

# The Organization of American Schools

**ED 1010**

# What Is a School?

- Schools can be viewed from multiple perspectives and defined in many different ways.
- Schools can be defined as social institutions whose goals are to promote both students' growth and development, and the well-being of a country and its citizens.
- Every school is part of larger institutions, including school districts and state offices of education.

# The Organization of Schools

- The personnel within a school influence its effectiveness more than any other factor.
  - Administrators and support staff help create an environment in which teachers can teach and students can learn.
  - Teachers are the most powerful factor influencing learning within a school.
- The physical plant can influence not only student learning but also teachers' morale and job satisfaction.



# Organization of the Curriculum

- The curriculum—what teachers teach and what students learn—is a critical component of the organization of schools.
- The curriculum is strongly influenced by the developmental needs and characteristics of students.
- Decisions about the organization of schools and the curriculum are also influenced by monetary and political considerations.



# Early Childhood Programs

- Are heavily influenced by developmental psychology and the developmental needs of young children
- Developmental early childhood programs accommodate differences in children's development by allowing them to acquire skills and abilities at their own pace through direct experience.
- Research shows that effective early childhood programs can have a powerful effect on later success in school and life.

# Elementary Schools

- Elementary schools provide teachers with considerable autonomy in terms of curriculum and scheduling.
- Self-contained classrooms are designed to provide students with nurturing environments for social, emotional, and cognitive growth.
- Critics of self-contained classrooms contend they place unrealistic demands on teachers to be experts in every content area.



# Junior High and Middle Schools

- Expose students to subject matter experts in the form of content-specialized teachers
- Middle schools attempt to meet the developmental needs of early adolescents through:
  - Interdisciplinary teams
  - Home rooms that allow teachers and students to develop more meaningful interpersonal relationships
  - Interactive teaching strategies that stress active student involvement
  - The elimination of competitive activities that emphasize developmental differences





## Junior High and Middle Schools (continued)

- Advocates of middle schools contend they are effective in meeting students' developmental needs.
- Critics believe developmental emphasis weakens emphasis on subject matter and academic rigor.





# High Schools

- A comprehensive high school houses all students and attempts to meet all students' academic needs through a variety of tracks or different programs.
- Criticisms of the comprehensive high school:
  - Tracking segregates different-ability students and shortchanges those in non-college-prep tracks
  - Excessive size depersonalizes students
  - Departmentalization fragments the curriculum
  - Academic rigor is lacking



# High Schools (continued)

- Alternatives to comprehensive high schools:
  - Schools within a school that create smaller learning communities
  - Career technical schools designed to provide job skills that are immediately marketable after high school

**TABLE 7.1** Common Ways to Organize Schools

School Level	Grade Ranges
Elementary school	K-2
	K-3
	K-5
	K-6
Middle school	5-8
	6-8
	7-8
Junior high school	7-8
	7-9
	8-9
High school	9-12
	10-12

# Grade Retention

- Increasingly popular in this age of testing and accountability
- Proponents argue against “social promotion” and advocate retaining students until they have mastered necessary knowledge and skills.
- Critics contend it does not improve subsequent academic performance, leads to higher risk of dropping out later, and that minorities and low- SES students are unduly targeted.

Optimal school and class size

<http://www.mes.org/esr.html>

Clear school mission and strong leadership

Safe and orderly environment

High parental involvement

Academic focus

High collective efficacy

Interactive instruction

Frequent monitoring of student progress

# Characteristics of Effective Schools

# School Organization and the Achievement of Cultural Minorities

- The way a school is organized and run has a powerful influence on student achievement, especially for cultural minorities.
- Tracking often results in cultural minorities being over-represented in lower tracks.
- Large class sizes adversely affect minorities; smaller class sizes allow teachers to get to know their students better and adapt instruction to students' specific learning needs.