

1989

## Nebraska Policy Choices: 1989 - Education

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**NEBRASKA  
POLICY CHOICES:  
EDUCATION**

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# **NEBRASKA POLICY CHOICES: EDUCATION**

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**1989**

**Miles T. Bryant, Patricia O'Connell,  
and Christine M. Reed, *Editors***

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## **Nebraska Policy Choices: Education**

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# FOREWORD

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On behalf of the College of Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha; and Teachers College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we are pleased to welcome you to *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education*. This volume is designed to help the reader consider education in Nebraska—its current status, strengths and weaknesses, and alternative choices for consideration by decision makers. The publication's ultimate goal is to serve as a catalyst for creation of an improved educational climate for the youth of Nebraska via presentation of issues and information.

Special thanks go to the Center for Public Affairs Research for conceiving the idea for this special edition on educational issues and for inviting us to collaborate on its production. We congratulate and commend the authors and editors for the fine thinking and writing reflected in *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education*.

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# PREFACE

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The eight chapters in *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education* represent the work of University of Nebraska faculty from both the Lincoln and Omaha campuses, as well as the University of Nebraska Medical Center. These authors participated in a unique effort jointly sponsored by the University of Nebraska Central Administration, College of Education (University of Nebraska at Omaha), Teachers College (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), and Center for Public Affairs Research (University of Nebraska at Omaha). Unlike earlier volumes of *Nebraska Policy Choices*, the focus of this volume is on one critically important area: education policy.

As with previous volumes, our primary goal is to focus on emerging issues—not necessarily those currently on the policy agenda, such as school finance and reorganization. The process of identifying those emerging issues began with a brainstorming session in May of 1988, attended by 30 individuals from around the state who represented a variety of perspectives and who came from different geographical areas.

Shortly after the brainstorming session, faculty from UNL's Teachers College and UNO's College of Education gathered at a forum to discuss the recommendations of the brainstorming group and to offer their own suggestions for chapter topics. As a result of these two sessions and further proposals from interested faculty, several strategic education policy issues were identified, and prospective author-experts were commissioned to write chapters for the volume.

The eight chapters included in this volume reflect the priority strategic issues identified by the brainstorming group and faculty—the increasing debate over who should control schools, the expanding role of schools as the educational system is asked to redress certain consequences of larger societal trends, and the appropriate purposes of the school system in Nebraska.

The volume begins with Robert O'Reilly and Donald Uerling's analysis of local education control. This chapter charts the tension between state and local authority over what happens in schools, and it discusses some of the problems that emerge from this tension. Among its

recommendations is that state responsibility requires continued school district consolidation.

The role of business and economics in setting the education policy agenda in Nebraska is a critical component of the issue of control. Miles T. Bryant lays out the relationship between education and rural economic revitalization and suggests that if rural development is a strong state goal, the educational strategy of consolidation needs to be coordinated with regional and community development realities.

James Dick and James Marlin review the history and scope of school/business partnerships around the country and in Nebraska. Unlike some of the more celebrated examples in larger, urbanized states, there are no examples in Nebraska of systematic use of business resources for education reform. These authors urge the business community to invest its knowledge and skill in community schools and, ultimately, in small community development.

Michael Gillespie's chapter develops a vision of education that contrasts with the views of schools as centers of economic development. While Dick and Marlin tout the economic development model and Bryant cautions against it, Gillespie points out the critical error that such approaches may make. In this chapter, Gillespie focuses on discipline-based art education and challenges all of us to question whether, in the pursuit of a competitive position in the global market, we have lost sight of the purpose of general education: enhancing people's capacity to make experience intelligible by the way they order and relate phenomena. Without a good general education, Gillespie argues, students are subject to manipulation by the media. Moreover, debates in the education policy arena may erupt without the participants being conscious of the different images or values driving their positions. This chapter's in-depth look at an innovative approach to art education in Nebraska suggests how to enhance the human capacity to interpret and critically evaluate life situations through the development of ways of thinking about images.

The next two chapters cover in detail the changing requirements and needs of the state's younger children.

Deana Finkler and Cordelia Robinson identify one group of children at risk: those experiencing biological or environmental difficulties that carry a significant risk of developmental delay. New federal legislation, P.L. 99-457, makes incentive funding available to states for early intervention services not only for handicapped infants and toddlers, but also

for children from birth through age two who are at risk for developmental delay. The State of Nebraska already serves this age group, but it must define what criteria it will use to designate children as *at risk* if it chooses to serve them. Finkler and Robinson lay out the new choices federal law will require state policy makers to make, including how to: 1) define the family unit; 2) foster inter-agency cooperation; 3) develop trained specialists who can work effectively in a cross-agency setting; and 4) solve funding problems.

Mary McManus Kluender and Robert L. Egbert highlight the factors that help or hinder opportunities for children to succeed in their personal, social and economic responsibilities as adults. Their research demonstrates that a strong relationship exists between what children experience during the early years of their lives, their academic and behavioral performance by the time they complete the primary grades, and the life circumstances they will experience as adults. They find that to be born poor is to drastically increase the likelihood of being at risk, and that early childhood education is the single most effective means for Nebraska to help children overcome the constraints of poverty.

Two particular areas promise to become more and more critical for education in the state. As the world grows smaller and as dominant cultures shrink, education will need to respond by producing a citizenry cognizant of the need to give all Nebraskans equal opportunities and rights. Helen A. Moore's chapter points out that, despite a public policy of equal education opportunity and a high overall secondary school graduation rate, racial minority and female students continue to experience subtle but pervasive discrimination. Moore's analysis of a statewide survey leads to the conclusion that, while citizens hold to a general belief in cultural pluralism, they resist specific curricular reforms needed to eliminate racism and sexism in the institution of elementary and secondary education. However, educators can be leaders in communicating to their communities the value of ethnic diversity and the contributions of women. Moore's chapter emphasizes the statewide nature of this issue, particularly as a result of projected changes in the cultural diversity of communities with an influx of immigrants, such as Norfolk, Hastings and Lexington.

John W. Hill's chapter on at-risk youth in a suburban Nebraska school district provides startling evidence that troubled youth exist in large numbers in school districts commonly thought to be immune from such difficulties. His study of junior and senior high school students suggests

that an alarming number of older youths at risk are capable of achieving at the national average; however, these teenagers are "failing" according to the norms of their college-bound peers. Hill argues that at least one-third of the teenagers in this suburban district are at risk for unproductive lives, and that their best hope is to stay in school, which will only happen if educators send the message that they are valued members of the school community.

We have many people to thank for the enormous effort that lies behind these pages. First, Katherine Kasten, formerly of UNO and now at The University of Northern Florida, provided essential guidance to the project in its early stages. Margaret McDonald Rasmussen undertook the difficult task of converting academic prose into a language more accessible to the lay community. The help of Russell L. Smith, Director of the Center for Public Affairs Research, was also instrumental. Finally, our faculty colleagues who gathered in early planning stages to brainstorm the content of this volume, and who subsequently wrote chapters, deserve our special thanks.

We hope that all who read this volume will find in it useful information about some part of the educational policy puzzle.

Miles T. Bryant, Christine M. Reed and Patrica O'Connell, *Editors*

# Local Control of Education

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# 1

*Donald Uerling*  
*Robert O'Reilly*

The theory of educational control holds that schools are best served by local boards of education. In practice, however, these local boards are subject to numerous constraints, especially at the state level, and often at the federal level. The social, political, legal and judicial climate has great bearing on what school boards may or may not do, and how they may or may not do it.

In Nebraska, equitable allocation of resources and recognition of the value of local control can help school districts better achieve the state's educational goals.

Local control of education is a concept that has become embedded in American culture. It is generally accepted that decisions about the education of children in a public school district should be made by those who are closest to the site. However, major policy decisions about education are not made at the local level; they are made by legislative bodies, both state and national, and in some instances by state and federal courts.

Local boards of education have long had the responsibility for assignment of students, by grade and location. Still, that authority has been conditional and stipulated by the judiciary as well as federal and state statutes. Boards have control over admission of students to their local schools, but they may not deny admission to handicapped children or assign students by race. Boards have control over hiring and assignment of staff, but they cannot be prejudiced or biased in any of the eight categories of protected citizenship in such board actions. Boards are responsible for fixing the compensation for teachers, but in more than 40 states, statutes demand that boards engage in collective bargaining with faculty. These fluctuations in authority over public education demonstrate how closely state and local authority are interrelated.

Although these functions are responsibilities of local boards, it must be understood that many or most of them are delegated to administrators who function for the board in the actual operation of the schools.

Schools function in an environment influenced by social, political, and legal sectors. But there are ambiguities. Some public school districts



may want or need particular legislation while others may oppose it. Policy that would be most generally beneficial in the state is not always easily discerned. Public education is not a condition of state government vs. local government, although some board members and some legislators may sometimes see it as so.

### **The Philosophy and Definition of Local Control of Education**

The decisions and official actions taken by each local board of education relevant to the operation of the schools under its governance constitute local controls, as differentiated from state or federal controls. The responsibility to provide for free instruction for qualified persons in the common schools of the state is lodged with the legislature, primarily in Article VII of the Nebraska Constitution. As a matter of geographical necessity, the legislature early saw fit to delegate the responsibility for instruction to specialized political subdivisions. Following an already well-established pattern, the public school districts were created by action of the legislature with powers delegated to such agencies as county reorganization committees. For Nebraska's six classes of public school districts, the legislature stated how the governing boards should be elected and how they will proceed in much of the operation of the schools, and it has set forward many of the responsibilities and restrictions for each board.

Although this massive delegation from the state to the local districts occurred, the state legislature has continued to express an interest in the education of the state's citizens. Local control within a school district is subordinate to state control in two ways: its authority is delegated and restricted by the state (and developed from other sources such as the judiciary and the regulations of a state department of education), and its authority is limited to the educational enterprise operated within the public school district.

