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ROBESON COUNTY'S
SIX SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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# ROBESON COUNTY'S SIX SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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#### INTRODUCTION

Certainly all the citizens of Robeson County should be served when it comes to the matter of education. responsibility of a democratic government is more important than the education of its citizens. The fact is confirmed by the North Carolina Constitution, which states: 'Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, libraries, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged. The constitution also states: 'The people have a right to the privilege of education, and it is the duty of the State to guard and maintain that right. The people of Robeson County should be enlightened to realize their interest. "Govenor Nathaniel Alexander in 1806 had given a formula for education in a democracy in these words: 'In a government constituted as ours, where the people are everything, where they are the fountain of all power, it becomes infinitely important that they be sufficiently enlightened to realize their interest and to comprehend the best means of advancing them. "12 The people of Robeson County should be able to comprehend the best means of advancing their educational interest. The object of this paper is to assist in comprehending what course of action is best; merger of the school systems (districts), which may or may not include consolidation of school plant facilities; or the "status quo".

The following statements will give a base from which to view the pros and cons of school district merger: Merger of school districts will serve the best interest of all in Robeson County. It will, in the educating of Robeson County children, increase efficiency, provide economy, and improve the quality.

### I. BACK GROUND IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

- A. <u>EASIC SCHOOL UNITS</u>: Before pros and cons concerning merger of Robeson County School Districts are dealt with perhaps some background will be helpful. "... the basic school units in the United States can be conveniently grouped into five catagories: common school districts, city school districts, town or township school districts, county school districts, and high school districts."

  North Carolina has the county school district system.
  "In general there are two types of county school districts either the entire county or those parts of the county outside of independent districts." "North Carolina Public Schools receive a large percentage of their revenue receipts from state sources." "North Carolina Public Schools receive larger percentages of their revenues from county than from district or local sources."
- B. Consolidation is the trend in educational systems today and rural education has been making progress in catching up with urban education is a second trend. Because of both

financial and administrative advantages, there is a distinct trend today toward larger school units than those commonly used in the past, and the county unit is steadily gaining in favor among educators and students of school administration."7 "The rise of the profession of school administration during the heyday of scientific management contributes further to the movement for centralization."8 "Many states provided substantial financial incentives for local districts willing to accept mergers. Many states make the availability of ! state school construction funds contingent on the acceptance of local consolidation plans."9 "Most of North Carolina's county-wide school systems have always been one school unit and did not obtain their unity through consolidation procedure. The others, however, resulted from a consolidation of separate school units - a growing trend throughout the country. In the 1966-67 school year, North Carolina had 169 separate school units; in 1974-75, only 149."10 "Though additional improvement is needed to bring the rural school more nearly up to urban standards, the progress of recent years has been gratifying and prospects for the future are encouraging." 11

II. BACKGROUND IN ROBESON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS
In Robeson County there is the County School System made up
of the county outside the independent districts and five
independent districts. A community leader has said about

the Robeson County Church and Community Center and the six school districts in the county, "The Center has addressed other ills such as non-adequate public education because of the waste and ineffectiveness of having six administrative systems." The voters of Robeson County however, voted in 1972 not to consolidate or merge the school systems.

INDIANS AND EDUCATION: A background review of Robeson County's school systems must include some comments concerning race, for race has very much influenced the structure of the school systems. The county's tri racial general make up has been of Blacks and Whites living in the municipal areas and Indians living in the countryside. Just as in other areas of the United States rural education in Robeson County has been a poorer quality than that of the municipal areas. In addition to being rural, the county population outside the municipalities has, as stated, been Indian, another factor influencing educational achievement. "Among forces influencing low Indian achievement are the discriminatory conditions under which Indians live in the U.S. 113 Robeson County has not been an exception to the fact of discrimination. Indians were, however, given some provisions for an education as early as 1887, a provision which evolved into what is today Pembroke State University. "Special provisions for the education of the Indian inhabitants of the state was made in 1887 in the founding of the Cherokee Indian Hormal School of Robeson County at Pembroke. 114 One author soid, "the future of Indian education is dependent upon achievement of self-determination by Indian Americans."15 Indians in Robeson County have shown self determination. It is certainly true of Robeson County that "Since the late 1960s, Indian communities have begun to generate considerable organized protest around school issues." The Indians led in a successful effort to eliminate "double voting" in Robeson County, a system whereby municipal citizens voted for the school board in their independent school district and voted for the school board of the county. Whites and Blacks descrive much credit for their efforts in the area of education in Robeson County; but, in the opinion of the author, Indians have assumed leading roles, revealing their self determination, a determination not surpassed by anyone.

