



POLICY BRIEF

The Politics of Educational Change: What Can We Learn from the School Consolidation Acts of 1961 and 1963?

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As the Pennsylvania General Assembly grapples with the difficult task of reforming the formula for supporting the Commonwealth's 500 public school districts, a century-old question has arisen: Do we have too many school districts? Could we make better use of limited resources if the legislature were to require, or incentivize, consolidation? Whatever the policy or fiscal merits of school consolidation – and there have been recent studies by legislative service agencies suggesting that savings are possible and other studies arguing the opposite – almost everyone agrees that school consolidation is politically difficult. Yet, in the early 1960s, under two successive governors, Democrat David Lawrence and Republican William Scranton, the Pennsylvania General Assembly dramatically reduced the number of school districts from more than 2,000 to roughly the 500 we have today. How and why did this happen? We could find no good case studies of the politics of school consolidation, so Temple's Center on Regional Politics (CORP) asked Wes Leckrone, associate professor of political science at Widener University, to produce one.

Introduction

Over the course of the 1960s, Pennsylvania saw a precipitous drop in the number of school districts. This was the consequence of consolidation laws passed in 1961 and 1963. Deliberation on school district consolidation was contentious and involved debates over “the centralizing movements of governing bodies and the decentralizing interests of local communities seeking to retain their identity” (Post and Stambach 1999: 114). This emphasis on local versus state control was considered one of the primary tensions in education policy during the waves of school consolidation in post-World War II America (Bailey, et al. 1962: 5-12). This policy brief examines the impetus for school district consolidation, the policy debates leading to the passage of the two laws in the early 1960s, and lessons that may be learned from these experiences. The topic takes on contemporary importance given recent interest by some state policymakers in considering further consolidations as one means of making more efficient use of limited financial and educational resources.¹

The Pressing Need for School Consolidation

Pennsylvania's attempts at school consolidation were part of a national trend aimed at improving education in mid-twentieth century America. Demographic and economic changes, combined with Cold War international competition and rapidly rising costs of education, pushed politicians to consolidate school districts. Traditionally small, localistic schools symbolized American individualism and governmental decentralization.² Education experts were able to change the tone of this narrative. They argued that larger school districts offering comprehensive educational services were necessary for the United States to retain its economic and military dominance in the post-World War II international order.

Four major trends helped to build a consensus on the need for consolidation of school districts. First, the post-World War II economy required skilled labor to accommodate new technology and increasingly complex social, political, and business organizations. This necessitated that schools teach a full range of college preparatory classes, particularly in science and math. Second, policymakers were concerned with the ability of the United States to

1. See for example Governor Edward G. Rendell's proposal in his 2009 budget message for consolidation to “no more than 100” districts and two recent studies by legislative service agencies: “Is Bigger Better: A Comparison of Rural School Districts,” Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 2006, and “A Study of the Cost Effectiveness of Consolidating Pennsylvania School Districts,” Volumes I and II, Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, 2007. No consolidations resulted from Rendell's proposal or the two studies. The governor's budget message and the two legislative reports are accessible through Temple University's Pennsylvania Policy Database (www.temple.edu/papolicy).

2. The so-called “little red school house” was then, and remains, a powerful image of the traditional and enduring American commitment to local control of schools (Zimmerman 2009; Atherton 2014).

match the technological advances of the Soviet Bloc. The launch of Sputnik in 1957 focused attention on the need to produce a new generation of better educated citizens. Third, the educational infrastructure needed to meet these demands required larger, better staffed schools. New services such as guidance counseling, health services and libraries, combined with the need to offer more varied instruction to advanced and remedial students, could only be accomplished with larger economies of scale. Finally, the costs of providing public education rose dramatically as a consequence of these reforms. Expenditures on education in Pennsylvania grew as an overall proportion of the state budget and showed no signs of abating. The pressure of accommodating more school-age Baby Boom children added to the need to stabilize spending.

