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ABSTRACT

An overview of the history of rural school consolidation in north central Iowa reveals that by 1994, 9 of the 10 high schools in towns of less than 500 in 1940 had closed, and 3 of the 5 high schools in towns with populations of 500-999 had closed. However, all three towns with populations over 1,000 in 1940 had high schools in 1993-94. This down-sizing trend is evident in all areas of Iowa in that the number of towns with a high school decreased to 727 in 1950, to 419 in 1970, and to 359 in 1990. This study examined whether a greater percentage of incorporated towns in Iowa with a high school had a population increase, compared to towns without a high school during the same decades. During 1930-50, rural areas lost population, but the state gained and the number of places with high schools did not change. During 1950-70, population trends were the same, but a greater number of places lost their high schools to consolidation. During 1970-90, the state lost population, and the number of communities without a high school continued to increase. Data analysis revealed that half the communities with a high school gained a significant amount (5 percent or more) of population over 2 or more decades, and within the same time frame, three-fourths of communities without a high school were losing population. This study concludes that a community without a high school loses population faster when compared to all the towns losing population during the same time period. Contains seven references. (LP)

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IS THERE LIFE IN TOWN AFTER THE DEATH OF THE HIGH SCHOOL?

OR

HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE POPULATION OF MIDWEST TOWNS

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"Is there LIFE in TOWN after the DEATH of the High School?"
or
HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE POPULATION OF MIDWEST TOWNS

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Life, for youth, begins with high school. 100 years ago that was not true in rural areas as few farm children had any opportunity to attend more than their one room school. But in 1897 that began to change as the first Consolidated High School, west of the Mississippi River, was established. The farm and country people in the Mid-West wanted their children and youth to have both a grade school and a high school. The Consolidated District, well known in eastern states, came across the Mississippi River with the decision of school leaders in Buffalo Township, Winnebago County, Iowa. (Dreier 1973) This first High School for farm youth west of the Mississippi river was located in north central Iowa six miles south of the Minnesota line.

In 1900 Buffalo Center had become a town of 875 and in 1930 the population was 911. Within a 25 mile radius of Buffalo Center, by the 1930's and 1940's, were 17 high schools and six of the high schools were in consolidated districts. See Figure 1. North Central Iowa Area of 25 Mile Radius of Buffalo Center, Iowa.

In the last 50 years (1940 -1990) the population of Buffalo Center has changed from 911 to 1081. However it was 1233 in 1980. This loss of 12.3 percent in one decade must be noted along with the 50 year increase of 18.7 percent. What has happened to the population of other places with high schools? What may happen to Buffalo Center and it's high school in the decades ahead?

I. EARLY CHANGES IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS

The rural (Consolidated District) high school brought together the youth from one village, town or city and the surrounding farm area. The big push for Consolidation in Iowa came between 1912 and 1922. During this time over 500 such districts were formed. Five were in a 25 mile radius of Number ONE Buffalo Center. One other town had gathered the township around it to become a Consolidated Township District and one had been formed around a village that was not incorporated and its population was not known. Another town had only a Catholic Parochial High School. The 10 other high schools were in districts that were "Independent", the towns did not serve the one-room schools around them.

The population grew in some towns and cities following World War II while the number of farms declined and the farm population decreased. There was also the desire for property tax support from every student enrolled. The

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Iowa General Assembly responded by creating a new school district which would include all the land where its grade and high school students lived. The one room school districts were dissolved and the land become part of the new high school district.

The new school district, created by State Law in 1953, authorized town and farm people to vote and establish a "Community School District". The directors used the schools as needed, could relocate classes, and/or build new elementary and high schools.

Unlike the earlier Iowa Consolidated School Laws, before World War I, a minimum number of students were required before the new district could be created. The new Community District added one-teacher school districts the high school districts which included villages or towns. The minimum enrollment of 300 students, K through 12 grades, was usually exceeded. The resulting Community District would collect all 9th to 12th grade students into one high school in one town, the middle school in another place (usually in a former high school), and gather the non-graded and graded pupils into one elementary school in village or town.

The very last Consolidated Districts were formed in Iowa during the late 1940's and early 1950's. As the student enrollment have dropped the voting into Community Districts has continued. This closed some high schools buildings as well as middle and elementary units in villages, towns and cities. The earlier Consolidation law had begun the closing of the one-teacher schools. No public one-room school districts existed after the decade of the 1960's in Iowa.