The delegation of responsibility to local districts by a state does not eliminate state influence. For example, the hiring of teachers has always been a local responsibility, with local governing boards responsible for identifying and hiring competent instructional leaders for appropriate classes within the district. However, only applicants with appropriate certificates issued by the state can be realistic candidates for job openings. Through certification, the state greatly reduces the pool of job candidates, restricting the choice of an employing board.

This particular example of control by the state over authority delegated to the local school board seems to be well received by the boards of education on a shared presumption of heightened quality among job candidates. In a way, it is an initial screening of candidates by the state. No school board association is seeking a roll-back of standards for teacher certificates.

The general public may form even greater restrictions on teacher certification. In the Twentieth Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools (Gallup and Elam 1988), a resounding 86 percent of those polled favored a national set of standards for the certification of public school teachers. This suggests a structure in which states would forego control over certification, with that power to reside in some federal agency. Such a movement does not seem likely in the foreseeable future, because states are unlikely to voluntarily relinquish power to the federal government, and no existing legal structure would force them to do so.

Addressing topics of general curriculum, the legislature has great power. In such areas as special education, state legislatures are sharply restricted programmatically, having been co-opted by federal statutes and case law, but they may have substantial financial liability, and that not of their own initiative.

In 1988, three states legislated a substantial increase in the state management of local schooling. In New Jersey, statutes empowered the state commissioner of education to "take over" local school districts found to be academically bankrupt by specified criteria for assessment of student achievement (*Education Week* June 1988). In Minnesota, a program allowing students to choose their own schools within or across district boundaries is derived from notions of market response; i.e., consumers will choose schools perceived to be good and their tax support will be changed to that district, so districts will compete for students with improved academic programs. It is anticipated that the program will be fully operating in 1991 (*Education Week* October 1988). Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act (1985) is now up for re-examination by the legislature on its accountability and cost aspects (*Education Week* March 1989). Anxieties about America's future have followed the rush of reports issued in the 1980s calling for reform/improvement, giving rise to a particular message: Let's do something! However, unless managed with reasonable criteria by which to judge proposals, legislation may emerge that is far off the mark for improved education.

There is a positive correlation between the number and complexity of laws and rules in a society, and the number of people in that society who hold varied perceptions and expectations of public service agencies. Given the increasingly complex American culture of the latter 20th century, it is reasonable to expect new controls, such as requiring special education courses for all prospective educators, will be legislatively imposed. American education will continue to experience an increasing number of controlling statutes and regulations.

### **The Courts' Role**

Many issues are settled by court cases. With the expansion of special education following LB 94-142 in 1975, many questions have been brought to the courts for answers. For example, in *Irving Independent School District v. Tatro* (1984), it was determined that public schools must be ready, willing and able to provide related supportive services as one way to increase access to beneficial educational services for handicapped persons. In *Adams Central School District v. Deist* (1983), Nebraska's Supreme Court clarified the obligations of local districts: to provide needed programs or to reimburse parents who sought them elsewhere, when denied locally. Not incidentally, this same issue of responsibility for selected services is now before the United States Supreme Court (*Gilhool v. Muth*, a Pennsylvania case), and the question may be answered in such a way as to substantially enlarge the options for parents who are not pleased with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) developed by their local school district. The outcome may also raise costs of special education programs.

Recent pronouncements from the Supreme Court have also attended aspects of control over students by school administrators in matters of speech. In *Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser* (1986), the court examined freedom of oral speech and identified some restrictions that public school students must accept. In *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), school newspapers were identified as a part of the curriculum, under the control of local board policy. In *Honig v. Doe* (1988), the court clarified the "stay put rule" for special education students guilty of disruptive behavior, diminishing the options for local districts meeting such problems.

## The Potential of Local Control

Despite recent limitations on local control, there are many justifications for local control. Control is not absolute; it is a question of the balance of authority between state and local officials. How much control, in what areas, should be delegated by the state to the local boards?

Several purposes are served through implementation of local control. Viewed from the vantage point of organizational theory, it is desirable to put decision-making control close to the action. This presumes, of course, that citizen interest will be high and competent individuals from the local citizens group will be willing to serve on public school governing boards. Through delegation, citizens are allowed to assume ownership through elected boards, PTAs, etc., even though local education is interrelated with state and federal government. Because we tend to be most interested in what is our own, and because citizen interest in the welfare of educational organizations is a large part of their success, the delegation is justified. Distance of state government from the school sites is well beyond what is practical for good administration.

Local control of schools may emerge in newer forms, because a sense of ownership is a powerful motivator toward insistence upon quality. Conversely, when parents and patrons feel alienated from their schools, they evidence low levels of care about what goes on in those schools. Recognizing that social principle, the Illinois legislature passed a bill that would reorganize the Chicago school system (*Education Week* October 1988). Intended to reconstruct the board of education, it will also create local school councils to oversee and advocate for every one of the 594 schools in that system. Other states have similar statutes or regulations, and some federal legislation in the past two decades has stipulated having local school councils as one aspect of eligibility for receiving federal funds.

LB 316 provides another example of the state stipulating how local authority will be exercised. It was enacted in 1988 "to prohibit corporal punishment in public schools; to eliminate a justification for the use of force; to change provisions relating to student discipline. . . (Nebraska Revised Statutes, Sect. 79-1247.02)." Through the enactment of this bill, districts were removed from decision making on the primary question of corporal punishment, but were left with some new problems on how

to provide for every classroom a necessary minimum of control over student behavior.

Discussions on the national scene about what a restructured educational system should look like—in curriculum, facilities and personnel—are not unified, and certainly not tried. Everyone wants better results. State legislators have become uncertain about what they are getting for their money in the educational enterprise, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty, even of distrust. Local school control has been subjected to calls for accountability. It is a politically defensible move, a reflection of constituent dissatisfaction calling for change. However, state standards must be narrow and unambiguous if they are to produce local accountability.

Other factors that should influence state legislators' determination of what authority may be delegated and what withheld include the economic status and prospects for the state; consideration of reports from labor market surveys that indicate a rapid decrease in repetitive, low-skill jobs; and demographic data that describe a third of the student population as having dismal job prospects as adults.

American high schools produce the highest percentage of public school graduates in the world. American schools devote tremendous energy toward both equity and excellence. In the interest of uniformity and economic accountability, they must recognize their interrelationship with state and federal governments. However, consideration and restraint may be the most commendable actions for any state legislature, allowing some time for the assimilation and trial of reform demands just now in place on the local scenes.

### **Social and Economic Influences on Local Control**

Education is interrelated with many social and economic factors. Decisions at all levels must be made in consideration of trends in areas as diverse as population, school district reorganization, property tax equity, and labor relations.

**Social Influences.** In a late 1988 information release, the Omaha Metropolitan Area Planning Association provided population projections for Douglas and Sarpy counties, which account for about 30 percent of the state's schoolchildren. These data show that in Douglas County the school-age cohort will be substantially larger in 1990 than in 1985; substantially larger in 1995 than in 1990, perhaps even a 16

percent increase; and still a little larger in 2000. From that point, a gentle decrease in school-age children will start, and by 2010 that number will be just slightly higher than the 1980 registrations. In the meantime, a steady increase in the over-60 age group will occur until between 2005-2010, when there will be a surge in growth, perhaps 20 percent in the five years (*Age and Sex Projections to the Year 2010* 1988). This increase in proportion of older citizens will be reflected in each school district's tax base.

Although less pronounced than in Douglas County, the Sarpy County data are quite similar in the pattern of growth and decline, leading to decline of the school-age cohort that will start about 2005 and growth in the over-60 cohort starting just before 2005. Demographic data are a part of the information legislators must use as future plans are made for education.

**Economic Influences.** The boundaries of public school districts are primarily or exclusively under the jurisdiction of state governance. Nebraska has been slow to require small districts to consolidate. At the time of World War I, Nebraska had well over 7,000 public school districts (O'Reilly and O'Reilly 1980). By 1986 that number had been reduced to 955, but that total was exceeded only by Illinois, California, and Texas. In round figures, Nebraska has 950 public school districts for 1.6 million people; California has 1,000 districts for 22.6 million people. Drawing from those same Department of Education data for neighboring states, it was revealed that Iowa had 436 public school districts; Kansas, 304; South Dakota, 194; Wyoming, 49. And in all states those were unified K-12 districts (*Dateline: Education* March 1987). Legislators control those numbers in that they have the power to redistrict the entire state if they choose to do so.

For local control of education to be exercised in a truly meaningful way, a school district must be a viable entity in terms of both student numbers and financial resources. School district reorganization raises controversy over local control issues. In many instances, while the proponents of a proposed reorganization contend that the merger of existing small school districts into a single, larger unit will result in enhanced educational opportunities at a lower cost per pupil, opponents argue that reorganization would diminish the control residents of each small district have over the education of their children.

An underlying consideration for many is their property taxes; people will often support whatever configuration of school districts results in the lowest tax bill for them. It is possible to devise a state system of school finance that would result in nearly equal assessed valuations and tax rates on similar kinds of property all across the state. If property taxes thus became a moot issue, decisions about school district reorganization could be based on educational considerations rather than on tax advantages, and some of the rather specious arguments about local control could be eliminated.

This fact indicates the reasonableness of such legislation as seen in LB 940, introduced in the Nebraska Unicameral in 1988, whose stated intent is to "change provisions relating to the formation of new (public) school districts." A cursory test for fairness in accepting the financial burden for public education identifies Nebraska as a state in which special interests are still accorded reduced tax obligations, shielded by public school district boundaries. LB 940 provides a plan to attend equity in taxation with the strong prospect of increasing educational quality. The bill is being read for its consequences by Nebraskans who bring different viewpoints to questions of education, including some who will see the goals and intent portions of Section 10 of the bill (Nebraska Revised Statutes, Sect. 79-1247.02) as disadvantageous to their financial welfare. Doubtless, they will speak to legislators, seeking change in that legislation in the direction to continue their preferred financial status. Still, the data and the concepts of financial equity and educational effectiveness indicate the appropriateness of LB 940 as long overdue, and perhaps not forceful enough.