Legislative History Proved School Consolidation Mandate Necessary

“Total voluntary reorganization of school districts has been state policy for decades and it has failed utterly...The lesson is plain. There can be no true reorganization of school districts unless it is mandated by the state.” - Governor’s Committee on Education, Final Report, 1961

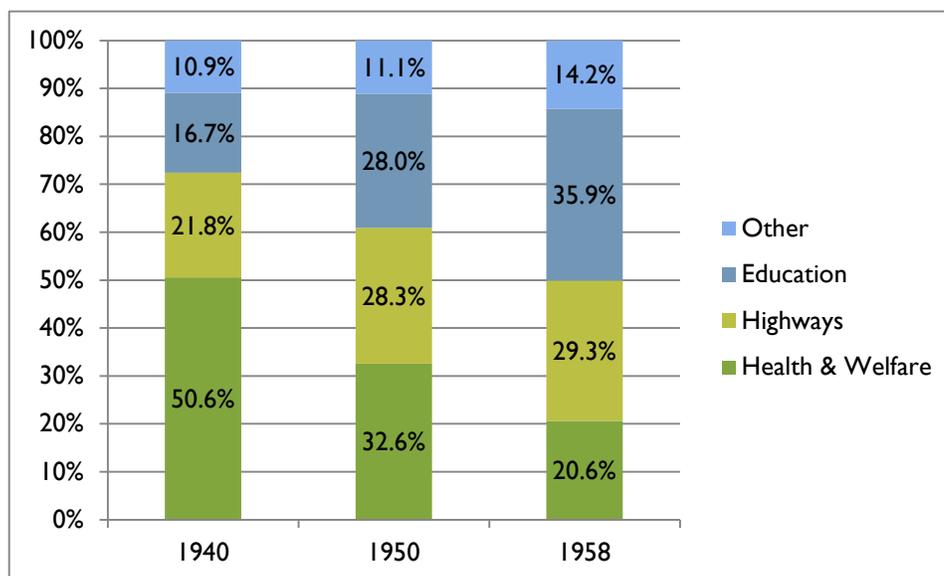
Most school consolidation legislation in Pennsylvania prior to 1961 attempted to provide voluntary incentives to encourage larger schools and school districts to merge. These efforts spurred little action as the state shed only 322 districts by 1960.

School districts were offered two methods to fully consolidate. “Unions” were instituted in 1911 as a way to consolidate two or more school districts. However, the mechanism for achieving union inhibited consolidation because it required “a petition signed by a majority of the school directors of each district desiring union, approval by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and finally an affirmative vote [by the electorate] in each district concerned” (Governor’s Committee on Education 1960(b): 15). The process was streamlined with the creation of “merged” school districts in 1937. This shifted initiation to the county board of school directors. It also allowed consolidation even if the voters of all districts did not approve of the plan. Districts with a positive vote were allowed to merge and the non-approving districts remained independent. Consequently consolidation could not be voided by the no vote of just one district.

Only 131 union or merged districts had formed by 1960. Most school districts opted for cooperation with other districts rather than full consolidation. “Jointures” allowed multiple districts to function as one unit while still retaining their own identity. They were governed by a Joint Board which was composed of the members of each district’s school board. Most importantly, each district retained its own budget and funding stream through its own tax system. Most school districts funded the jointure based on their proportion of students in the new system. Jointures were initially authorized under legislation passed in 1854 (Governor’s Committee on Education, Task Force 2 – Reorganization of School Districts, 1961: 14). However, they gained popularity after Act 361 of 1947 provided financial incentives for joint high schools (1949) and elementary schools (1951). By 1960, 88% of districts in jointures opted for agreements that covered grades 1-12 (Governor’s Committee on Education 1960(b): 18-19).

The importance of jointures to the success of school district reorganization in the 1960s should not be underestimated. One commentator stated that “[c]ounties, in most cases, simply made reorganized school districts out of jointures” after 1963 (Lundin 1973: 276).³

Pennsylvania State Expenditures by Program 1940-1958



Source: Governor’s Committee on Education 1960(a):8.

3. This observation was from Severino Stefanon, Secretary to the State Board of Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education. See also Lundin 1973:142.