It the desire of every village, town, and city to maintain its own high school, or at least a school. The popular wisdom is that a place without a high school is dead or is dieing. Main Street amd County Seat Towns believe they are doomed to loose their business if in a combination of school districts "their" high school does not contintue to be located in "their" town. The last sections of this paper will look at this wisdom.

II. HIGH SCHOOLS AND POPULATION CHANGES OF PLACES IN THE BUFFALO CENTER AREA

Between 1930 and 1950 the high schools did not change in any of the 22 places in this area. One of the five unincorporated places had a consolidated high school. All but one of the 17 towns increased their population between 1930 and 1950. The smallest town, Lone Rock with 159 people gained 18.2 percent by 1950. Only the town of Scarsville lost population, 27 people or 23.7 per cent, but not its high school. The third smallest place, Leland, did not have a high school and grew from 164 to 209 people. Leland is 7 miles north of Forest City, largest place in Winnebago County. Between 1930 and 1950 this county seat grew into city status, from 2,016 to 2,766 people, or by 37 per cent.

During the decades between 1950 and 1970 all the one-teacher schools and four of the high schools closed in this north central Iowa area with a 25 mile radius. Half of the towns, eight, lost population. The high school in the consolidated district around the unincorporated place closed. Three incorporated towns lost their high school and population. Three other

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villages, under 500, with high schools, lost population. Two of the five towns with high schools also lost population.

One of the small towns gaining population one was Leland, which never had a high school. The other had voted in the are around it to change from a Town Independent to a Township Consolidated School District. Each of the three largest towns increased population by five per cent or more.

Between 1970 and 1990 the population of the state, both in rural and urban areas, increased very little. In this area of 17 incorporated towns 11 lost population, five did not have high schools and six did. Of the six gaining population three were over 1,000 in population. Leland, without a high school gained from 223 to 311. Even smaller, Lone Rock gained from 166 to 185. Titonka, still with a Consolidated Township High School, gained from 599 to 612. The Buffalo Center Consolidated school district had added one-teacher districts in the late 1950's and 1960'2s (like the other towns) to become a Community High School. Before 1990 the Rake Community joined to for the Buffalo Center/Rake Community School with the high in Buffalo Center. However the town had an eight per cent decrease in population between 1970 and 1990.

III. RECENT CHANGES IN THESE TOWNS AND THEIR HIGH SCHOOLS

In the years between the IOWA EDUCATIONAL DIRECTORY OF 1989-90 and the 1993-94 edition many changes in these towns with high schools are noted.

The high school district of Lakota joined with Buffalo Center which had earlier combined with Rake. Ledyard, the smallest town in 1930 (245) and in 1990 (164) voted to become part of another district and its high school is in Swea City (634). Titonka (612) and Thompson (498) arranged for their high school students to attend the Buffalo Center-Rake Lokata Community School District with the high school in Buffalo Center (1081).

Table I summarizes the changes in number of high school by size of town in this North Central Area of Iowa. By 1993-94 nine of the 10 high schools in towns of less than 500 in 1940 had closed. Two of the five towns with poplation of 500 to 999 had high schools in 1993. One of these had experienced population gains making it over 1,000 since the 1950 Census. All the three towns of over 1,000 in 1940 had high schools in 1993-94.

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TABLE I. CHANGES IN NUMBER OF HIGH SCHOOLS IN AN AREA OF NORTH CENTRAL IOWA, 1930 - 1993.

Size of Community (1940)		1930	1950	1970	1990	1993
		Number of Communities Number of High Schools				
Unincorporated		5	5	5	5	5
		1	1	0	0	0
Less than 500 people		9	9	9	9	9
		8	8	5	1	0
Between 500 and 999 people		5	5	5	5	5
		5	5	5	3	2 #
Over 1,000 people		3	3	3	3	3
		3	3	3	3	3
Total Incorporated Places	18					
Total High Schools		17	17	13	7	5

1990 population of these places is 1,081 and 634

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IV. POPULATION CHANGES IN IOWA AND HIGH SCHOOLS BY DECADES

A basic concern of the villages, towns, and cities in Iowa, and most of the midwest is survival. Will the town continue because the people move, the families grow smaller, the farms grow larger, and employment is somewhere else?

Since people are essential will familes and workers live here if there is no high school in the town? Unintentionally the distiction has been made between "schools" and "schooling" (DeYoung and Howley, 1990). A physical operating high school is seen as essential even though by combining with another place schooling will be provided by the larger district should the high school and or other schools close due to the combining of districts. The popular wisdom is that the village or town with/out a high school will not grow but that a place will grow as long as it contains a high school.