Nebraska has large corporate property owners/users finding relief from local property taxation, under federal statutes from the 1970s. The 4-R Act of the mid-1970s, passed to financially energize the nation's railroads, is now being interpreted as a way to get unattached business property off the property tax rolls. Burlington Northern, Chicago, North Western, and Union Pacific are among companies seeking such relief in the courts. Uniformly successful in their suits, the flow of tax receipts from those companies has been interrupted. At stake is \$378 million in railroad property that currently generates about \$10 million per year in property tax revenue. Some observers in the Nebraska Association of School Boards contend that, combined with the principle of equity embedded in the Nebraska Constitution, many other businesses are likely to be eligible for such relief from property taxes. Combining facts of the

state's economy with current happenings in taxation points up a need for reconsideration of public school district financing, traditionally dependent upon local property taxes (*Newsletter of the Nebraska Association of School Boards* 1989).

In their financing, Nebraska schools have responded to the plethora of civil rights initiatives of the 1960s and 1970s, especially in integrating the due process obligations into the operations of their labor intensive enterprise. The diverse enrollment numbers in Nebraska schools complicates our condition beyond that of many states. Laws and programs suitable in one place may be inappropriate in another. Still, neighboring northern plains states have made progress toward educational program uniformity while also creating equitable property taxation.

Local control may have very different meanings in large and small school districts (as defined by student enrollment) and among rich and poor districts (as defined by assessed valuation per resident student). For example, a large school district tends to provide a broader range of options within which the discretion of the board of education and administration can be exercised. Decisions about what programs and services to offer are seldom made simply to comply with state requirements. In contrast, in very small school systems the programs and services offered may be limited almost exclusively to those required by state approval and accreditation standards. Similarly, options available to rich school districts differ from options of poor school districts. Unless the financial resources are available to support the programs and services that a board of education deems appropriate for its school district, its freedom to exercise the discretion that local control of education implies is of little consequence.

The Nebraska legislature has been responsive to messages from teachers regarding salaries and labor relations. In the sense that permanence in position is based upon procedural due process, Nebraska teachers achieve tenure in their first year of employment (Nebraska Revised Statutes, Sect. 79-2354.02). With teaching an exceptionally low-risk occupation, questions may arise about how high teacher salaries should go. The general rule in labor relations is that high risk merits high pay; low occupational risk (and promised longevity in position) is linked to comparatively lower pay. Still, in 1989 the legislature passed a teacher pay plan (LB 89) that sets aside funds exclusively for teacher salaries. The distribution of that money is left to each individual public school district. The state's history of collective bargaining in



schools covers 20 years. In *School District of Seward Education Association v. School District of Seward* (1972), clarification of management areas was provided. Now, impasses in contract bargaining seem to involve increasingly minute details, and Commission of Industrial Relations awards provide less certainty of direction on how to approach bargaining with confidence of moving toward agreement.

There are, then, some aspects of education that legislators might well avoid, leaving those problems and tasks to the local school districts. Others beg for attention, and they are, typically, difficult questions. On such controversial issues, legislators might do well to limit their considerations to educational quality for Nebraska schoolchildren and equity in taxation for Nebraska citizens.

### **Legal Context of Local Control**

Education is of national interest, a state function, and subject to local control (Hudgins and Vacca 1979). Therefore, the concept of local control of education must be considered within the context of the organization and hierarchy of American law.

In each of the 50 states, there are two distinct but interacting systems of law: that of the federal government and that of the state itself. As stated in the Supremacy Clause in Article VI of the United States Constitution, the supreme law of the land is the Constitution and the laws of the United States enacted pursuant thereof. The enacted and decisional laws of each state must conform to the provisions of federal law. In turn, the regulations and decisions of boards and administrators made at the local school district level must be consistent with the provisions of both federal and state law.

### ***Federal Context***

Education *per se* is not among the fundamental rights afforded federal constitutional protection, either explicitly or implicitly. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court has noted that "education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments," and has distinguished education as being more important than other government benefits because of its impact on both the individual and the whole society (*Plyler v. Doe* 1982).

**U.S. Constitution.** Through the 10th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, those powers not delegated to the federal government by the states

are explicitly reserved to the states or to the people. Education is never mentioned in the Constitution; thus it is reserved as a function of state and local government.

Although education itself is not regulated by the U.S. Constitution, various sections of the constitution do impact school boards and school administrators' actions. For example the First Amendment, which protects the freedoms of religion, expression and association; the Fourth Amendment, which protects against unreasonable searches and seizures; the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, which provides that a state cannot deny any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws; and the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment—have all been invoked in court cases related to education.

Also through the operation of the 14th Amendment, the Constitution affords private individuals the right to establish parochial and other nonpublic schools; a state cannot require that all children attend public schools (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters* 1925).

A state does have a critical interest in the education of its young people and has the power to impose reasonable regulations regarding the control and duration of basic education and the quality of the education that all schools provide (*Board of Education v. Allen* 1968). One area in which the authority of state and local school officials appears to act independently of federal constraint is in academic matters. The Supreme Court has made it clear that, absent some showing of bad faith, decisions by educators about academic matters are not susceptible to constitutional challenges (*Regents of University of Michigan v. Ewing* 1985; *Board of Curators v. Horowitz* 1978).

**U.S. Statutes.** Congress has no constitutional authority to directly regulate the governance and administration of public education, but the impact of federal legislation on the local control of education through less direct means is nevertheless substantial. Based on powers delegated by the Constitution, Congress has enacted a broad array of statutes that promote national policies of equal educational opportunities and fair employment practices.

Several major legislative enactments provide for federal financial support for education to those states and local school systems willing to comply with the requirements imposed by these statutes and their implementing regulations. The Education for All Handicapped

Children Act of 1975 provides federal money to assist state and local agencies in educating handicapped children, but conditions such funding on compliance with extensive regulations. As provided by the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, a state or local school system, any part of which is extended federal financial assistance, is prohibited from practicing various forms of discrimination by four separate statutes. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin; and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, prohibits discrimination against handicapped persons who are otherwise qualified for educational or employment opportunities; and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of age for those age 40 to 70.

**Federal Courts.** When disputes arise that involve federal constitutional or statutory law, the federal courts often serve as the forum in which these disputes are resolved. During recent decades, proponents of state and local control of education have contended that the federal courts have been too willing to protect personal rights grounded in federal law, thus diminishing the authority of boards and administrators. The Supreme Court has also been willing to intervene when fundamental constitutional rights are threatened or when the provisions of federal statutes are not followed, but it has generally affirmed the comprehensive authority of state and local governments to control public education.

### *Nebraska Context*

Education is primarily a function of state and local government. The state constitution and statutes are the basic laws that define a state's system of public education. And as the decisions of the Nebraska Supreme Court have made abundantly clear, there is no doubt about the power of the Nebraska Legislature to control the state's educational system, at both the state and local school district levels.

**Nebraska Constitution.** Article VII, Section 1 of the Constitution of Nebraska states, "The Legislature shall provide for the free instruction in the common schools of this state of all persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years." Sections 2, 3 and 4 provide respectively for

existence of the State Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the Commissioner of Education.

The Nebraska constitution also recognizes authority greater than that of the Legislature—the power of the people. Article III, Section 2 provides in part that "[t]he first power reserved by the people is the initiative whereby laws may be enacted and constitutional amendments adopted by the people independently of the Legislature. This power may be invoked by petition wherein the proposed measures shall be set forth at length." Section 3 provides for the referendum, "Which may be invoked, by petition, against any act or part of an act of the Legislature, except those making appropriations for the expense of the state government or a state institution existing at the time of the passage of such act."

An illustration of the use of the referendum power to negate a legislative enactment is provided by the history of LB 662. Enacted by the Unicameral in 1985, its major implications were to require some form of reorganization of Class I school districts and to impose a 1 percent sales tax for educational purposes. LB 662 was referred to the voters at the 1986 general election and soundly defeated.

**Nebraska Statutes.** In contrast to the federal government, which has only that authority delegated to it by the Constitution, a state legislature has the authority to act in regard to any subject it chooses, insofar as its enactments are not inconsistent with federal law or the state constitution (Alexander and Alexander 1985). Pursuant to the mandate of Article VII, Section I of the Nebraska Constitution, the legislature has enacted a comprehensive set of statutes that provide for a state system of public education. In addition to these "education laws," there are numerous other statutes that apply generally to all political subdivisions of state government or to all employer-employee relationships, and some of these general provisions have a substantial effect on local control of public education.

While public education is most subject to state control, the legislature has retained some control over private elementary and secondary schools. Sections 79-1701 *et seq.* set out requirements and authority specific to the operation of all private, denominational, and parochial schools in the state.

The legislative manifestations of the state's education policy can be found throughout the statutes, but two sections are especially worthy

of note. Section 79-4,140.01 is a legislative finding and declaration of the educational mission of the state. It provides that this mission is to be accomplished through the public school system. Section 79-4,140.02 recognizes the importance of education and the intent of the legislature to join with local governing bodies to advance the quality and responsiveness of Nebraska's education system. Its language clearly indicates that the legislature views public education as a state function to be accomplished through a state system of local school districts.

For reasons previously discussed, the legislature has delegated much of the responsibility for implementing state education statutes and supervising the operation of local school systems to the Nebraska Department of Education. The regulations of the state department of education have on occasion been challenged as being an unlawful delegation of legislative authority. The Nebraska Supreme Court noted in *School District No. 39 v. Decker* (1955) that granting administrative discretion is not an unconstitutional delegation of a legislative function in those instances where adequate standards to guide the exercise of such discretion are provided in the authorizing statute. In *School District No. 8 v. State Board of Education* (1964), the court similarly pointed out that the legislature may properly delegate authority to a state agency to formulate rules and regulations to carry out the expressed legislative purpose. There is a difference, however, between a delegation of legislative power and the delegation of authority to an administrative agency to carry out the expressed intent of the legislature. The court concluded that it is almost impossible for a legislature to prescribe all the rules and regulations necessary for a specialized agency to accomplish the legislative purpose, and so the general delegation of authority to an agency to meet the need for complex regulation has been the natural trend.