School District Reorganization in Pennsylvania 1900-1960

School Year	Number of Districts	Union	Merged	Number of Joint Boards	Number of Districts in Joint Boards
1900	2510				
1910	2599				
1920	2590				
1930	2585	2			
1940	2552	4			
1945	2544	5		97	219
1950	2530	11		190	557
1955	2461	33	30	430	1651
1960	2277	71	60	436	1835

Source: Adapted from Governor’s Committee on Education, Task Force 2 – Reorganization of School Districts 1961: 14a, 17.

Governor Lawrence and the Passage of Act 561 of 1961

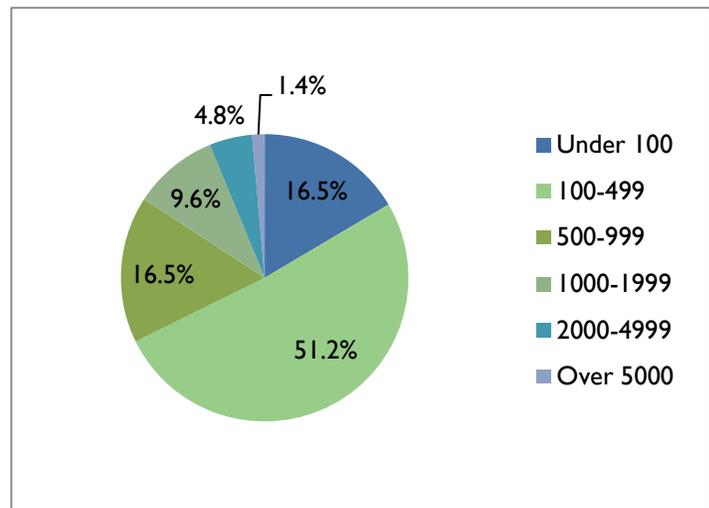
Governor David Lawrence created the Governor’s Committee on Education in 1960 to study the state of education in Pennsylvania and recommend comprehensive reforms. The committee’s final report produced 145 proposals addressing issues such as increased pay for teachers, curricular change, increased state funding for schools and an overhaul of the state’s higher education institutions. Lawrence pushed for wholesale reform. However, the legislature balked at new revenue to fund the initiatives and school consolidation was the only major reform to pass (Beers 1980: 263-265; Weber 1988: 356-357).

Governor Lawrence signed Act 561 into law in September 1961. Proponents convinced a majority of the General Assembly that the larger districts would provide a broader college preparatory curriculum, more academic and administrative services, and a more personalized educational experience for students. Educational opportunity could be expanded to everyone while at the same time saving money by stretching state and local tax dollars further.

The debate over school consolidation was contentious. The biggest controversy surrounded the size of newly consolidated school districts. A special task force of the Governor’s Committee pushed for a 10,000 student minimum which would have resulted in 172 school districts (Governor’s Committee on Education, Task Force 2 – Reorganization of School Districts 1960(b)). By the time the act

passed, this number had been lowered to 4000 students. Even this was not a hard cap as the minimum could be lowered to 2500 after accounting for “factors of topography, pupil population, socio-economic characteristics, facility of transportation of pupils, utilization of existing school buildings, existing administrative units and potential population changes” (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Instruction 1962:3).⁴ The act would have resulted in approximately 300 school districts, down from the 2277 existing in 1960 (Pennsylvania Economy League 1962).

Pennsylvania School Districts by Student Population 1958-59



Source: Christie 1962: 7.

Act 561 included a mandate for consolidation that had been avoided in previous legislation. However, ultimate responsibility for determining the details of consolidation was left up to the county board of school directors, in consultation with local school directors and administrators. The law was fairly conservative in that the creation of new school districts could only come via consolidation, not a wholesale geographical redesign. Existing school districts could not be split apart and jointures could not be dissolved without the consent of all cooperating districts.⁵ Finally, Act 561 only mandated the consolidation of administrative units and not schools within the newly created districts. Consequently, while it mandated that each district have at least one high school and elementary school, it did not mandate that small schools be consolidated. The new districts, of course, could close school buildings, and opponents of consolidation probably foresaw that they would have less success in opposing school closures in a larger district.

