

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.