

Follow-up Resources Forwarded by Education Commission of the States in Response to Testimony Questions on February 23, 2024

- 1) [50-State Comparison: Private School Choice](#) - This 50-state comparison provides comprehensive information on private school choice policies specific to vouchers, education savings accounts and tax credit scholarships.
- 2) Research and Best Practices - There are few large-scale studies on the effects of consolidation, in part because research suggests that consolidations have become more uncommon in recent decades. Moreover, many studies may focus solely on the financial efficiency aspects of consolidation and do not explore the effects on student achievement, school and community climate, or teacher retention. As a result, our analysis was primarily limited to case studies involving a relatively small number of districts. Many of these studies were conducted following the economic downturn in the early 2010s, when some states considered consolidated schools or districts in response to declining revenue. Below is a synthesis of our review of research and best practices.

Financial efficiency

One of the driving motivations behind consolidation is to achieve lower administrative costs through economies of scale. Economic research [indicates](#) that optimal cost savings is expected to accrue when smaller districts consolidate; however, [optimal district size](#) varies greatly based on geography and context. Some critics of these cost function models argue that the projected savings may be overestimated, and case studies in [Arkansas](#), [Iowa](#), and [Nebraska](#) indicated that the projected cost savings were not achieved.

Student achievement

While it is difficult to isolate the effects of consolidation on student achievement, some case studies have examined this relationship. Some cost modeling of consolidation has hypothesized that due to cost savings from economies of scale, more resources may be available to direct to student needs, thus bolstering student achievement. In a [literature review](#) conducted by the Connecticut School Finance Project, the authors conclude that the research does not indicate conclusively that consolidation has either a positive or negative effect on student achievement. Some qualitative case studies have suggested that consolidation may increase access to educational opportunities such as Advanced Placement, gifted and talented programming, and expanded pre-K and kindergarten offerings.

Best practices

Best practices [research](#) indicates that consolidation is most likely to be successful when initiated at the local level with input and support from community stakeholders. Recommendations include:

- Identify the expected benefits and costs of consolidation.
- Examine cases individually, rather than through statewide mandates.

- Solicit input from a variety of stakeholders including students, parents, and teachers.
 - Consider alternative approaches to achieve cost savings and shared services.
 - Provide funding for initial costs if consolidation occurs.
- 3) Examples of other states requiring voter approval for consolidation.
- **Arizona** ([Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 15-459](#)) requires the approval of the majority of persons voting in each of the affected counties to approve the consolidation. The proposal can be brought forward by the governing board of the school district or 10% of the qualified electors in the school district.
 - **Indiana** ([Ind. Code Ann. § 20-23-6-6](#)) requires majority of voters in each of the proposed consolidation school corporations to approve the consolidation. The proposal can be initiated by the governing body of each school corporation putting forward a resolution or by 20% of the registered voters signing a petition.
 - **Minnesota** ([Minn. Stat. Ann. § 123A.48](#)) requires the approval of the majority of the votes cast on the question of consolidation. The proposal for consolidation can be brought forward by resolution of a board in the area proposed for consolidation or by a petition of 25% of the voters in the area.
- 4) [2021 Summary of Class Size Reduction Policies](#) – Legislative examples of class size reduction policies enacted by featured states. This summary includes additional resources that lead to trends in class size policy across the country, as well as excerpts from said policy.