

The New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and Accreditation of the Small Secondary School

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THE New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools evaluates and accredits institutions of higher education, independent secondary schools, and public secondary schools in the six-state New England region. During the current year, the Association has 831 institutional members including 121 colleges and universities, 176 independent secondary schools, and 534 public secondary schools.

Approximately ten per cent of the public secondary schools currently accredited by the New England Association have enrollments of less than 300 students. Table I indicates the distribution by state of these small member schools.

Definitions of small secondary schools vary in New England. For instance, the state education departments of Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire define secondary schools with enrollments below 300 students as small. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island use an enrollment of below 500 students as their criteria for smallness.

Standards of Accreditation

The New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has not adopted a formal standard by which it classifies

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TABLE 1. New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools—Member Public Secondary Schools

State	Member Public Secondary Schools	Member Schools With Less Than 300 Students	% Under 300 From Each State
Connecticut	117	6	5%
Maine	54	10	19%
Massachusetts	246	15	6%
New Hampshire	47	12	26%
Rhode Island	27	0	0
Vermont	43	9	21%
<i>Total</i>	<u>534</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>10%</u>

a school as small. It has chosen instead to adopt minimum standards for the accreditation of public secondary schools regardless of their size. In order to qualify for membership in the New England Association, schools must meet these educational standards rather than any enrollment standard. These standards are briefly defined as follows:

1. *Philosophy and Objectives*—the school shall have a clearly stated educational philosophy which shall be supported by definitely stated objectives designed to meet the needs of the students and the community served.
2. *Program of Studies*—the school shall have a carefully planned program of studies and activities consistent with its stated philosophy and objectives.
3. *Guidance Service*—the school shall have an organized and co-ordinated guidance service to aid students in meeting educational, vocational, health, moral, social, civic, and personal problems.
4. *The Library*—the school shall have a library which is the center for resource material for every aspect of the school program. There shall be a professionally competent staff, an adequate collection of books and periodicals, auditory and visual aids, and other resource material. These facilities shall be effectively used in the educational program.
5. *The School Staff*—the school shall have a professional staff well-qualified in character, health, and personality, and competent in various educational and related services. Staff members shall have a sympathetic understanding of youth and a desire to continue professional growth. The staff shall be sufficient in number and adequately paid. It shall be a group motivated by high ideals and working together to attain the objectives of the school. The

school shall have an adequate number of employees for non-professional services.

6. *Records*—an adequate system of student records and of permanent files shall be safely maintained. These shall include the cumulative record of attendance, progress in school, and results of objective tests. Student schedule cards and a master schedule of each teacher shall be maintained. An adequate system of records of faculty and administrative staff shall be maintained.
7. *Administration*—the principal or headmaster, although accountable to higher authority, shall be responsible head and professional leader of the school. He shall interpret to his superintendent, to his board of control, and to his constituency the place of the school in the life of the community. The board of control shall be responsible for the determination of policy and for the approval of appointments and expenditures. Under no circumstances shall the board perform the functions of the educational administrator.
8. *Plant and Equipment*—the plant and equipment shall be adequate for the progress of the school and shall be operated to assure the safety and health of the students, faculty, and non-professional staff.
9. *School and Community Relations*—school and community relations are of such importance in the development of a good secondary school that an appropriate program for promoting effective relations between school and community shall be maintained and constantly improved.
10. *Financial Support*—financial support of the school shall be adequate to sustain the educational program, including activities, consistent with the philosophy and objectives of the school and with the standards of the New England Association for public secondary schools.
11. *School Atmosphere*—the school shall have an appropriate atmosphere which indicates that an effective educational program prevails.

These general standards are defined in great detail in *Evaluative Criteria* (National Study of Secondary School Evaluation, Washington, D.C., 1960 Edition) which explains specific accreditation requirements used by the New England Association.