4. Small population counties of the 7th and 8th Classes were exempt from this limit. However, they were still required to submit planning documents.

5. School districts could be divided if the parts were “first established as an independent school district, or the territory [was] annexed to a political subdivision of the administrative unit and the annexation [was] approved for school purposes” (Christie 1962:26).

Key Components of Act 561 of 1961

Size of District	A minimum of 4000 students. Could be lowered to 2500 if the State Council of Education ruled it necessary due to one or more of the following: Topography, pupil population, socio-economic characteristics, transportation, existing buildings, the structure of existing districts, or population.
Control Over Consolidation	County boards of school directors required to draw up plans in consultation with school districts and local schools. State Council of Education responsible for approving plans. Rejected plans sent back to county for revisions. If there is no approved plan for a county by January 1, 1964, the Department of Public Instruction would create one.
Territorial Integrity Preserved	School districts could not be divided up in the consolidation process without their consent. Districts yoked by jointures could not be split apart involuntarily.
Attendance Areas	Decisions about closures, mergers and construction of specific schools remained local.

Source: Adapted from Christie 1962: 18-23.

Opposition to School Consolidation

Opposition to school district consolidation was strong throughout the debate leading to the passage of Act 561 and reached a crescendo during the campaign year of 1962. It was a major issue in the governor’s race and was a contributing factor to Republicans taking control of both houses of the state legislature after the election. There were three primary sources of opposition: 1) those believing the legislation would result in increased costs with little benefit; 2) those concerned with loss of local control under the new system; and 3) critics of the implementation plan to carry out Act 561.

Many opponents were concerned that the increased services required of the newly combined school districts would result in higher costs and ultimately more taxation. Some affluent suburban districts opposed consolidation with urban districts because they believed it would result in increased taxes to subsidize poorer schools without receiving increases in their own educational quality. Critics from rural districts cited increased transportation costs as a result of combining districts in low population density areas. Some accounts suggest that fear of racial integration also was a factor in engendering opposition to consolidation, an effect that outlasted the history of these two acts.⁶

Those fearing loss of local control under the new law believed it was an attempt by a state bureaucracy to impose centralized regulations on locally controlled schools. Political and school district boundaries were often coterminous and many saw a loss of community identity and control if they were combined with neighboring jurisdictions. They also feared job loss as a consequence of administrative mergers.⁷

Finally, many consolidation supporters disagreed with specific provisions of Act 561. The requirement that all districts have 4000 students (or 2500 under certain circumstances) proved to be the most contentious issue. Opponents argued that size did not ensure quality and numerous districts provided evidence of their academic achievements. This led to a second problem with the legislation: there was no formal mechanism for individual school districts to contest forced mergers. County boards of school directors created the plans, which were then reviewed by the State Council of Education. If the plans were rejected the county would get a chance to make revisions. Absent an acceptable plan from the counties, the Council of Education would create its own plan for the county. Critics argued that this left no method of appeal for individual districts who believed they had the ability to achieve academically. Finally, the legislation was criticized because it did not offer guidance on some major issues affecting the newly consolidated issues. This included how to deal with old debt in the reconstituted districts, and teacher issues such as tenure and differing pay scales.

Governor Scranton and the Passage of Act 299 of 1963

Act 299 became a partisan issue in the Pennsylvania elections of 1962 with Republicans opposing the law and Democrats supporting it. Republican gubernatorial candidate William Scranton vowed to repeal and reform the legislation while his Democratic opponent, Richardson Dilworth, supported the implementation of the law in its existing form.

6. In 1966, State Senator Clarence Bell, R-Delaware, argued that school consolidation proponents wanted to create a metropolitan school district that would integrate Philadelphia’s schools (with large minority populations), with (mostly white) suburban districts, as had been urged by Richardson Dilworth, then president of the city’s school board, who had characterized the suburbs as “a white noose” around the city and its schools. As noted above, Dilworth’s support for Act 561 probably contributed to his defeat by William Scranton in the 1962 gubernatorial election (Cutler and D’Ignazio 2013). See also Lundin’s “School District Reorganization in Pennsylvania Between 1963 and 1971 and Its Effect on Racial Balance.”