Section 79-101(11) of the Nebraska Constitution defines a board of education as the governing body of any school district. Sections 79-440, 79-441, 79-443, and 79-444 give each board the authority and the responsibility for the general care and supervision of the schools. The board is to provide facilities and other material necessities; hire administrators, teachers, and other employees; regulate the attendance, promotion, and conduct of pupils; and establish a curriculum consistent with the requirements of the state department of education.

As discussed previously, a board of education has no inherent authority; only that delegated to it by statute. If a board acts beyond the

scope of its authority and is challenged in court, the court will likely hold that the action has no legal force. On the other hand, there have been instances in some states where innovative programs and services initiated and implemented by local school officials were later authorized and regulated by statute (Peterson, Rossmiller and Volz 1978).

The powers granted to local boards of education are quite comprehensive, but they must be exercised within state statutory constraints from all perspectives. Several examples illustrate this. As in all political subdivisions of state government, school board meetings must be conducted pursuant to the Public Meetings statutes, collective bargaining is governed by the Commission of Industrial Relations statutes, and financial affairs are regulated by statutes such as the Nebraska Budget Act. In addition, all public educational institutions are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sex in any program or activity by the Nebraska Equal Opportunity in Education Act. All public and most private school systems are required by Section 79-328(5) to comply with the State Department of Education rules for approval and accreditation. All school districts must comply with the requirements of the tenure statutes set out in Sections 79-12,107 *et seq.* in instances of dismissals of certificated personnel, and Sections 79-4,170 *et seq.* in matters of student discipline. These examples show the diverse nature of the various state statutes that have a significant impact on local control of education.

Local officials sometimes complain that their authority over staff and students has been eroded by state law. It must be noted, however, that if boards of education and administrators do comply with the statutory procedures, then decisions made at the local level about such matters as staff dismissals and student discipline are likely to be sustained by the Nebraska courts. When standards of performance and rules of conduct are reasonable, the actions of local school officials will probably be upheld. (See, for example, *Eshom v. Board of Education of School District No. 54* 1985; *Brasch v. DePasquale* 1978.)

**Nebraska Courts.** As the foregoing discussion of constitutional and statutory provisions indicates, the state legislature has comprehensive and pervasive power over the organization and operation of public school districts. The extent of this power has been confirmed in three opinions from the Nebraska Supreme Court.

In *Halstead v. Rozmiarek* (1959), the court stated that "[a] school district is a creature of statute designated a body corporate, possessed of the usual powers of a corporation for public purposes as a convenient agency for exercising the authority that is entrusted to it by the state." The court went on to note that a school district was viewed as a municipal corporation and quoted with approval from a U.S. Supreme Court decision: "Municipal corporations are political subdivisions of the state, created as convenient agencies for exercising such of the governmental powers of the state as may be entrusted to them. . . . The number, nature, and duration of the powers conferred upon these corporations and the territory over which they shall be exercised rests [in] the absolute discretion of the state. . . ."

The power of the state over the very existence of school districts was emphasized in *In Re De Jonge's Petition* (1966). "The State is supreme in the creation and control of school districts and may as it thinks proper, modify or withdraw any of their powers, or destroy such school districts without the consent of the residents thereof, or even over their protests."

The authority of the state over boards of education was pointed out in *School District of Seward Education Association v. School District of Seward* (1972), a case in which the powers of the Commission of Industrial Relations were at issue. The court found, "The Legislature has plenary power and control over school districts, including provision for the appointment or election of governing bodies thereof. Consequently, it may provide limitations on any authority to be exercised by a school board."

The myths and realities of local control, as considered in the context of the legal relationship between state government and local school districts, are summarized by the following:

The large degree of local control of education which prevails in the United States leads many people to assume that local school districts have been granted the right of continued control of education and that the state, by granting substantial control to the local district, has relinquished its authority over the operation of local school districts. There is no factual basis for this assumption. (Peterson, Rossmiller and Volz 1978)

## The Future of Local Control

The climate of school operation has become increasingly legalized, a reflection of the willingness of citizens to engage in litigation and the

increasing receptivity of the judiciary. That trend seems likely to continue, for it is in harmony with larger American society. Mandates and restrictions have multiplied, reducing the on-site alternatives open to educators. It may well be that the surge of civil rights legislation that peaked in the 1960s and which powered the moves for extension of rights to individual Americans is on the wane. There are indications that the persons confirmed to federal judiciary positions in the 1980s will be less willing to impose restrictions on governmental units. The political and legal issues of the next decade may evidence conservative approaches.

Contemporary political movements are contradictory when analyzed to determine the future of local control of education. For example, consider the effects of federal legislation that mandated extensions of opportunities for handicapped children and due process for personnel administration, from recruitment to dismissal or retirement. Nebraska has also codified its own mandatory legislation in those areas, but none of that activity has decreased the effort of local boards of education to make decisions regarding special education and personnel. Those efforts have only been channeled in new, specified directions. In fact, some board of education members—and some local school administrators—would contend that such mandates in specific categories have increased their workload. Reasons given include the need for more precise planning of how to carry out intentions in such programs, as well as the demands for accountability that necessitate record keeping and reporting.

Because of this, legislative mandates to school districts may not be automatically implemented. There may be extensive details to attend to. Mandates may reduce degrees of choice on the local scene, but may actually increase the need for an active, thoughtful, and resourceful board of education. The mandated change may be what a local district would do on its own or it may be labeled as intrusive and unwelcome, but change will not decrease the importance of effective local boards of education.

### **Concluding Observations**

As state policymakers consider the balance between state and local control of education, they should keep in mind the state obligation to ensure every child the opportunity to pursue a quality education. Most people would probably concur that the basics of some carefully defined



core curriculum should be studied by all and mastered by most. But while the state meets this obligation, local school districts should still be free to expand their educational agendas to accommodate local needs and preferences. The hand of state control must not be so heavy that it stifles the promise of local creativity.

Proponents of local control sometimes complain about the scope of the power that resides with the state. But in fact, much discretion about how to accomplish the educational mission of the state resides with local boards and administrators. Most truly good ideas in education that are generated at the local level are not killed by the mandates of state control; in general, the state has been supportive of local innovations. Ideas of real merit usually will thrive. The challenge is to generate such ideas and devise a way to implement them at the local level.

Proliferation of statutes and regulations directly limits local control of education. However, there is a less obvious, but quite adverse, effect on governance and administration at the local level that is seldom considered. As the number and complexity of laws increase, boards and administrators must devote an ever greater amount of time and attention to the task of complying with legal requirements. The diversion of financial resources to attorney fees and other costs associated with legal matters is obvious; however, the diversion of professional time and attention from the more important matters of education may be the greater problem.

### **General Recommendations**

The basic responsibility and authority for public education is lodged with the legislature, but the state's educational mission is necessarily accomplished by the local school districts. Striking the proper balance between state and local control is critical. To that end, three general recommendations are offered.

First, the state must meet its responsibility by promulgating rules and standards that ensure quality education for all Nebraska schoolchildren. These rules and standards must be specific enough to be meaningful, yet general enough to accommodate the great variations among Nebraska schools.

Second, the state should continue to pursue the question of school district reorganization. All children in the state must have the opportunity to attend schools that are capable of providing an education appropriate for the 21st century. To support that kind of education

across the state, there must be a more equitable allocation of the financial resources available.

Third, the state should recognize the hardiness and durability of local public school districts as political subdivisions of the state, deserving both guidance through standards and discretion for local implementation. Alone, neither the state nor the local school districts can achieve the state's educational mission; together, they can deliver on the promise of a better future through education.

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# Education and Rural Revitalization: A Study of the Link Between Education and Economic Development

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## 2

*Miles T. Bryant*

Rural Nebraska faces economic uncertainties that perplex state leadership. The public school system is an important part of any community or state effort directed at improving rural life. This chapter analyzes the relationship of Nebraska's schools to rural economic development.

Nebraska's rural economy might be best described as a roller coaster. Its vicissitudes were captured by Nebraska humorist Roger Welsch in 1971: "Living in Nebraska is absolute hell; No ordinary man can even make a living on these godforsaken wastes; I'm doing just fine."

Though times have improved, even extraordinary Nebraskans do not always find themselves doing "just fine." Rural Nebraska still faces economic uncertainties that perplex state and local leadership. In terms of both population and commercial activity, rural Nebraska has been in a decline for much of this century. The extent of this erosion became visible during the recent farm crisis. Since then, numerous initiatives from the state legislature, the governor's office, and other state agencies have sought to help Nebraska's rural communities handle their plight. Even Congress has allocated funds for rural revitalization. Across the nation, the need to reverse rural decline has received priority attention from policy makers.

In Nebraska this long decline does not necessarily mean that the state's economic productivity has suffered; Nebraska's agricultural land generates a proportionate share of the state's economic productivity. What perplexes state and local leadership is the issue of how to sustain a viable and economically stable rural culture. Should the state keep its rural communities alive? And if so, how?

Any rural redevelopment plan must overcompensate rural populations; that is, give more per capita to those in rural areas than to those in populated areas. Thus, before one begins to analyze the complexity

of rural revitalization, one is faced with the broad policy issue of whether it is in the best interests of the state to allocate a great proportion of limited resources to rural regions. Such a policy sets the interests of the populated east against those of the sparsely populated north, south and west. Nebraska's population disparities were evident as early as 1860, when Nebraskans were concentrated within 100 miles of the Missouri River. By 1920 ribbons of populated towns streamed westward along the railroad routes. In 1989 those ribbons have disintegrated, leaving scattered pockets of people in the rural parts of the state (see figure 1). It is the needs of those remnants that drive state rural revitalization policy.

