education, but that should not lead to the exclusion of the voice of those who provide a hefty 40% of the operating funds and most of the funds for school construction--local citizens, firms and taxpayers. A sense of ownership of local public schools is important in encouraging support for quality public education among not only parents of students but other taxpayers as well. It is possible to share the control of school districts between the state and local levels in

many ways, including the restoration of county boards, the delegation of powers, expanded intervention authority for the state Department of Education, and the use of referenda in deciding questions of organization and governance such as the makeup of district boards and the redrawing of district lines. That question of sharing control is a critical one as we move farther into the 21st century and a deeper recognition of the centrality of investing in our children for the state's future economic development and quality of life.

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