7. Based on interviews, Leslie claims that some officials from small townships and boroughs opposed Act 561 because they believed it could lead to consolidation of municipalities (1970:117).

All county boards of school directors were required to submit consolidation plans by January 1, 1963 under Act 561. Upon being inaugurated Governor Scranton postponed this deadline while he and the new Republican controlled legislature replaced the 1961 legislation. During a speech on education to a joint session of the General Assembly in February 1963 Scranton stated: “Mandatory consolidation is necessary to improve the quality of education state-wide.” He offered new legislation that “preserves the principle of reorganization, while eliminating the weaknesses that wrecked Act 561.”⁸

Act 299, the School District Reorganization Act of 1963, was passed on August 8, 1963. The legislation resulted in three primary changes to the existing consolidation Act: 1) it made the 4000 student school district requirement a recommendation rather than a mandate; 2) it created an appeals process for aggrieved school districts; and 3) it clarified the legal details pertaining to the process of merging school districts (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Instruction 1963(b): 1).

A primary criticism of Act 561 was its reliance on a minimum of 4000 students in each school district. There were some exceptions to this rule, but even in those instances, the districts were mandated to stay above 2500 students. Act 299 kept the 4000 number as a goal, but provided no minimum number in the case of exceptions. These included the major exceptions present in the previous legislation: topography, future population growth, community characteristics and student transportation. However, two impor-

tant additions to the exceptions were added to Act 299. First, school districts that had the capability of providing a comprehensive program of elementary and secondary education could avoid the minimum. Second, the state Council of Education was required to automatically approve county reorganization plans if they contained

1) No unit with a pupil population less than that of the unit with the smallest pupil population in the last previous county-wide plan submitted to and approved by the State Council of Education prior to September 12, 1961, and 2) no more units than were in the last previous county-wide plan submitted to and approved by the State Council of Education prior to September 12, 1961 (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Instruction 1963(a):2).

The practical effect of this added language was that the 4000 student minimum was a goal. However, at the time of passage it was believed that Act 299 would still result in a reduction to 527 school districts by July 1, 1966 (Pennsylvania Economy League 1964).

Act 299 provided more procedural specificity than the legislation it replaced. It created an appeals process for school districts with objections to their county plans. It also provided details on issues such as the administrative governance of districts as they transitioned from the planning phase to final consolidation, how prior debt would be handled, and how state subsidies would be applied to the new districts.

Key Changes to Act 561 in Act 299 of 1963

<p>Minimum Size of School Districts</p>	<p>The recommended minimum remained 4000. However, there was no minimum of students in the event of an exception. The exceptions from Act 299 remained: Topography, pupil population, socio-economic characteristics, transportation, existing buildings, the structure of existing districts, or population.</p> <p>New exceptions: School districts that could provide a comprehensive program of education without achieving the minimum. If a county provided a plan with no district smaller than their most recent approved plan and a number of school districts equal to, or less than, that submitted in the plan.</p>
<p>Control over Consolidation</p>	<p>County boards of school directors remained in charge of the planning. However, the state had to approve of any plan where there was: No unit with a pupil population less than that of the smallest unit in the last county plan approved prior to September 12, 1961. And there were no more school districts than in the last plan.</p>
<p>Appeals Process for School Districts</p>	<p>Aggrieved school districts were given the right to provide objections to proposed county plans by petitioning the Department of Public Instruction. Aggrieved school districts were given the right to appeal approved county plans by petitioning the State Board of Education.</p>
<p>Details on Implementing the Consolidation of New School Districts</p>	<p>Act 561 provided little guidance on the process for consolidating school districts. Act 299 provided more specificity, including instructions for: The creation of “interim operating committees” to make decisions during creation of new school district. The process for paying off previous debt among the components of the new school districts. How existing state educational subsidies would be applied to the new districts.</p>

Source: Adapted from Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Instruction 1963(a) and 1963(b).