At its heart, the rural revitalization issue is one of recreating or sustaining a critical mass of rural people. A retired postman in one Nebraska town put the matter simply: "To help these towns you've got to have people. And we've got two ways to do that: We either figure out how to get new ones, or we keep the ones we've got."

These two basic approaches to reversing the population declines common to many rural communities (i.e., attracting new residents and keeping present ones) require a strong educational system.

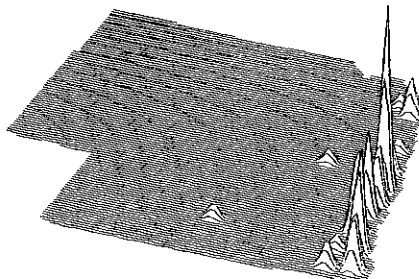
From the vantage point of the community developer, the local school is a factor in attracting new business and people, a site where local economic activity may be initiated, and an instrument of socialization. Without a local school, one could argue, a necessary community ingredient is lacking (Wall and Luther 1988a; Swain 1988).

The position that education has local economic usefulness for towns is not new to the state. The common school was one of the essential ingredients in the original founding and early development of Nebraska's rural towns. In his seminal work on the settling of the prairie, Cass G. Barns wrote, "the common school system established by early Nebraska was the keystone of progress and mental development of the state" (1930:115). One of Nebraska's early governors proclaimed that he would not rest until there were 10,000 school districts (Manley 1988), a statement fueled by his wish to see the prairie settled.

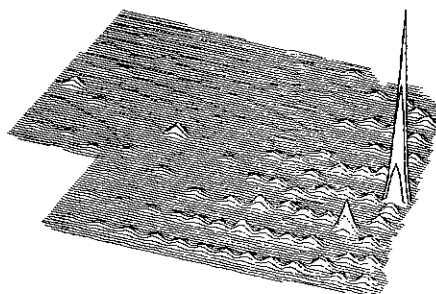
Thus, the contemporary role cast for education in rural revitalization has historical antecedent. However, the re-emergence of that role at this time in history is problematic. The primary mission of the public school system is an educative one. And since the long-range health and growth of the state are dependent upon the development of a superlative public school system, developing educational policy that attends to

**Figure 1 - Surface Maps: Nebraska Population Density**

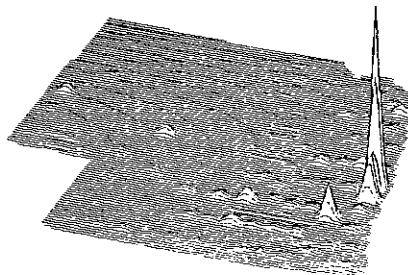
**Population Density 1860**



**Population Density 1920**



**Population Density 1980**



Source: Nebraska Legislative Fiscal Office.

this primary mission is essential to the long-term interests of the people of the state. The problem is that each of the two basic uses of the school to promote economic development—as a mechanism for attracting new people, and as a device for keeping current residents—runs the risk of compromising the basic educational mission in favor of short term economic gain. The primary mission of the public school system is and must remain an educative one.

### **Attracting New Residents**

As indicated above, one approach to creating the critical mass of people is attracting new residents. Schools are as essential now as they were in 1860 for communities seeking to attract new people and business. But it is not enough for a community to simply have a school; the quality of the school is important. Thus, state educational policy that supports the continuation of small rural schools while simultaneously overseeing the quality of education in such schools is an important part of a comprehensive plan of rural revitalization. It should be noted that these two features of rural education—provision of schools and attention to quality of programs—are important regardless of whether the general rural development strategy advocates assisting distressed rural areas or following a growth center strategy (Deichert and Smith 1987).

Aspects of state education that need to be interrelated with rural development strategies are consolidation, distance learning, educational service units, school board development, and educational opportunity.

**Consolidation.** A most visible part of recent education policy has been the consolidation of school districts. The state once had a huge number of very small school districts, but attrition in student numbers has necessitated some centralization. However, the general goal of school consolidation needs to be rethought in view of rural revitalization efforts.

Consolidation of school districts takes many forms. Sometimes consolidation represents the joining of a small elementary-only district with a K-12 district. Sometimes consolidation means the merger of two declining K-12 districts. Sometimes existent buildings or attendance centers are used to house the student population of more than one community. Sometimes new regional schools are built. Often a new facility is located between the participating communities.

Whatever the consolidation arrangement, by definition, some communities lose their schools. The new, consolidated school is unable to serve as a focal point, a source of community identity, and a repository of community culture for those communities that lost their schools. Lacking such a primary resource, a community's absence of a school may seal the fate of any present or future local economic development efforts. Once the school is removed from the rural community, it is almost impossible to retrieve it.

Thus, consolidating school districts requires careful evaluation. State efforts to reduce the total numbers of school districts should be constructed to coincide with rural economic development plans. If the state strategy is to develop growth centers, the educational resources within the shadow of those growth centers need to be planned carefully so that consolidation serves the needs of the regional plan. If the state strategy is to assist depressed areas, help must be provided to maintain—not displace—the rural school as one mechanism to reverse rural decline.

The strength of small rural schools is in the communities that surround them. Parent participation, small class size, close contact with teachers, a core curriculum, a set of community values that reinforces educational values—all of these exist in most small rural schools. However, while these factors contribute greatly to the affective education of students, they do not ensure a high-quality instructional program.

Again, it is important not to neglect quality. If state educational policy makers are to retreat from a goal of consolidating school districts, there must be an accompanying program to ensure that the educative mission of each school remains paramount. If economies of scale are to be sacrificed and the continuation of small rural schools is to be supported, educational quality in those schools must be equal or superior to that of larger schools.

Rural schools and the educators who make them work are particularly vulnerable to external forces. Because rural education is typically underfunded and undermanned, educators have little in the way of resources available to help them effectively analyze their own educational practices. Finding time and resources to enable rural educators to participate in inservice growth activities would be one concrete way of addressing the need for continued educational improvement.

**Distance Learning.** Distance learning promises much for Nebraska's rural schools. Presently some curricular material is delivered to schools



via satellite. A few schools are experimenting with two-way interactive television. Some use is being made, particularly in agricultural business classes, of on-line computer data banks. In all, Nebraska lags behind other states in putting technology to work in its schools. But an intensive use of modern communications technology by the entire rural school system promises the most for rural schools. Such technology offers a way for rural schools to protect the integrity of their educative mission.

As an illustration, distance learning over two-way interactive television allows neighboring school districts to design, produce, and broadcast programs together. This allows schools to share teacher resources, to expand the classroom experience of children, to make the most of existing resources, and to control the education program locally. Using this technology, students in several classrooms can instantly communicate with one another. Furthermore, once the hardware for such a system is in place, the school can become a focal point for adult learning.

The state must expand its proactive role in helping to develop distance learning. The technology exists to bring knowledge and learning opportunities to the children and adults of rural communities. If state leader are seriously committed to rural revitalization, they must make getting these technologies to Nebraska's rural communities a priority.

**Educational Service Units.** In seeking to improve the education that takes place in rural schools, a critical resource that should be better utilized is the educational service unit (ESU). Currently each county in the state is part of a service unit. There are nineteen of these units in the state. A few school districts do not belong to their local service unit, but most school districts in the state are served by an ESU.

If rural education in small schools is to keep pace with the rest of the state, teachers need continued access to staff development activities (Breed 1989). ESUs can provide such development, in the form of workshops and regional conferences in new curricular content and approaches, training in particular educational innovations, skill development with new technologies, and access to new developments in academic fields. These kinds of services are essential in countering the isolation that often prevails in rural education.

In the future, though, ESUs will have increasing difficulty meeting the demands of school districts for staff development because of fund-

ing limitations. By law ESUs may exercise their authority to levy taxes up to \$.035 per \$1,000 evaluation. A number of ESUs now tax their patrons up to that limit and still face increasing demand from schools for more activities, particularly in the area of staff development. Unable to gain additional revenues from local sources, ESU leaders have made proposals to the legislature to allocate state funds to the ESUs to provide for staff development activities. Because of the link between ESUs and rural education, and between education and rural economic development, the allocation of state funds for this type of activity would contribute much to rural revitalization.

**School Board Development.** If rural schools are to be maintained as part of a larger plan to help revitalize rural regions, the school boards that guide these schools need assistance. Local school curricular improvement and staff development activities are unlikely to take place unless supported by the local board.

Expanded in-service activities for board members could be provided by a variety of agencies, including the Nebraska School Boards Association, the colleges and state university system, the Department of Education, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Directors, and the ESUs. Presently, the only in-service opportunities board members have are provided through the Nebraska School Boards Association, which does not include all of the board members in the state.

There is reason to believe that incentives to encourage participation in such activities would be needed. A survey conducted by the author in 1986 found that around 60 percent of the board members surveyed attended regional workshops hosted by the state school boards association, but participation levels could be much higher (Bryant 1988-89). Boards, in conjunction with local superintendents, should develop working plans for their own membership relative to board development. State financial assistance with such development should be provided.

Additionally, the state needs to be clear about its expectations of school board behavior. For example, if the state were to set in place standard operating rules, these rules could protect board members from some of their worst proclivities, such as routinely becoming involved in personnel matters and student discipline matters. Not infrequently, such interference has a negative impact on administrator and teacher morale, leads to staff turnover, and produces, over the long term, instability that results in an impoverished educational program.

Simple statewide educational opportunities and requirements that would guide individual board member behavior in more detail could assist local boards in doing a better job.