B. STATE STUDY: The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and representatives from the six school boards in Robeson County surveyed the educational needs of the county in 1970. An example of their findings is what was said about the media program of the school units, "There is need for greater effort to provide . . . centralized support." The major recommendation was to "organize all public schools and school systems in Robeson County into one administrative unit under the direction of one superintendent and one board of education."

- C. <u>VOTERS CHOOSE</u>: The voters of Robeson County had an opportunity to merge the six school districts in 1972.

  According to the county's daily newspaper 5,668 were for such a merger and 12,878 were against such a merger. 19

  The same newspaper, a few days prior to the voting, had an article on the front page which said: "Voters facing the School merger issue on November 7 will face it without any guarantee of how students will be reassigned." The bold type heading for the article read: "Student Assignments In School Merger Issue Undecided Despite Upcoming Vote".

  Perhaps this article is a clue to why the voters did not elect to have the six school districts merged. Student assignments may have meant more than anything which would be gained by a merger.
- D. PARKTON/ST PAULS: The importance of assignment of students to the voters of Robeson County is obvious from a current school issue in the county. An effort was made by some citizens of a Parkton interest group and some elected officials to allow one White controlled school district (St Paus) to annex a White oriented portion of another school district (Robeson County). This attempt was made through petitions to the Robeson County School Board and by a bill in the North Carolina State Legislature. About the issue a weekly paper in Robeson County said: "the issue

here is quite clear: the White oriented Parkton group is meeking to escape the jurisdiction of the majority Indian-Black county board of education. In the works of Rep. David Parnell, they can 'relate better' to the White controlled St. Pauls Board of Mcucation. Make no mistake about it; if the . . . effort is successful, then similiar efforts will shortly follow in other areas such as Littlefield and Orrum."21 (Littlefield and Orrum are White oriented schools.) The bill in the State Legislature sponsored by Rep. Parnell to allow Parkton citizens to vote whether they wanted to be annexed by St Pauls School District had an amendment drafted to it. ". . . an amendment was drafted to Parnell's bill by a local Indian attorney asking that the predominately Indian areas of the Red Springs School District around Oxendine, Rennert, and Shannon be allowed to vote on whether they should be joined to the county school district. The vis-a-vis rationale was that if the fold around Parkton were allowed to vote to join St. Fauls why not allow the Indian folk the same opportunity? The question formulated by the proposed amendment was: Can Parnell justify granting one racial group a right to vote on an issue and deny the same right to another racial group?"22 "The fight to defeat the Parkton Annexation to St. Pauls School System was engineered by Indian Representative Horace Locklear and by Black Representative Bob Davis."23 "Because of the political

After the first reading of the bill, many Indians and Elacks called Mr. Davis and speke against the bill forcefully."24

"Rep. David Parnell's legislative attempt to annex the Parkton-Oak Ridge school attendance areas to the St Pauls School

System was soundly defeated in the North Carolina House of Representatives . . . by a 53-39 vote."25

OTHER CONFLICTS: Statements of a past year and of the current year tell that Robeson County educational systems have, and continue to experience conflicts. In a year gone by: "We wish to state here that the Robeson County Board of Education did not last year nor does at this time oppose the efforts of the Lumberton City Board of Education to obtain its much-needed school facilities within the city. However, our Board of Education must shoulder the responsibility of calling for any or all school bond issues within the county and in this matter has a legal and moral responsibility to all the children within the boundaries of our county, regardless of their race, station, or geographic location. The Robeson County Board of Education would be derelict in its responsibility to the people of Robeson County if we should present a request to the Robeson County Board of Commissioners for one particular group of its people while ignoring the grave depressing needs of another group as such now exist

in the county."26 Just this year, 1979, published in a paper of the county was: "Six school units exist in Robeson County. There are only 1/45 in the whole state. Madness prevails in educational circles in Robeson County. Kon-Indians have courried away until there is nowhere for them to go anymore. They must stay put and fight for the children, especially their own."27

# III. ARGUNENTS FOR MERGER

Now that the background of educational systems in general and Robeson County's background of educational systems have been reviewed very briefly, the arguments for merger will first be considered.

opportunities are gained by consolidation of schools is generally supported by the public at large. "The public, however, has generally supported the views of the proponents of consolidation, who argue that the nineteenth century districts were geared to the transportation of that period and to the idea that few pupils would go further than the eight grade, and that consolidated schools provide greater educational opportunities for all." Needs of students today are very different. "The educational program for students in grades 9-12 should provide a broad comprehensive program to meet the needs of each student. . ."<sup>29</sup>

Opportunities for such broad comprehensive programs is obtained by consolidation and/or merger say the proponents of mergers and consolidations.