8. “Message on Education by Governor William W. Scranton Before a Joint Session of the General Assembly, February 12, 1963;” Governor William W. Scranton Papers, Manuscript Group 208, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

Lessons from the School Consolidation of the Early 1960s

Given the extraordinary fiscal pressures facing Pennsylvania's school districts, it seems likely that proposals to further consolidate school districts will recur in upcoming policy and budget debates.⁹ Indeed, consolidation has been proposed or studied in the last decade. Governor Edward G. Rendell proposed in his 2009 budget message a commission to study how to reduce the number of school districts to "no more than 100." Two recent studies by legislative service agencies pointed in opposite directions. In a 2006 study entitled "Is Bigger Better: A Comparison of Rural School Districts," The Center for Rural Pennsylvania raised doubts about the cost and educational effectiveness of rural school consolidations. In a two-volume 2007 report entitled "A Study of the Cost Effectiveness of Consolidating Pennsylvania School Districts," the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee suggested economies of scale were available when consolidating districts up to a student population of 3000. No consolidations resulted from Rendell's proposal or the two studies.¹⁰

History suggests that strong gubernatorial leadership is needed to accomplish dramatic changes such as school consolidation. Governors Lawrence and Scranton are generally regarded as two of the most effective chief executives in the Commonwealth's post-World War II era. Rendell proposed further consolidation, but his priority was enacting a school funding scheme based on "costing out" the resources needed to provide every student with an "adequate" education, whereas for Lawrence and Scranton, consolidation was a much higher priority.

Atherton's history (2014) shows that school funding reform traditionally has had bipartisan roots and that school consolidation was exceptional in being executed in back-to-back sessions of unified government. But even this case history suggests that bipartisanship is important if structural reforms are to endure. Scranton, a Republican, campaigned against the plan enacted by his Democratic predecessor, and control of the legislature also shifted, but Scranton essentially accepted its numeral goals and proposed modifications that defused much of the controversy.

The reorganization laws of 1961 and 1963 were successful in reducing the number of school districts from 2277 in 1960 to 669 by 1970 and eventually down to 500 (Pennsylvania School Boards Association 2009: 6). This number was significantly more than the 172 districts initially recommended by a task force of the Governor's Committee on Education. However, compromises were necessary to usher the legislation through the political process.

In many respects Acts 561 and 299 were products of their historical time period. They were part of a national wave of school consolidations brought on by economic change, the Cold War and the Baby Boom. Despite this, several lessons from the debates surrounding their passage could help inform contemporary debate on school district consolidation.

Consolidation was achieved through a state mandate because earlier legislation encouraging mergers and unions failed to lower the number of school districts in any meaningful way. However, the individual plans for consolidation were the product of county boards of school directors. The 1963 legislation also provided a mechanism for individual school districts to appeal merger decisions. Consolidation has always been a struggle between the centralizing tendencies of state bureaucracy and the educational tradition of local control. Avoiding a top-down state imposed comprehensive plan of consolidation was a key to the legislation's passage.¹¹

The legislation achieved consolidation through merging existing jointures or school districts rather than radically redesigning the educational system. One of the prime arguments against consolidation was the loss of a sense of community when schools or districts were merged. By necessity, consolidation causes disruption. However, these acts tried to mitigate this argument by merging intact communities into new districts rather than breaking them up. This has relevance to contemporary discussions of school consolidation since the community schools model of reform has revived the argument that schools are sources of social capital for communities.

Money serves as an inducement for action. Starting with the elimination of one-room school houses straight through to the 1961 and 1963 acts, additional funding to

9. As this policy brief goes to press, Representative Timothy Mahoney, D-Fayette, is introducing legislation calling for consolidation through the establishment of county-wide school boards. Senator John Wozniak, D-Cambria, introduced a bill calling for an update to previous consolidation studies.