The Evaluation Program

In December 1954, the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools adopted a plan for the evaluation of public

secondary schools so that accreditation could be objectively based on the minimum standards listed above. The five purposes of this evaluation program have been:

1. The upgrading and improvement of the entire program of public school education.
2. The appraisal of local schools at small cost to the community.
3. The support which the New England Association, through its recommendations, would give to local school officials for needed facilities, equipment, and instructional materials.
4. The recognition which would come from institutions of higher learning and from the community as a result of an evaluation program.
5. The strengthening of the New England Association as a result of more stringent membership requirements.

In the eleven years since that plan was adopted, over five hundred public secondary schools have been evaluated by visiting committees representing the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Each year over 3,000 New England educators participate either in the self-evaluation phase for their own schools or as participants in the visiting committee evaluation of other schools. Approximately one-half dozen member schools are all that remain to be evaluated for the first time.

Schools of any size may apply for membership in the New England Association. Careful and thorough evaluation based on the Association's minimum standards, however, is making it increasingly difficult for smaller schools to become accredited or, once accredited, to have this accreditation renewed when a subsequent evaluation is required (once every ten years).

Educational Innovations

In some parts of the country, significant and exciting experiments have been undertaken to improve the quality of education provided in small secondary schools. The New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools is noted for its interest in and encouragement of educational innovations. Like the state education departments of the six New England states, however, the New England Association favors the concentration of students into larger secondary school units as the best way to solve the problems of small secondary schools. School authorities in New England have therefore been concentrating on district reorganiza-

tion rather than the development of special programs designed for small secondary schools.

The need is great for such realignment of school districts in New England. Table 2 indicates the number of schools by states that enroll less than 500 students and the total number of students served in these schools.

TABLE 2. Public Secondary Schools in New England Enrolling Less Than 500 Students

State	No. of Schools Enrolling Less Than 500 Students	Total No. of Students Enrolled
Connecticut	38	13,318
Maine	202	45,182
Massachusetts	58	19,017
New Hampshire	58	13,000
Rhode Island	2	223
Vermont	60	12,086
<i>Total</i>	418	102,826

The Case Reviewed

The strengths and weaknesses of such small secondary schools are undoubtedly no different in New England than they are in other parts of the United States. Local control, community identification, and individualized attention are strengths of small schools frequently mentioned when district reorganization is being considered. These are close to the hearts of New England communities. But even the reluctant are acknowledging the weaknesses of limited curriculum diversity, inadequate staffing, economic inefficiency, and lack of special services which confront small secondary schools.

Some of the clearest evidence for a case against small secondary schools is costs per pupil. As is true in other parts of the country, providing minimum standards of education costs more per pupil in small secondary schools than in larger schools. Table 3 indicates per pupil costs for various kinds and sizes of secondary schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts where 246 out of a total of 249 public secondary schools in the state are members of the New England Association.

TABLE 3. Comparison of High School Enrollments and Costs Per Pupil¹
(Per Pupil Costs in Average Daily Membership, 1962-63)

Enrollments	3-Yr. High School	4-Yr. High School	6-Yr. High School
1000 or more students	\$520.26	\$465.95	\$492.98
500 to 999 students	517.35	507.58	493.02
Less than 500 students	548.03	545.67	501.86

It is clear from such figures that in the New England region the costs per pupil for meeting minimum standards for accreditation by the New England Association increase, as the size of the school decreases.

Dilemma: Qualification for Accreditation

The New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has not denied membership or accreditation to any school based on size alone. Its public school evaluation program makes it increasingly difficult for small secondary schools to qualify, however, without bearing significantly higher costs per pupil. The New England Association's main concern has been and will continue to be that each student in its member schools benefits from a full and effective educational program regardless of school size. The public school evaluation program is helping to assure that accreditation is firm evidence that such an educational program is being provided in schools belonging to the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

¹ *Financial and Statistical Data Pertaining to Massachusetts Public Secondary Schools*, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Education, Division of Research and Statistics, Research Bulletin #1, July 1965.