B. GREATER ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY: Greater economy and efficiency is a second argument for school merger. . . . conventional wisdom suggest that if the change to a larger school provides the potential for either acquiring the same resources at less cost or purchasing more resources for the same cost, the consolidation should produce the opportunity to improve the efficiency of school operations."30 New stimulates for merger for economical purposes are on the way. "Use of extensive and sophisticated electronic gear will stimulate the formation of larger and more efficient local school district structure than in 1970. By 1985 there will be no more than 2,000 local school districts, approximately ten percent of the number in 1970. This may be to large an estimate with the figure on number of districts closer to 1,000."31 Larger school systems are looked at as an occasion and as an opportunity. "The establishment of larger school systems provides the occasion and opportunity for developing new kinds of organizations that serve educational purposes more effectively and economically." 32 The chief school administrator in North Carolina apparently welcomes large school systems and the opportunities they afford.

". . the policy of the chief school administrator of the State calls for the dismentling of the various small deak city boards of education in favor of larger more efficient county boards."33 A study of Robeson County verified that merger of the six school districts (systems) in it should bring improved efficiency. "Unification of the six existing units should provide the school system with increased services and improved efficiency in areas such as maintenance and operation, purchasing, food services, instructional supervisory staff, instructional media, accounting, personnel services, and student personnel."34 The study also said: "The merging of the six school systems would provide a broader financial base to support the educational needs of all students."35 Centralization continues to be "the thing" because of the economy gained. "Given the growth in school populations and the economy that is gained from larger organizations, bureaucracy and centralization are becoming characteristic of school systems everywhere."36 Deduced from what one author says, Robeson County is not only loosing out on an opportunity for greater economy by not merging its six school systems, but it receives financial support from other portions of North Carolina to continue such systems which, he implies, are maintained for reasons of race. "Each year there are fewer and fewer city school systems

across the State and each year the effort to eliminate them entirely gets stronger; the other counties across the State are not going to continue supporting financially our own local racial madness in this county forever." Administration/Pupil ratios of Robeson County School Systems do verify diseconomies of scale in one area (See Appendix 1). Administrative expense per pupil seemed to have little to do with percentage of pupils passing compentency tests but may have been influenced by local salary supplements since schools with the largest percentage of personnel receiving such supplements were also the schools with the highest percentage of students passing the compentency tests (See Appendix 2).

- C. A CHANCE FOR IMPROVED QUALITY OF EDUCATION:

  A chance for improved quality of education is another argument for school merger. The technology required to improve quality of education can best be afforded by merged school systems. "Technology will enable the teacher to give more individual attention to 200 pupils assigned in 1985 than could be given to a small class of 25 with the rudimentary instructional technology of 1970. Larger consolidated high schools attract a professional staff with higher credentials. One manual warns that larger school systems are not guarantees of better schools, but that such systems are needed according to assumptions. "This manual assumes that relatively large school systems are needed to achieve quality cducation for all pupils; it also recognizes that large systems cannot be merely scaled-up versions of small ones and that bigger organizations are not necessarily better." 40
- D. A MEANS TO RESPOND TO AND PLAN FOR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: School merger is a way to respond to educational and economic needs, a way to plan ahead. "... the purpose of district

reorganization is not to change school boundaries, but to improve educational programs and to make better use of the monies which society. spends in every increasing amounts on its schools."41 Says one author: "Another major purpose of district reorganization is to create school systems which are responsive to the educational needs of the local community. This requires school systems of sufficient size and with sufficient resources to assume increased responsibilities in three major areas. The first of these is curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. The development of personnel is the second major area. The third is the procurement and management of financial resources. These areas are of course interrelated. The problem facing larger systems, then, is to design new organizations which will function so that these increased responsibilities are carried out effectively."42 A school system of sufficient size to deal with educational problems is continually being called for by some in Robeson County. "The problems associated with six school systems and their attendant district lines cannot be solved on a piecemeal basis, the time is long overdue for all six school systems within this county to begin to collectively work towards the resolution of common longstanding problems."43 One school board has called for unity for the purpose of planning. "It would seem to

this Board that a poor county such as Robeson can ill afford to continue to build schools without some over-all scheme of developments." 44 Certainly merger of the six school systems in Robeson County would provide the unity necessary to plan and to respond to educational needs.

