

Educational Equity and School Structure: School Size, Overcrowding, and Schools-Within-Schools

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Consistent with the Williams v. California suit, our focus in this article is on

This article provides background information relevant to the plaintiff's case in *Williams v. California*. Consistent with the suit, our focus is on educational equity, particularly the interface between equity and school organization. We concentrate on two structural issues, school size and school overcrowding, and on one specific school structure, school size. We discuss the relationship between

the article as an interpretive summary of existing studies of these topics, concentrating on how these structural issues relate to social stratification in student outcomes, particularly academic achievement. The evidence we provide is drawn from both national studies and, when available and appropriate,

As schools grow, they typically become more bureaucratic, resulting in more formalized human relations and increased curricular specialization. As such

consequences on student learning (Gamoran, 1989; Oakes, 1985). Increasing size promotes curricular specialization, resulting in differentiation

achievement. Lee and Smith also found that even though the same "ideal size" was consistent across schools identified by their average SES and

Challenging ...

... of ...

DEFINING OVERCROWDING

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measure overcrowding_making_large-scale investigations difficult. *Man...*

CALIFORNIA'S OVERCROWDED SCHOOLS

For three fundamental reasons, public schools in California are among the

most overcrowded in the nation.

Few reliable analyses quantify a relationship between school overcrowding and student or teacher outcomes. Although several solid empirical studies

elementary school students learn more in smaller classes (see Finn & Achilles, 1999; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 1999, 2002).

Temporary Structures

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some form of year-round calendar (National Association of Year-Round Education [NAYRE], 2001). Almost all of these schools (97.5%) are public.

The Single-Track YRE Model

Year-round calendars can be divided into single-track and multitrack mod-

The Concept 6 MTYRE model, commonly used by the LAUSD, requires students to attend school for only 163 days per year, compared to the traditional 180-day calendar. To compensate for this reduced instructional time, between 20 to 40 minutes are typically added to each school day. At the secondary level, however, this extra 6–7 minutes per class may not be wholly utilized for additional instruction, while the loss of 17 instructional days allows fewer nights for homework (Helfand, 2000). Another concern is that the Concept 6 calendar calls for two vacations each lasting 60 days.