10. Governor Rendell's budget message and the two legislative studies are accessible through Temple University's Pennsylvania Policy Database Project (www.temple.edu/papolicy). Two other recent studies assessed the financial impact of consolidating school districts along county lines. One study concluded that consolidation would save money for Fayette County (Education Management Group 2011) and the other that consolidation would drive up costs for York County (Independent Fiscal Office 2014).

11. The current process for school district consolidation remains decentralized. Plans for mergers are developed by the school districts. Each participating school district board must then approve the plan by a majority vote, after which it is sent to the State Board of Education for approval (Public School Code of 1949, Article II, Section 224, See also Pennsylvania Economy League 2009).

school districts stimulated school closures and cooperation with other districts. Financial incentives in the 1950s encouraged the jointures which eventually became most of the consolidated school districts, although a commission appointed by Governor George Leader apparently concluded that they were ineffective (Cutler and D'Ignazio 2013). Funding was also included in Acts 561 and 299 to make the legislation more palatable to school districts. Given this history, future comprehensive legislation providing more funding for education could also include provisions for consolidation.

Anyone taking a look at the dramatic decrease in the number of school districts in Pennsylvania during the 1960s would assume that there was a radical policy change. However, school district consolidation was actually a long process that had its roots in legislation passed in 1947. Throughout the 1950s, counties were required to draw up plans for consolidation and incentives were meted out for mergers, unions, and jointures. Most of the consolidation that took place post-1963 involved the merger of school districts that were already coordinating through jointures. Act 299 succeeded where Act 561 failed because it built on the county plans that were developed over the course of the 1950s. This incremental approach of moving school districts through stages of cooperation prior to consolidation proved to be successful. Although Act 299 consummated the political struggle to consolidate school districts, which is the focus of this case history, even this legislation was not the end of the story. The act provided procedures to be followed in reorganizing districts, for the submission of reorganization plans to the Department of Education, and for the subsequent approval or rejection of these plans by the State Board of Education (created in 1963). Needless to say, this was a very long and cumbersome process. In 1966, Governor Scranton signed legislation that formally recognized and classified 505 school districts, later reduced to 501 and then 500, and the 1966 law is sometimes cited as key legislation for that reason, although the politics of school consolidation had been decided earlier (Bissett and Hillman 2013: 24).

Finally, issue framing is also important. A national wave of school consolidation occurred after World War II because education experts and politicians saw it as a fiscally prudent means of helping the country adapt to new economic and demographic realities. In Pennsylvania, most of the debate was focused on creating schools that could train students to succeed in an increasingly complex society and an increasingly urbanized and industrialized economy. This was combined with a discussion of how to get “more bang for the buck” from the rapidly increasing share of the state budget going to education. Advocates for school consolidation carefully avoided broaching divisive topics

such as race and regionalism. Framing the issue in terms of the benefits to the entire state rather than to specific groups contributed to the success of school consolidation in Pennsylvania.

Many of the same kinds of controversies surrounding school district consolidation in the 1960s affect the current discussion of this issue. Leading economists in Pennsylvania and nationally have warned that public school finance will face daunting challenges in the years ahead due to an aging population whose seniors will consume more government resources and produce less government revenues (McClure 2014; Roza 2014; Strauss and Deng 2015). Policy change will require a balance between realizing cost-saving economies of scale where they are achievable, having schools with sufficient numbers of students, teachers, and resources to mount an educational program that prepares the students for the new economy, and improving student performance by transforming schools into centers of community life.