### IV. ARGUMENTS AGAINST MERGER

- A. <u>SOME REASONS FOR CFPOSITION TO CONSOLIDATION</u>: Next for consideration are arguments against merger. About consolidation of schools one writes, "The consolidations have come only after grueling political fights. Opponents object to the impact of the larger consolidated schools on grassroots control of school policy, the loss of a rural community center, the 'homegenizing' effects of an urbanized school on rural students, and the prospects of large bond issues for the new consolidated schools."<sup>45</sup>
- B. NO SAVINGS IN CONSOLIDATION: There is no economic savings in consolidation or making schools or school systems bigger. In consolidation "There are transportation diseconomies: new buses, new bus drivers, etc. Material and equipment costs tend to be higher because of the purchase of items not normally found in small high schools."46

  Even if there could be economic savings the schools become a formalized social system. When discussing how business Principles were taken over by educators an author said:
  "This trend is still apparent in the tendency of some educators

and some laymen to measure the efficiency of a school system in terms of the number of pupils, classes, and teachers in relation to costs. The stress of efficiency and increased bureaucratization adds to the formalism of the school as a social system." A7 Says another, "No compelling evidence exists which proves that the consolidation of rural schools and school districts produced significant net economic advantages. Thus, any attempt to legitimize the massive rural consolidation programs implemented since 1930 must find its rationale somewhere other than in the economics of the situation." 48

C. <u>QUALITY OF EDUCATION NOT IMPROVED BY CONSOLIDATION</u>:

The quality of education has little to do with the size of the school. "Earker et al (1962) studied the actual participation of students in various high school activities outside the regular classroom, and found that the average student in the small school took greater part in musical activities, dramatics, school clubs, journalism, and athletics.

Furthermore, while the larger school presumably offers a number of special or advanced courses not available in a small school, and while it may have a better library, its classes may be larger and be conducted in such a way that a student gets little personal contact with the teacher."

Concerning correlation between school size and achievement scores, "... of the recent controlled studies, there is

not one which records a consistent, positive correlation between size and achievement, independent of IQ and social class." 50 How about college preparation and the consolidated schools?" Another fondly held belief among consolidated proponents is that students who graduate from large high schools do better in college than children from small high schools. Once again the evidence does not support this belief. On the available evidence, which shows variability in results, it would be incorrect to assert that consolidation improves a student's chance for either enrollment or success in college." 51

D. EDUCATIONAL FORCES NOT THE PROPLEM: Merger of school systems would not attack one of the basic problems in education, that of home environmet. Concerning North Carolina's high school comptency test, "State figures show that more than two-thirds of the 13,312 students who failed the state's high school competency test last Hovember were blacks from homes where parents had less than a high school education." Says J. Frank Yeager, Superintendent of the Durham County Schools and Chairman of the North Carolina State Annual Testing Commission, "We can come up with all the educational forces in the world, and I'm not sure that we can overcome totally the home environment." 53

- citizens is another argument against school systems merger. Cone politician in a county adjoining Robeson County said about merger of that county's two systems, "If the Board of Commissioners or any other group tried to do it (merger) before it was acceptable, I don't think it would work." That county overwhelmingly defeated a merger proposal six years ago. 55 As mentioned in the background portion of this paper, Robeson County's citizens also voted overwhelmingly against merger of its six systems, truly nonacceptance.
- F. <u>BIGNESS PRESENTS PROBLEMS</u>: Consolidation has been considered a "cureall" by some. "Consolidation was deemed a panacea. However, panaceas are as mythical in rural education as elsewhere in society." <sup>56</sup> Elsewhere in society there is already talk of decentralization of school units.

  ". . . the new problem will be bigness. Metropolitan school districts will be established by 1985. Educationally defensible as well as politically palatable decentralized units will be defined by the mid-1980s to gain the most from 'economy of scale' and eliminate the danger of strangulation of services from too large and unwieldy administrative units." Large and unwieldly administrative units is not the answer to educational needs in Robeson County.

### CONCLUSION

From the information contained in this paper, there is none which proves that a merger of the six school districts in Bobeson County and resulting possibilities of consolidation to some degree would provide increased efficiency and economy or improve quality in education. Appendix 1 does indicate potential economic savings to some degree not specific and only in one area. Neither is there convincing evidence that a complete merger would not result in more economy, efficiency, and a better quality of education.