at least 200 schools. It

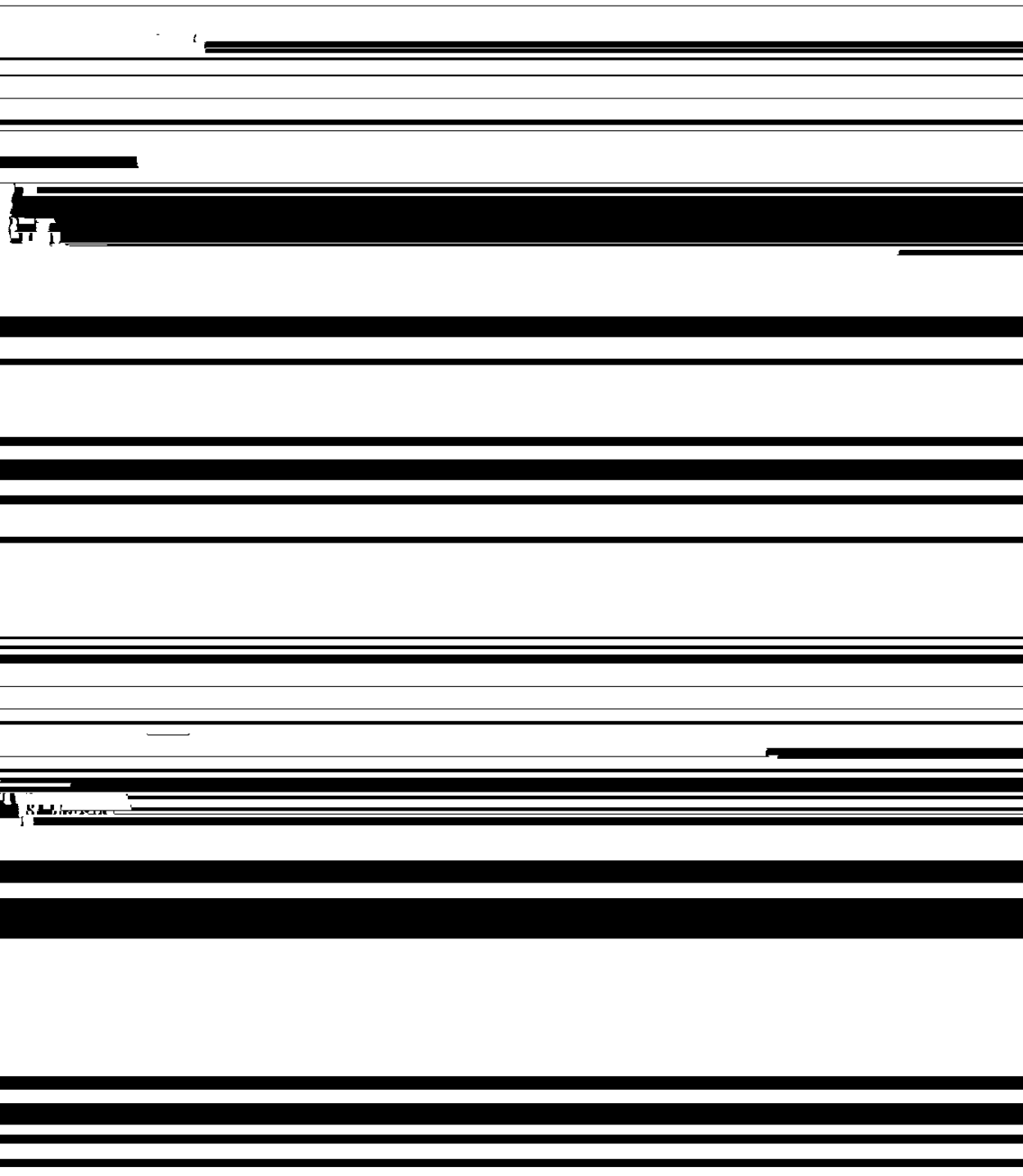
the Concept 6 schools and those using traditional calendars, but noted that

today's fiscal environment, it is quite unlikely that taxpayers would support the construction of many small high schools and the abandonment of the buildings that now house large comprehensive high schools. In many locations with large public high schools, particularly inner cities, even maintaining existing schools is a financial challenge.

A logical (and seemingly less expensive) alternative to constructing new schools is to divide existing large high schools into several smaller schools

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The conditions under which these purposefully small schools are created differ from those common to SWS high schools. Many purposefully small



around the desire to retain both the benefits of small schools *and* those of large, comprehensive high schools. The consensus among staff was that the smorgasbord nature of the comprehensive high school usually led to the decay of the SWS structure; students' school-wide curricular choices frequently trumped attempts to maintain autonomous sub-units.

CHOICE AND THE SWS MODEL

SWS high schools commonly allow students to select their subunit, based presumably on their individual preferences and attraction to the various subunits' themes and offerings (Lee et al., 2001; McPartland et al., 1996; Ready, Lee & LoGerfo, 2000). The goal of permitting subunit choice is to foster commitment among students and to increase their engagement with school. Allowing students to choose their subunit is a common practice in SWS high schools. This practice is intended to increase student commitment and engagement with school. However, this practice can also lead to the fragmentation of the school's curriculum and the loss of a common educational experience for all students.

comprehensive high schools. Our own research about the SWS structure has identified many benefits, including enhanced social relations among school members, safer and more orderly school atmospheres, and im-

low-income students. Thus, it is often the case that the students who would benefit from smaller high schools the most—minority and low-income students—are actually educated in the largest schools.

California's Overcrowded Schools

Alta California State Office of Education



transform the social differences students bring to school into academic differences. We strongly advocate reforms that are associated with rising achievement, and achievement that is equitably distributed by race, ethnicity, class, or family origin. Reforms that raise achievement of children at the lower end of the distribution without damaging those at the top are ones toward which we believe our nation should strive.

Our own research leads us to support strongly the plaintiffs' case in the *Williams* class action suit. The State of California, through its public schools, must deliver a high-quality education to all its citizens. We hope that this article provides some evidence to help define which size high school

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