**Equal Educational Opportunity.** It is widely known that there is great funding diversity in Nebraska's school districts. In terms of adjusted current expenditures per pupil in 1987-88, the top ranked school district in the state spent \$7,403 while the bottom ranked school spent \$2,202 (Bureau of Educational Research, Service and Policy Studies 1988). In that same year, the highest tax rate paid by any community (the measure of local residents' willingness to tax themselves to support their local schools) was Wolbach's 2.84-cent mill levy; the lowest was Louisville's 0.81-cent levy. Both are small towns in rural areas; both had K-12 school districts with enrollments of fewer than 400 students. Yet the amount of local educational dollars behind their respective students varied a great deal. While the consequences such disparities have for the actual education received by individual students are dependent upon a host of variables, there is little reason to doubt that such large discrepancies result in unequal opportunity for children. In particular, these discrepancies create an educational marketplace that works to the disadvantage of rural children.

Educational opportunity is not only measured by quantity—the number of teachers, books, courses, or activities. It is also related to expertise, knowledge and skill. Unfortunately for rural communities, teachers or administrators who are recognized as good at their jobs, and therefore marketable, tend to move to larger districts. These districts usually pay more, provide more benefits, and exist in communities generally judged more attractive. For example, Omaha's Westside School District ranks first in the state in terms of teacher salaries; Butte School District in Boyd County ranks last. In 1988 the average salary difference between the two was \$13,939 (Bureau of Education Research, Service and Policy Studies 1988). Left unregulated, therefore, the educational marketplace will produce rural/urban inequalities. In Nebraska those inequalities result not only from varying community tax effort and worth, but also from the amount of skill and expertise that fewer education dollars buy.

It would be difficult for state policy makers to change the perceptions people have of what is and isn't a desirable job or job location. But reductions in the huge spending differences across Nebraska school dis-

districts could accomplish two things: they could slow the inexorable movement of more gifted educators from poor to wealthy districts; and they could create a climate in which state initiatives to help retain gifted rural educators might have some chance of success.

Statewide programs to keep gifted teachers in rural schools and incentive programs for promising entering teachers could be developed. State funds could be used to augment salaries as way to sustain strong rural school personnel. Programs to help rural educators develop themselves with the stipulation that they return to rural communities could help motivate changes in typical occupational patterns in the state.

The topics addressed above are just a few that relate to the quality of education in rural schools. Rural educators as a group are often deeply committed to their students and communities. Finding ways to help and keep these educators in the rural communities is essential to the health of rural education.

### **Keeping Residents**

The strategy of keeping residents in the community also links education with rural revitalization. This strategy seeks to retain critical numbers of younger people in the community. The major obstacles to this strategy tend to be found locally, not within state policy. Thus, creative activities to merge schools and rural revitalization without compromising the educative mission of the school need to arise more from local community leadership than from statewide policy directions.

Although not often voiced, there is a simple and obvious contradiction between the educative role of the school and the community's need to retain young people. The more the school teaches about matters beyond the local sphere, the more it connects students to the world beyond the community. And the more that occurs, the less likely those students are to stay in town and remain participants in the local economy. In many small Nebraska communities, over 70 percent of a graduating class often goes on to some form of postsecondary education. In his analysis of the impact of high school on rural communities, historian Page Smith noted that "The high school did not provide the town with leaders; it simply encouraged migration to the cities" (1966:231).

### *A High School Case Study*

A survey by the author of the high school students in one Nebraska community captures student attitudes about remaining in their communities as well as the messages they believe they hear from adults and teachers.

The 315 students surveyed composed the school population of a high school-only district located in a town of about 4,500 inhabitants. The community was engaged in an economic development plan, and the survey of the high school population was conducted to provide community leadership with information about the opinions of local youth. Data relevant to the strategy of keeping youth in the community are presented below. Table 1 records the responses of students to an open-ended question asking what adults in their community commonly say to them about their futures.

Table 1 - Responses to the Question: When adults in your community talk with you about your future, what do they say to you?

Comment	Number	Percentage
No Response	92	29
"Get A Good Education"	94	30
"Be What You Want To Be"	26	8
"Plan Ahead"	26	8
"No Future in Small Town"	14	4
"No Jobs" or "Poor Pay"	7	2
Other	36	11
No Answer	20	6

Of those who answered this question, 30 percent perceived encouragement from adults about going on to more education. When asked in another question what they expected to be doing in the year after high school, 76 percent indicated they expected to be attending an institution of post-secondary education.

Interestingly, about 50 percent of the parents of these students ended their educations with high school diplomas. Thus, many of these students expect to exceed the education levels of their parents. If this is true, then this particular school and community are doing an excellent job creating future aspirations in its young. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the success in creating these aspirations may well mean that the young people will leave the community.

A similar difference occurred with occupational aspirations; they were high, and they did not mirror parental occupations. Table 2 presents responses on a question about parental occupations and the students' occupational aspirations.

Of 18 occupational categories, the most popular responses were the following:

- 1) Professional who works in science, math or engineering, such as physician, scientist, veterinarian, engineer, computer scientist, or college professor in these areas (n=48; 15 percent of total surveyed).
- 2) Professional who works with people, such as clergy, lawyer, psychologist, sociologist, or college professor in these areas (n=32; 10 percent of total surveyed).
- 3) Other professional, such as artist, writer, social worker, actor, politician, or athlete (n=23; 7 percent of total surveyed).

These students aspire to professional occupations that require more education than their parents obtained. These aspirations will probably lead students to localities where professional career opportunities exist in greater numbers than in their present community.

Table 2 - Parental Occupation and Student Occupational Preference as Reported by Students\*

Occupation	(n = 315)	Father	Mother	Self at Age 30
Agriculture business		15	5	9
Clerical occupation		8	61	13
Crafts occupation		28	7	21
Farming		53	6	14
Homemaker		1	49	2
Manager		29	13	6
Military		2	0	12
Owner of business		22	15	15
Professional (doctor)		11	5	48
Professional (lawyer)		0	1	32
Nurse		1	13	18
Other profession (arts)		1	0	23
Police (security)		4	2	6
Sales		8	8	3
Barber/beautician		2	28	17
Beef fabrication		36	25	0
Skilled operator		38	17	8
Laborer		10	7	6

\*Columns do not total 315 because non-respondents are excluded.

Supporting this probability are the responses to another survey question relating to expected future residence. Sixty percent of the students in this study did not plan to live in their home town as adults. The major reason was that they did not expect to find the type of job they wanted.

The students completing this survey were relatively typical of rural Nebraska high school students. They lived in a community with an agricultural base that has been losing its commercial market share to larger nearby communities. These students shopped for most of their needs in the larger nearby area and looked to these communities for recreational activity. They did not dislike their community—many reported that they would like to raise a family in such a community—but they found its smallness inadequate for their perceived needs.

### *Perceptions and Attitudes*

If the strategy of retaining youth is to be successful, ways must be found to change these perceptions and attitudes. What community leaders need to do is multifaceted and complex, although Wall and Luther capture the central idea: "If they could create a vision of the community's potential...they might be able to keep the young people in the community after graduation" (Wall and Luther 1988a).

The steps community leaders take to develop a vision of their community and region offer the most promise relative to retaining rural youth. Rural community leadership needs to actively incorporate its youth into the social and economic life of the community, which requires the investment of energy and resources. This is referred to as the "deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of leaders" (*Visions from the Heartland* 1989).

One of the ways to incorporate youth into the leadership of a community is to involve them in the workings of that community leadership. In the present climate of rural redevelopment, there are ample opportunities to include high school students in the strategic planning process. Requesting that students participate in the planning is likely to increase their feelings of loyalty toward the community. Providing them with some voice in community discussions is one route to involvement. Identifying youth needs and seeking to provide for these should be a critical part of strategic planning. Linking school and community leadership is also a way to enhance youth involvement. Initiatives such as these work to foster a sense of loyalty on the part of a community's youth. Com-

munity leadership needs to work with the educators in the local school system to identify youth leaders.

Incorporating youth into the economic life of the community is a second method of helping to retain a critical population mass. Schools have been identified as "small business incubators" (Wall and Luther 1988b; Sher 1988). Finding ways to create small, student-operated businesses that serve to model for young people a productive, entrepreneurial spirit may help to revive community economic life. When they see that prosperity is possible, the young people of a community are more likely to remain and become economically productive.

One rural researcher described a North Carolina school-based business activity where students operate a deli-style restaurant and gross approximately \$15,000 a month (Sher 1988). Wall and Luther, of Lincoln's Heartland Center for Leadership Development, identified a school in South Dakota where disabled students make puppets for a toy firm (1988b). Examples of other student-run business include:

- A greenhouse operation producing and marketing plants and seeds;
- An herbal export business;
- A silk-screen shop designing t-shirts and posters for individuals, community events, and businesses in a resort community;
- A child development center providing day care;
- A swine breeding and feeder operation; and
- A student-operated and -licensed radio station.

Activities of this type are common in high schools, and many others are waiting to be identified. However, linking the entrepreneurial activities of creative students and teachers with community development is uncommon. That linkage is what excites many rural development proponents. (For a more thorough discussion of such partnerships see Chapter 3, "School/Business Partnerships.")

Small business incubator successes have the potential of not only initiating students into the ways of developing and operating small businesses, but also of helping a community retain some of its own monetary resources, an important potential side benefit.



### *Youth and Spending*

Rural students themselves are a market force, but they tend to take their dollars out of their rural communities. Responses on the high school survey indicate that over 50 percent of the students earn money through part-time jobs. But that money tends not to be spent in the local community. These same students report shopping in other communities for clothes, sports equipment, and shoes. They patronize other communities' fast food restaurants and movie theatres. In fact, the three major economic activities they report in their home communities are purchasing gas, haircuts, and banking services.

The economic power of the young is shown in an analysis of the spending activities of Nebraskans. Table 3 provides evidence of the contribution younger consumers make to a county's economy. Using census data and sales tax receipts for 30 randomly selected counties, seven age cohorts were examined to see if there was a relationship between the proportion of residents in particular age groups and the amount of taxable goods bought.

