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*This article is based
on the author's personal
study.*

CHANGES

In Small Schools Of North Dakota

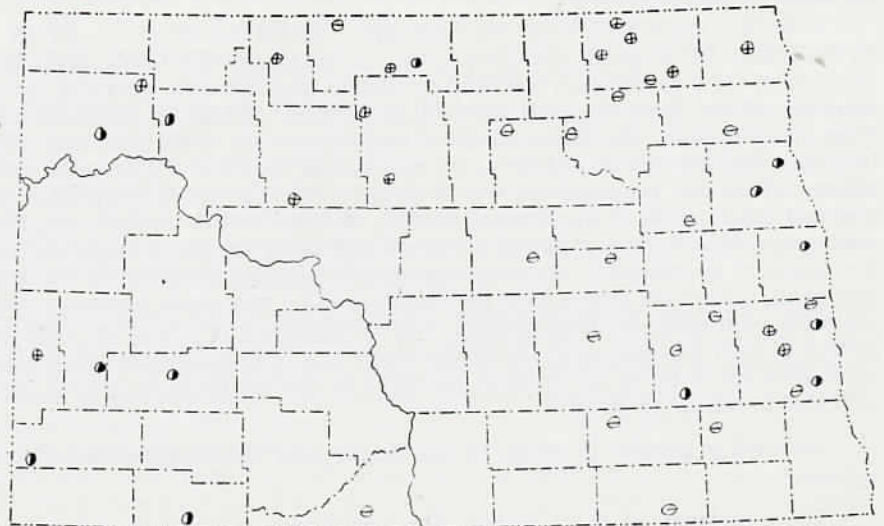
By RICHARD BERNARD

THE SMALL SCHOOL in North Dakota has changed in many ways the past few years. Most observers would agree that this is generally true. But the extent of this change over the state is not so obvious.

To determine the extent of the change in the small town school systems, statistics were compiled to show what the "average" school in the "average" small town of North Dakota was like in 1954 and 1964. To do this, data was compiled from the North Dakota Educational Directories of 1954 and 1964, and North Dakota census figures for 1950 and 1960.

The school systems studied in this report cover a rather narrow, but very large segment of North Dakota's school systems. Data in this report was compiled by studying all communities that maintained public four-year high schools in 1954 and whose 1960 population was under 1,000. Over three-fourths of the schools in the 1964-65 directory are in communities where the population is less than 1,000 though these schools enroll only about one-third of the state's public school students.

In 1954, there were 286 four-year high schools in communities of 1,000 population or under. By 1964 the number of high schools in these com-



- ⊕ School systems where enrollment is less than 120, grades 1-12, in 1964-65
- ⊙ School systems where enrollment is less than 120, and whose enrollment has decreased in the past ten years.
- ⊖ Schools which had a high school in 1954, but now retain only the grade school.

munities had decreased by almost one-fourth to 220.

Several reasons accounted for the decrease, not the least of these being higher standards of accreditation and the ever increasing costs of maintaining adequate schools. The systems that no longer maintain high schools have not always closed down completely. Several of the districts in this report closed their high schools between 1954 and 1964 but still retain their grade schools. Virtually all of the school closings from 1954 to 1964 were due to consolidation.

On the average, the school system in small North Dakota communities is much larger now than it was ten years ago. Forty schools in the group studied increased their enrollment by over 100 percent from 1954 to 1964. Two schools in particular showed rapid growth. Sargent Central, located in Forman, did not exist in 1954. In that year the Forman system enrolled 244 students in grades 1-12. By 1964, the addition of Cayuga and Cogswell districts to Forman had helped increase the enrollment to 738. In the same period of time, the Richland County community of Wyndmere increased its school enrollment from 214 to 621.

On the other end of the spectrum were 29 school systems that decreased in enrollment during the ten-year period. The average decrease per system in these schools was 24 students. However, it was noted that even in these schools the faculty increased in numbers from 1954 to 1964. Most of these schools were found in the eastern and northern one-third of North Dakota. (See map).