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Appendix

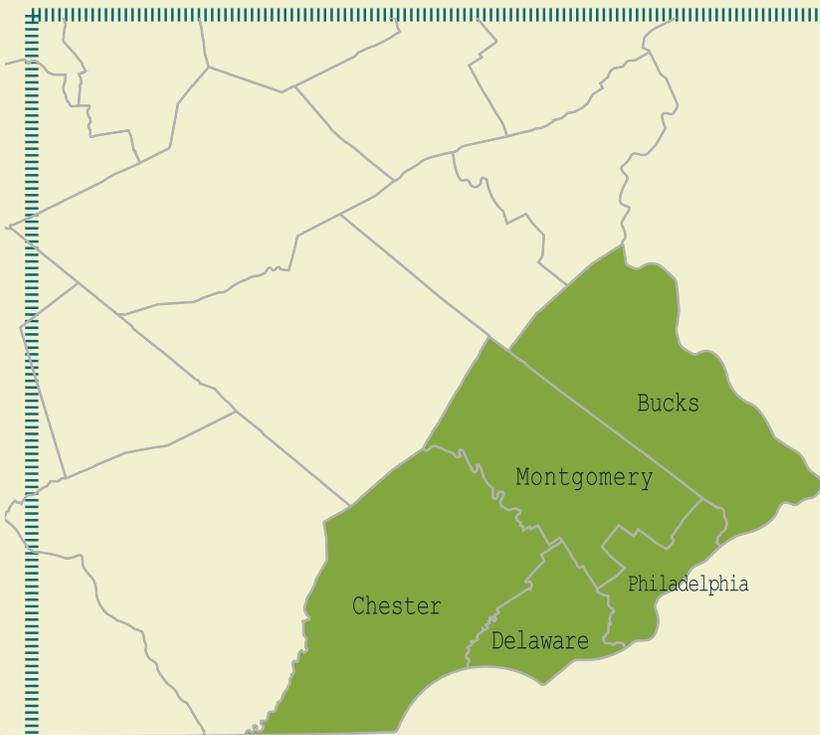
Legislation	Impact on School Consolidation
Act 105 of 1901	"Centralized School Act" encouraged merging schools within districts. Served as starting point for free transportation to schools.
Act of May 18, 1911, P.L. 309	Makes provisions for consolidation through "union" school districts.
Act 453 of 1919	"Sweitzer Act" requires closure of most schools with less than 10 pupils.
Act 163 of 1921	"Closed School Reimbursement Act" encouraged school consolidation by providing \$200/year subsidy for closed schools.
Act of May 13, 1925, P.L. 634	Created graduated transportation reimbursement scale to help poorer districts.
Act of May 13, 1937, P.L. 605	Created easier process of consolidation of school districts through "mergers". Created county boards of school directors and scheduled compulsory mergers starting with districts without any schools.
Acts 6, 7, and 8 of 1938	Provided financial incentives to build new schools.
Act 403 of 1945	Reimbursed districts on the basis of teaching units and established differential payments between secondary and elementary units. This encouraged reorganization bringing 7th and 8th grades into secondary status.
Acts 249 and 498 of 1947	Authorized contracts between school districts and municipal authorities. Set up the State Public School Building Authority. This eased debt limitations, thus encouraging school construction in reorganized administrative units.
Act 361 of 1947	Required county boards to prepare county-wide plans for administrative units and for merging of component districts.
Act 557 of 1949	Required state to reimburse school districts for a portion of "rentals" on school facilities complying with county-plans of school district reorganization, and provided by the State Public School Building Authority.
Act 650 of 1955	Required State Council of Education to 1) adopt standards and regulations for intermediate units of school administration; and 2) prepare a state-wide plan for the reorganization of counties or parts thereof into intermediate units.
The Act of March 10, 1949, P.L. 1803	Required subsidies for secondary schools operating in jointures.
Act 472 of 1951	Extends subsidies to elementary schools operating in jointures and to elementary and high schools in union or merged districts.
Acts 26 and 627 of 1951	Authorized school districts to organize their own municipal authorities and required state to share the cost of "rentals" for approved building projects by municipal authorities.
Act 184 of 1953	Required state reimbursement for student transportation jointures in 3rd class schools.
Act of July 13, 1957, P.L. 864	Added provisions similar to those of 1951's Act 627 to reimburse building projects financed by general obligation bonds after March 25, 1956.

Source: Adapted from "Chronology of Significant Legislation Stimulating Reorganization of School Districts" in Governor's Committee on Education, Task Force 2 – Reorganization of School Districts 1961: 18-20.

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POLICY BRIEF

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What Can We Learn from the School
Consolidation Acts of 1961 and 1963?**

J. WESLEY LECKRONE

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