**Table 3 - Correlation Matrix of Net Taxable Receipts (Non-Auto) With Seven Age Cohorts (Heads of Households)**

	Per Capita Sales	15-24	25-34	35-44	Age 45-54	55-64	65-74	75-
Per Capita Sales	1.000	.483*	.384*	-.233	-.318*	-.591*	-.270	-.002
15-24	.483	1.000	.797	.258	-.294	-.880	-.772	-.535
25-34	.384	.797	1.000	.463	-.015	-.752	-.893	-.751
35-44	-.233	.258	.463	1.000	.472	-.127	-.569	-.839
Age 45-54	-.318	-.294	-.015	.472	1.000	.360	-.128	-.434
55-64	-.591	-.880	-.752	-.127	.360	1.000	.621	.335
65-74	-.270	-.772	-.893	-.570	-.128	.621	1.000	.756
75-	-.002	-.535	-.750	-.840	-.434	.335	.756	1.000

\*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The sales variable in Table 3 was created by transforming basic sales receipts into dollars per capita per year using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{County Non-Auto Sales Receipts}}{\text{County Population}} = \text{Average Per Capita Annual Sales}$$

This transformation controlled for the differential effects of local wealth and size of the county's population.

A similar transformation was made for each age cohort. The formula below was used to find the percentage of each cohort as part of the county population.

$$\frac{\text{Household Heads in Age Cohort}}{\text{Total Households}} = \text{Percentage of County Household Population Age Cohort Represents}$$

The resulting sets of data were then correlated.

The strong positive relationships between the younger age cohorts (15-24=.483 [p > 0.003] and 25-34=.384 [p > 0.017]) and sales tax receipts are suggestive. Increases in the size of these two age groups are associated with increases in sales tax revenues. Thus, it appears that one of the conditions for economic viability is adequate numbers of these two age cohorts. Interestingly, negative relationships exist for the other age cohorts, meaning that greater population in these age groups is associated with lesser sales tax revenues. Clearly these older cohorts participate in the economic life of localities, but the relationship of their numbers to consumption is less clear.

These county statistics suggest that the youth contribution is essential. But according to the high school survey, that contribution is likely to be made in the regional commercial center, not in the small rural community. On most of the survey measures of consumption, over 70 percent of the students reported traveling to another community. Thus, rural revitalization needs to attend to the spending patterns of the younger population and seek ways to help small communities regain some portion of this market. Student- and school-generated enterprises are one very real way to accomplish this.

## Conclusion

The resources that flow to education and the role that is envisioned for education will vary according to the orientation of Nebraska policy makers toward rural revitalization. The analysis above shows some of the areas of concern that arise when education is expected to directly contribute to the economic fortunes of a local community.

If education is to be used as an instrument to help rural community leaders improve their local economies, it is important that the mission of education to educate the youth of the state not be compromised.

Many policy alternatives need to be pursued simultaneously. District consolidation efforts need to be carefully orchestrated with regional and community planning. Educational leadership needs to develop state initiatives to bring distance learning to all rural schools, to expand the capacity of the service units, and to provide much greater resources to local school boards. Additionally, rural schools and educators need help, not to look like their larger school cousins, but so that they can create equal opportunities for all of Nebraska's children.

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# School/Business Partnerships

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# 3

*James Dick*  
*James Marlin*

Business involvement in Nebraska schools has increased in recent years. This chapter compares types of school/business partnerships, explores their applications, and identifies models appropriate to Nebraska school districts and communities.

As our nation confronts the future of its school systems and dramatic economic changes, and as we quickly become part of an international economy, business leaders become increasingly concerned about reforming America's public schools. This commitment is more than philanthropy; it is enlightened self-interest, based on traditional public service responsibility and the promotion of a positive business image. There is a mixture of economic and humanitarian concerns, the need to get more for one's tax dollars, and the need to be certain that reliable, trained workers are available.

The report of the 74th American Assembly, a national meeting of educators, business leaders, and journalists, highlighted these problems as follows:

The prospects for American workers in the twenty-first century are mixed. American workers have experienced fifteen years of slack labor markets, stagnating income, intensifying import competition, and dislocation. A vital American economy that offers workers creative, rewarding work is absolutely attainable, but the conditions for such a scenario will require serious planning, work, and a resurgence of trust and cooperation among business, labor, and government. It will require a shift to an economic program that promotes not only investment in plant and equipment, but also investment in human capital. (Starr 1988)

This "investment in human capital" includes, among other things, America's school system. As business leaders look at schools today, they are concerned about whether they should attempt to influence or direct educational policies. These concerns were initially voiced by executives of large corporations in major American cities, but business leaders in smaller cities and rural areas are now exploring ways to foster school reform. This is part of the growing recognition that the private sector

has a responsibility to participate in local, state, and national efforts to improve the public schools.

This chapter explores the role of business in education. Partnerships between schools and business are examined through a look at the history of business involvement in the schools and a general classification of school/business partnerships. Examples of national and state school/business partnerships, with special attention given to partnerships in rural areas, are identified. The nature of current school/business partnerships is discussed, as is the role of such partnerships in promoting economic development. The chapter concludes with policy recommendations regarding school/business partnerships in Nebraska.

### **Business Involvement in the Schools**

Since the early 1900s, American businesses have had a special interest in the public schools. The schools were responsible for producing the workers needed for rapidly expanding industries; early vocational education programs focused on the development of specific job skills. Business leaders influenced the content of these programs and, in addition, urged that schools should be organized and managed like their offices and factories. This concern for the production of a skilled labor force continued until the 1960s. There was little direct financial support to the schools from businesses other than taxes paid.

During the late 1960s and into the 1970s the educational climate was distinctly anti-establishment, so businesses had little to say about the operation of schools and the curriculum. Other local and national groups played dynamic roles in education reform, including the federal government, teachers unions, civil rights organizations, and special interest groups. The emphases of these reforms were equity, access, and community control. Many of these groups reflected the anti-business, anti-establishment mood of the era. Corporate leaders were rarely willing to serve on school boards, as it required working with volatile political issues that required enormous outlays of time and effort in a hostile environment. Some school districts shifted from appointed school boards to elected school boards, often electing board members by geographic district rather than at large. These changes helped to reduce the likelihood that business people would serve on school boards. As a result of this anti-business bias, corporate commitment to the schools was no longer proactive and was usually restricted to cooperation with career education programs.

In the changing educational climate of the 1980s, businesses again were welcomed participants in the school decision making process. Economic and political trends were favorable for school/business collaboration, as they had been before the 1960s. The Partnership in Education program, organized by the Reagan Administration in 1981, illustrates the renewed emphasis on school/business cooperation. The number of Adopt-A-School or Join-A-School programs increased dramatically in the 1980s (Burke 1986).

Additional evidence of this new relationship abounds. Two national organizations were formed: the National Association for Industry-Education and the National Manpower Institute Consortium. Professional journals, including *Partnerships in Education* and *Informedia*, were published. Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* called for businesses and other community groups to provide leadership and resources to make school reform a reality. The Committee for Economic Development, an independent, non-partisan research and education organization composed of 200 business leaders and educators, published a variety of reports, including *American Business and the Public Schools*, *Investing In Our Children*, and *Children In Need*.

Educators began to study these new types of school/business partnerships. The president of the American Education Research Association, in her 1987 presidential address, described how the economic and cultural aims of education could be pursued outside of school (Resnick 1987). Resnick urged educators to find ways to incorporate informally acquired knowledge into the curriculum.

Until this change in emphasis occurred, virtually all business financial support for education had gone to post-secondary institutions. However, more than 73 percent of the Fortune 500 companies have programs with the public schools. Banks, utility companies, and insurance companies are the most likely businesses to be involved in such programs (Shakeshaft and Trachtman 1986). In 1981 the National Association of Partners in Education initiated an annual symposium in cooperation with the Presidential Board of Advisors on Private Sector Initiatives. Today both business leaders and educators are interested in developing and studying these new relationships between business and education.



## General Strategies for School/Business Partnerships

In *Investing In Our Children*, published by the Committee for Economic Development, three types of involvement are identified: funding, program involvement, and policy involvement. Three strategies that characterize school/business partnerships are identified also:

- System Support;
- Incremental Improvement; and
- Structural Reform.

Most of the examples described in this chapter fit into the first or second strategy, System Support or Incremental Change. The type of involvement is usually either funding or program involvement. However, projects often fall into more than one category or cross the indistinct line between types of strategies or involvement. For example, projects that are classified as "program involvement" usually include some funding, although the dollar amounts tend to be smaller than "funding" projects, and the resources are usually targeted. Tables 1 and 2 categorize partnerships in place around the country and in Nebraska.

### *System Support*

Where schools are sound, productive and successful, businesses can help to ensure their continued success by supporting the existing system. This might include funding or program involvement by participating in career education programs, providing scholarships, and sponsoring teacher recognition days. Such efforts are appropriate for maintaining existing high quality programs.

**System Support Programs in Place.** Job training partnerships are sponsored by the National Alliance of Businesses, with funds from the U. S. Department of Labor, the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Reader's Digest Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation, in Albuquerque, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Louisville, Memphis, San Diego, and Seattle (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Influenced by *A Nation at Risk*, executives at Boeing developed a committee to support pre-collegiate education throughout Washington state. An education manager has been established at each Boeing facility in the state, and publicity about schools and educational reform is included in company newsletters. Boeing sponsors curriculum

materials for students, career information, computer contests, and student internships, along with in-service courses and mini-grants for mathematics and science teachers. Boeing's CEO has served as chairman of the Washington Roundtable, a group of 32 corporate executive and citizens who have made recommendations about the state budget for education. Roundtable members have also promoted structural reform by presenting teacher salary proposals and supporting an expansion of the state testing program, while sponsoring time-on-task research (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Corporations are sponsoring summer internships for teachers in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Flint, and the Silicon Valley. As summer employees, mathematics and science teachers learn new skills and information while earning extra income. The present internships are reaching only a small number of teachers, but it is believed that expanded programs could reach up to 10,000 teachers each summer. Current programs are highly praised by both teachers and employers (G. Gold 1987).