While the population of North Dakota increased from 1950 to 1960, the rural population and the population of the towns in this report decreased. By taking the 1950 and 1960 census figures and computing an average loss per year, it was found that the average population of incorporated communities under 1,000 population decreased from 340 in 1954 to 316 in 1964. This represents a decrease of about 7 percent in the 10-year per-

iod. If populations of the unincorporated places having schools were known, the above figures would undoubtedly be lower. The population figures show that most of the communities having high schools in this group are under 500 population, and they also show that any increase in average enrollment must be due to the effect of consolidation. It must be considered, however, that some districts have increased in size because of an influx of population for other reasons.

In addition to the 66 districts which lost high schools in the ten-year period, there were 20 three-, two- and one-year high schools operating in 1954, while there are none remaining this year. There still are a large number of rural and town grade schools in operation, but the number of these schools is slowly and surely decreasing. The western and southern sections of North Dakota retain the largest number of these schools.



It is interesting to compare 1954 and 1964 enrollment statistics for small town schools as there has been a significant change in the past ten years for these schools. In 1954, the average school system in these communities had an enrollment of 140 students in grades 1-12. These students were taught by an average of seven teachers. In 1954, the North Dakota Education Directory listed 121 high schools that had only two teachers.

By 1964, the number of high schools had decreased by 23 percent to 220. These remaining districts have increased their average enrollment, grades 1-12 to 240 students.

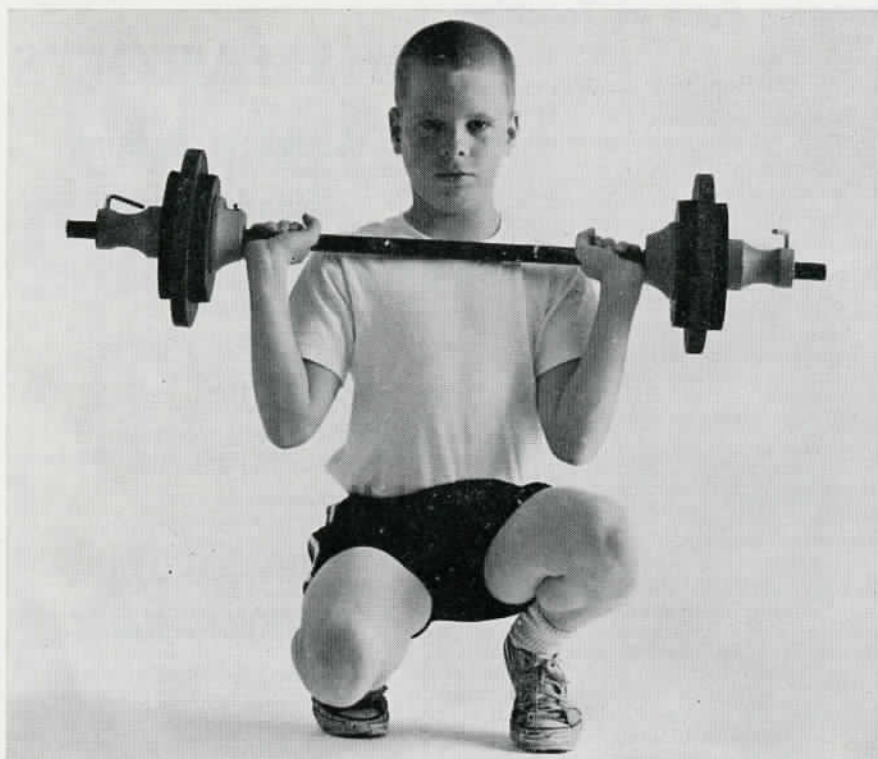
The average faculty this year is 13 teachers. The net increase in average enrollment per system in the 10-year period was 71 percent, while the average faculty increased by 86 percent in these schools. The two-teacher high school had virtually disappeared by 1964, with only two being listed in this year's directory.