The most convincing findings are that professionals recommended merger after a comprehensive study and that mergers apparently present unique opportunities in educational organization. Since the trend is to merge, then a merger for standardization purposes, if for no other, would have possible merit so that all school systems can be treated equally.

The real advantage of a complete merger in the opinion of the author is that it would indicate a willingness of the people of Robeson County to work together for the common goal of a better education for the children. This willingness to work together would be what would help in finding the best organizational and other solutions to educational problems in Robeson County. Citizens of Robeson County may look to the State of North Carolina to solve educational problems.

The state government is responsible for achieving local school district organization which can meet minimum standards of efficiency in terms of needed educational programs and services and relative economy of operation." But, looking to state government to solve the problems of citizens working together on educational goals could only be a dream. Realistic goals can only be achieved by the desire of individual citizens to collectively achieve them. Perhaps Rev. Mangum's statement about the Robebon County Church and Community Center best hints at what is needed. He says, "Both the Center and the churches must work to assure that the best . . . educational . . . opportunity be provided to every Robesonian without regard to race, color, creed, or class." Churches are made up of individuals. The desires of individuals is what will dictate the future of Robeson County Schools.

Merger of Robeson County Schools at this point in time is perhaps not best over all. The reason is that it is not wanted and therefore, would not have the support necessary to make it work for the best interest of educational improvement. Six districts may be costing extra money, above what a merged system would cost, but when supported, the six are better than one merged system not supported by its citizens. Hopefully the day will come when the economic unit, Robeson County, will be the educational unit which will have a commonality believed necessary to make a merged

county citizens. When that day arrives, then it can be said that a merger of school districts will serve the best interest of all in Robeson County Such a system, in the opinion of the author, would stand and excellent chance of improving efficiency, economy, and quality in education in Robeson County.

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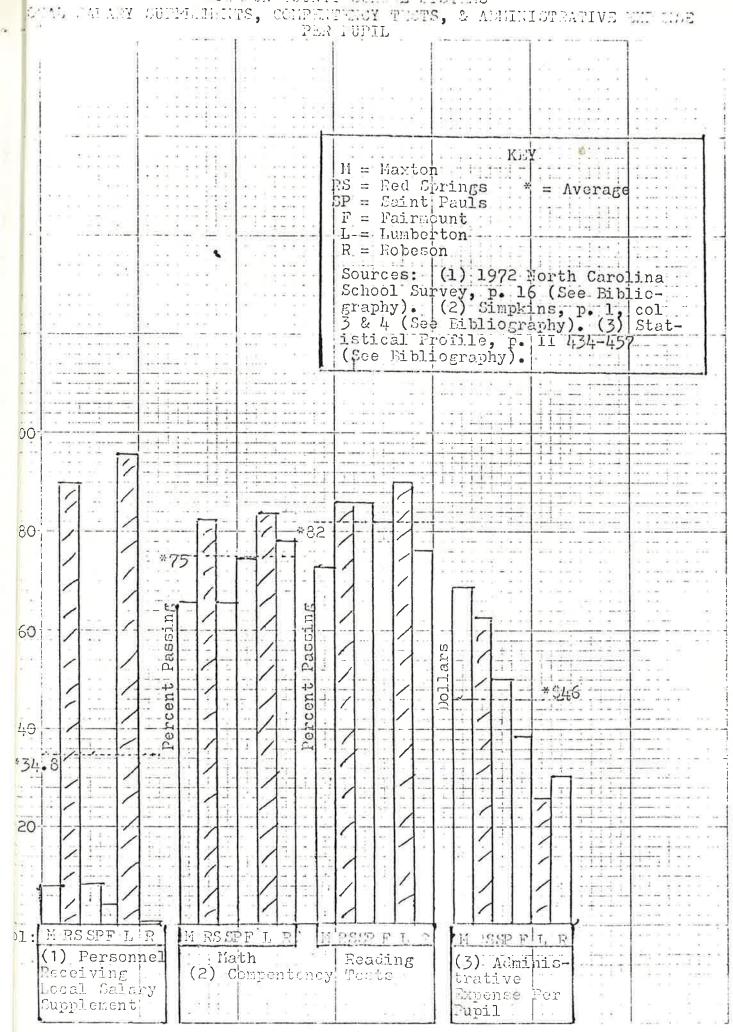
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Appendix 1



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