None of the unincorporated places and none of the places with a 1940 population of under 500, nine in number in this north central Iowa area, are in 1993 operating their own high school. In the 500 to 999 population range only 2 of the 5 so identified in 1930 and 1950 have high schools in 1993. The high school changes of Iowa towns with less than 1,000 people can be seen as critical. Before looking at that group, however, what has been the general trend in the population of Iowa over the past decades, and what has been happening to the number of districts in Iowa with high schools in these same decades.

The state's population by decades since 1930 has had a growth of less than five per cent every ten years. Specifically the decade growth to 1930 was 2.8, to 1940 was 2.7, to 1950 was 3.3, to 1960 was 5.2, to 1970 was 2.4, to 1980 was 3.1, and to 1990 was a minus 4.7 per cent. (World 1992)

The number of places with high schools was stable at around 900 in the early decades of this century and until 1950. The Community School law requiring each district to extend its schooling to all the rural areas it served (for the most part closing all the one room schools) and combining high schools if desired or needed to bring the total K-12 enrollment to at least 300 students. (Dreier 1967) The number of towns with a high schools decreased to 727 in 1950, to 419 in 1970, and to 359 in 1990. (Iowa 1993)

V. HYPOTHESIS AND PROCESS

The hypothesis of the study is that a greater per cent of the incorporated places in Iowa with a high school had a population increase that did places in general during the same decades and that places with/out a high school will lose population more often that such places in general lose population during the same time.

The process used the U.S. Census population for each place in the state of Iowa for each decade. The population of each place in Iowa was placed in the computor for every decade from 1930 to 1990 and in each decade the town was identified as having a high school or as a place without a high school.

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TABLE II. Do Iowa towns WITH HIGH SCHOOLS more often gain population (5 per cent or more) than do all places gaining population in the same decades?

Time Periods	1930 - 50	1950 - 70	1970 - 90	1950 - 90
I. All Incorporated Places In Iowa				
Number	907	926	947	926
WITH H.S.	353/727	221/419	138/359	206/359
Gaining	426/907	394/926	308/94[illegible]	359/926
Ratio in Per Cent	48.5/47.0	52.7/42.5	38.4/3[illegible].5	57.4/38.8
II. All Iowa Towns with 1950 Population Between 500 and 999 People				
Number	205	205	205	205
WITH H.S.	95/199	68/134	49/107	33/98
Gaining	100/205	102/205	75/205	104/205
Ratio in Per Cent	47.7/48.3	50.7/49.8	45.8/36.6	33.7/50.7
III. All Incorporated Places in North Central Iowa Area of 25 Mile Radius				
Number	18	18	18	18
WITH H.S.	15/17	6/14	2/6	4/8
Gaining	6/18	7/18	4/18	7/18
Ratio in Per Cent	88.2/88.9	42.9/38.0	33.3/22.2	50.0/38.9

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TABLE III. Do Iowa Towns WITH/OUT a HIGH SCHOOL more often lose population (5 percent or more) than do all towns losing population in the same decades?

Time Periods	1930 - 50	1950 - 70	1970 - 90	1950 - 90
I. All Incorporated Places in Iowa				
Number	907	926	947	926
W/O high schools	69/180	266/507	321/588	340/569
Losing	276/907	374/926	438/947	441/926
Ratio in Per Cent	38.3/30.4	52.5/40.4	54.6/46.3	59.8/47.6
II. All Iowa Towns with 1950 Population 500 to 900 People				
Number	205	205	205	205
W/O high school	0/6	27/71	48/98	50/98
Losing	50/205	58/205	74/205	75/205
Ratio in Per Cent	0/24.4	38.0/28.3	49.0/36.1	51.0/36.6
III. All Incorporated Places in a North Central Iowa Area of 25 Mile Radius				
Number	18	18	18	18
W/O high school	1/0	4/8	6/12	6/12
Losing	1/18	8/18	9/18	8/18
Ratio in Per Cent	0/5.5	50.0/44.4	50.0/50.0	50.0/44.4

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TABLE IV. SUMMARY OF PER CENT OF PLACES WITH HIGH SCHOOLS AND POPULATION GAINS AND PLACES WITH/OUT A HIGH SCHOOL AND POPULATION LOSES

Difference in Number of Places With Presence or Absence of High School and Significant Gain or Lose of Population Over Periods of Two or More Decades