Sixty of the 66 high schools that closed between 1954 and 1964 were located in towns whose population was under 250 in 1960. While the average population of the communities in this study had decreased between 1954 and 1964, the towns retaining high schools were somewhat larger, on the average, than those having high schools in 1954. It would appear that the smaller the community, the less likely it is to retain its high school. Of the 66 communities that lost high schools in the ten-year period, only 39 were incorporated communities in both 1954 and 1964. The rest were unincorporated or rural. The incorporated places which lost their high schools had an average population of about 200 in 1954. By 1964 the population of these towns had decreased by 15 percent to about 170. It is not known whether or not the relatively great decrease in the population of these communities was a cause of, or an effect resulting from, the loss of the high school.

In 1954, the average school system maintaining a high school in towns under 250 population, had 96 students enrolled from grades 1-12, and from five to six teachers in the system. In most cases, school systems in these towns had five teachers, two for high school and three for the grades. By 1964, the schools remaining open in these communities had increased to an average enrollment of 155, with an average faculty of ten members.

One might paint a composite picture of the small town high school in 1954 and 1964, by using average figures for community size and school enrollment. In 1954, the average school system was located in a community whose population was 340,

(More on page 38)



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Changes in Small Schools . . .

(Continued from page 21)

or less if the community was unincorporated or rural, as about 20 per cent of the communities were in that year. The school system itself enrolled about 140 students in grades 1-12, and employed seven teachers.

By 1964, the enrollment per system had increased by about 100 students to 240, and the faculty has increased from seven to 13. The schools were found in communities whose population averaged about 356, or somewhat greater than in 1954. However, even these communities had decreased in size from a 1954 average of 380, or a decrease of 7 percent. Only about 5 percent of the communities having high schools in 1964 were unincorporated, so the average population shown is quite close to a true representation.

The communities that lost their high schools in the ten-year period showed a 15 percent drop in population, while those that retained their high schools lost 7 percent of their 1954 population. The communities whose enrollment increased by over 100 percent in the ten-year period were no larger than the average community listed above, but their population loss from 1954 to 1964 was only about 3 percent.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from this report, but it must be remembered that these do not apply to every school system or community but are simply averages for schools in small North Dakota communities. The conclusions are:

1. The schools in North Dakota small towns are either growing or are slowly passing out of existence.
2. Growth of these smaller schools has been caused by consolidation, as rural and town population has decreased steadily in the past ten years.
3. The very small communities have shown the least ability to retain their high school.
4. In almost all of these communities, the size of the faculty has in-

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creased at a faster rate than the size of the student body.

5. The schools in these communities are still too small for really effective operation. One-third of the schools in towns under 1,000 population are not accredited by the state of North Dakota, and only seven are members of the North Central Association.

6. There will still be a great amount of consolidation within the state. Many of the smallest schools, especially in eastern North Dakota, are near enough to a larger community or other communities with high schools to consolidate in the near future.

7. It is very possible that more counties will reorganize with only one high school district, as three western North Dakota counties have already done.

8. While most of the communities in this group have lost population in the past years, it appears that those that have lost their high school have suffered more than those whose schools have survived and grown.

Oklahoma Applies . . .

(Continued from page 9)

Association, at the request of its affiliate, the Utah Education Association, imposed sanctions in 1964.

In Utah, a vigorous political campaign in which teachers took an active part, resulted in the election last November of a governor and state legislators in deep sympathy with the teachers' objectives. Since then, legislation has been passed which could start to correct the conditions in Utah schools.

The Oklahoma Education Association board also pledged to "make every possible effort to bring about the enactment of a program of education" which would satisfy its requirements; urged the state board of education "to continue to enforce the degree requirement for teacher certification"; and promised to "hold itself in readiness to adopt either more severe courses of action designed to effect improvement in school conditions or to withdraw sanctions al-

(More on page 42)



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