Decades	Group	WITH High School	WITH/OUT High School
I. 1930 - 50			
	All Iowa (900)	+ 1.5	+ 8
	500 to 999 (205)	- .6	-
	North Central (18)	- .7	-
II. 1950 - 70			
	All Iowa (900)	+10	+12
	500 to 999 (205)	+ 1	+10
	North Central (18)	+ 4	+ 6
III. 1970 - 90			
	All Iowa (900)	+ 6	+ 8
	500 to 999 (205)	+ 9	+13
	North Central (18)	+11	0
IV. 1950 - 90			
	All Iowa (900)	+12	+12
	500 to 999 (205)	-17	+14
	North Central (18)	+11	+ 6

TOTAL Expected Differences Over 5 Per Cent

All Places in Iowa (900)	3	4
All Places 500 to 999 (205)	1	3
North Central Sample (18)	2	2
Grand Total of 12 comparisons	6	9

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Three groups of places were examined. I. All the incorporated villages, towns, and cities in the state of Iowa. II. All the places in Iowa with a 1950 population between 500 and 999. III. The North Central Iowa area with a radius of 25 miles around the site of the first town to combine with its one room school units west of the Mississippi River. This area included 18 incorporated place shown in Figure 1. Its changes in location of high schools was shown in Table I from the 1930 -50 to the 1970-90 decades.

Four time periods were examined. In the 1930-1950 decade the rural area lost population but the state gained and the number of places with high schools did not change. During the 1950-1970 decades the population trends were the same but a great number of places lost their high school to receive schooling for their youth from another town. In the 1970-1990 decades the state lost population during the last ten years and the number of places with/out a high school continued to increase. The fourth period was included to compare a 40 year time span, 1950 to 1990, with the other 20 year changes.

What is a significant population gain or lose? To begin with the census was examined over periods of at least two decades. The population of the state of Iowa in 1930 to 1950 gained 6.0 per cent, from 1950 to 1970 gained 7.6 per cent, from 1970 to 1990 lost 1.6 percent, and from 1950 to 1990 gained 6.0 per cent. It was decided that a place had a significant gain in population if the amount was 5 per cent or more and significant lose in numbers of people if their census number decreased by 5 per cent or more over the same two decades (four decades in the last comparison).

VI. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY AND CONCLUSION

Table II. reports the number of incorporated places with a census population for the decade grew from 907 in 1950 to 926 in 1970 to 947 in 1990. The number of Iowa towns with a 1950 population was 205. Each of these towns was compared in all four times.

The per cent of places in the state of Iowa with high schools gaining 5 per cent or more population in Table II.is compared with the per cent of places in the state gaining 5 per cent or more population. In part I (all places) this was 48.5 compared with 47.0 per cent, a difference of only 1.5 per cent. In the same decades the small towns had a 47.7 to 48.3 ratio showing that a smaller per cent of towns of that size with high schools gained than did the group in the state. This kind of difference was also found in the sample of 18 places in North Central Iowa, a 88.2 to 88.9 ratio in 1930-50.

Table III. reports the comparison of places losing 5 per cent or more of the population and whether or not the per cent of non high school towns losing was greater than that for the general group. Among the 205 small towns - none or 0 of the towns with/out high schools lost 5 per cent or more between 1930 and 1950 while 24.4 per cent of all towns of that size lost a significant number of people. The zero renders this no comparison. In the same way among the North Central Iowa sample - the only town with/out a high school did not lose population, another zero comparison. One among all 18 places, or 5.6 per cent lost population.

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Table IV. has two columns comparing the differences found in places GAINING with a high school and LOSING population with/out a high school. In this rude, crude, simple method (if it can be called a method) in half the cases those place with a high school gained a significant amount of population. In the same time frame it was found that three-fourths of the comparisons found the places WITH/OUT a high school losing population.

Is this significant? Earlier a more complex and uncertain relationship was reported between changes in high school status and the population of the town. (Goudy 1994) This paper, however, does seem to support the second part of the hypothesis that a town with/out a high school loses population faster than do all the towns losing population in that time period.

P.S. The October 18th DES MOINES REGISTER (1994) quoted Diagonal Superintendent. "There is a sense among a lot of people that perhaps we've weathered the worst of it and are on our way back." (During the late 50's the Diagonal area had over 300 students, became a Community School District, and has maintained its own high school.) In the past year the K-12 enrollment in their town of 298, grew by 18 students or 11 per cent from 149 to 167. For the sixth year the total public school enrollment of the state increased with 44 per cent of the new students attending districts with a K-12 enrollment of less than 1,000.

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