The Council of the Great City Schools surveyed its member schools to identify private sector efforts at improving school management, cost-effectiveness, and productivity. In Baltimore, business executives make recommendations for school management. In Atlanta, the Chamber of Commerce has funded and conducted studies of school management. In Dallas, the school system seeks input from the private sector in the areas of personnel management, information systems, facilities utilization, and financial audits. In Dade County, Florida, local businesses assist in providing accounting procedures, training administrators, and furnishing additional consulting services (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Forward in the Fifth is an organization of business, education, and community leaders in Kentucky's Fifth Congressional District, an economically deprived area in the southeastern part of the state. Through advisory councils in each of the 27 counties, technical and financial assistance is provided to:

- Enrich education experience for students;
- Obtain greater parental and business involvement in the schools;
- Promote innovation by school administrators and teachers;

**Table 1. National School/Business Partnerships Listed by Strategy and Type of Involvement.**

	System Support	Incremental Change	Structural Reform
<b>Funding</b>	National Alliance of Businesses Job Training Partnerships Summer Internships for Teachers		Support for Evaluation and Research in Minneapolis
<b>Program Involvement</b>	Job Training Partnership Forward in the Fifth Advisory Councils School Management Training in Various Cities	North Carolina Rural Economic Development Partnerships Drop-Out Prevention Programs Adopt-A-School Programs Joint Council on Economic Education	
<b>Policy Involvement</b>	Local School Board Participation Lobbying State Legislatures and Congress		California Business Council and Achievement Council Washington State Roundtable The Boston Compact (Drop-Out Prevention and Job Skills Development) Chicago Demonstration Schools

**Table 2. Nebraska School/Business Partnerships Listed by Strategy and Type of Involvement.**

	System Support	Projects with Elements of Both Support and Change	Incremental Change
<b>Funding</b>	Sutton Public Schools/Sutton Commercial Club Partnership Columbus School Partnerships Junior Achievement	Buffett Awards Kiewit Awards Cooper Awards Academy of Finance	
<b>Program Involvement</b>	Hastings Chamber of Commerce/ Adams County Schools Partnership Norfolk Business and Education Partnership Task Force Columbus School Partnerships	Adopt-A-School Programs	Nebraska Council on Economic Education
<b>Policy Involvement</b>		Local School Board Participation New Seeds for Nebraska	

- Recognize outstanding accomplishments of faculty, administrators, and students;
- Increase communication between the school and the community; and
- Increase a community's confidence and commitment to the schools (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Junior Achievement provides practical economic education through programs and experience in the private enterprise system for young people in partnership with the business and education communities. Junior Achievement of the Midlands was organized in Omaha in 1962 and in Lincoln in 1971. The original Junior Achievement program was an after-school program where students, working with local business advisers, formed mini-companies to produce and market a product or service. In 1975, JA began to develop new programs to incorporate into regular classrooms.

Three additional programs are now available from JA. Applied Economics is an elective, full credit social studies course where juniors and seniors learn economic concepts and theories as they form a simulated company and use related micro computer programs. JA has produced a textbook and related curriculum materials for Applied Economics.

Project Business is a supplementary program for junior high school students. A business consultant visits the class once a week for nine to fifteen weeks to discuss economic concepts as they relate to his or her business. There is also an emphasis on job skills in Project Business.

Business Basics introduces fifth and sixth graders to the fundamentals of organization, production, and management. Instructional materials and training for consultants are provided by Junior Achievement; nationally Junior Achievement is developing a delivery system to bring its programs to rural school systems (*Some Facts About Junior Achievement* 1988).

In south central Nebraska, the Hastings Chamber of Commerce and the Adams County Schools have formed a partnership. After conducting a survey to determine which schools and businesses were interested in cooperative programs, the Hastings Chamber of Commerce sponsored a workshop where participants from partnerships in other school districts shared their experiences with teachers and business leaders in

Adams County. Initial partnerships were formed and follow-up activities were planned. "Through [this program] schools benefit from the expanded education opportunities provided when business takes a more active role. . . business will be able to take advantage of a better educated, better qualified work force" (Odom 1986:6-9).

The Sutton Public Schools and the Sutton Commercial Club had developed a partnership long before the current interest in adopt-a-school programs. Activities in this partnership include fund raising for extra-curricular activities, sponsoring student recognition awards, contributing to scholarship funds, and providing athletic awards. A member of the Commerce Club attends all meetings of the school board.

In Norfolk, a Business and Education Partnership Task Force representing the Chamber of Commerce, the public and parochial schools, and local colleges was developed to create linkages between schools and businesses. Community and business leaders, trained by the Norfolk Public Schools, participate in Omnibus, the district's gifted and talented program. The Chamber sponsors an annual business, industry, and education day. Futures Unlimited, sponsored by area businesses and colleges, introduces high school students to occupations and future opportunities; Junior Achievement is provided for interested students. Limited and full partnerships with businesses have been formalized to infuse career awareness, based on community resources, across the curriculum.

The former Volunteers Coordinator and Public Information Director of the Columbus Public Schools has reported on a variety of school/business partnerships, including:

1. "Columbus Public Schools Report to Our Stockholders," an insert paid for by a local bank, that appears in the *Columbus Telegram* four times per year.
2. Omnibus units for the gifted and talented students taught by representatives from the radio station and a local bank.
3. Luncheons for business and education leaders, and sponsorship of vocational education and economic education workshops for teachers.
4. Creation of a "blue ribbon panel of community leaders who [meet] to discuss the opportunities and roadblocks in regard

to the business and education sectors working together in the community" (Odom 1986).

Several Nebraska foundations have developed programs to honor outstanding teachers and provide financial rewards as well as public recognition for their classroom performance. Each spring a group of outstanding teachers is recognized by the Buffett Foundation in Omaha and the Kiewit Foundation across the state. The Cooper Foundation has established the statewide Cooper Awards, which honor teachers for curriculum development in the areas of history, economics, mathematics, science, foreign language, and communications. Because the awards are given to educators who create innovative projects, these programs also support incremental improvement.

### ***Incremental Improvement***

The second strategy, incremental improvement, requires businesses to support more obvious school reforms such as supporting teacher incentives or merit pay, providing leadership training for administrators, or calling for competency testing for students. Responses at this level are based on stronger corporate decisions to become involved in educational reform, including a willingness to sponsor specific projects. At this level, important questions about the role of private sectors in public education begin to emerge.

**Incremental Improvement Programs in Place.** Dropout prevention programs were funded by Hewlett Packard for Santa Clara, California schools; by Rich's Department Store in Atlanta; and by Digital Equipment in Oxford, Massachusetts.

Some school/business partnerships in rural areas combine school and work efforts with rural economic development. The Way Off Broadway Deli in St. Pauls, North Carolina, and the Hurricane Screen Printing Company in Gumberry, North Carolina, are examples of school- and business-supported student entrepreneurial projects. As a result of participation, it is hoped that students will have employment options when they graduate. Those who leave will have employment skills; those who stay in their home towns will be able to earn a reasonable income (*A New Idea for Rural Youth* 1988).

The Academy of Finance, part of a national program supported by the American Express Foundation, provides a two-year program in finance for high school juniors and seniors. In the Omaha Public

Schools, businesses, schools, parents, and students work together to reach the following outcomes:

- Make students aware of career opportunities and provide them with skills necessary for work in the financial service industry;
- Increase students' knowledge and appreciation of basic financial concepts;
- Help students understand the relationship between the American economic system and the world of finance; and
- Provide on-the-job training to help students apply what they learn in class.

Students who enroll in this program must demonstrate competencies in accounting and computer science, have an interest in the financial services industry, be willing to commit to the two-year program and a summer internship, and be nominated by their teachers. While the major financial costs are provided by the American Express Foundation and the Omaha Public Schools, local businesses provide the internships and local business leaders along with educators serve on the advisory committee (*OPS Academy of Finance Model Program 1988*).

The Adopt-A-School program, developed in 1983 by the Omaha Public Schools' Department of Human-Community Relations Services, is based on national programs designed to foster closer relationships between public schools and the business community that will help resolve the challenges facing the urban school districts. It represents both system support and incremental improvement. The goals for this school/business partnership are to:

- Plan and implement a program which helps students to compete more successfully in modern society; and
- Improve administrative-managerial activities through application of combined professional expertise.

Included on the current list of over 100 business partners are major national corporations, banks and other financial institutions, civic groups, grocery stores, hospitals, hotels, fast food restaurants, and small businesses.

As a school partner, the business or community group may provide tutors and teacher aides, transportation, field trips and special recogni-



tion events, internships, and career seminars. As a business partner, the local school may provide music programs and art displays at a business site, job skills training and human relations training, reduced admission to school programs, and the use of other school facilities (Kehrberg 1988).

In 1987, the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce Education Committee in cooperation with the Lincoln Public Schools created Ventures in Partnerships (V.I.P.), an adopt-a-school program. Over 40 partnerships were established by the end of the 1987-88 school year. V.I.P. gives students and teachers a realistic awareness of the job market and provides a mechanism for businesses and schools to share expertise and services. In addition to increasing communication and understanding between schools and businesses, the program supplies role models for students, improves students' attitude about school, and encourages them to earn a diploma. Student employability is enhanced because regular contact with schools helps to keep the curriculum compatible with existing jobs and with the expectations of businesses (*Ventures in Partnerships Handbook*).

The Nebraska Council on Economic Education, based at UNL, works through Centers for Economic Education at UNL, UNO, Kearney State, Chadron State, Wayne State, Peru State, and Doane College to increase the economic literacy of K-12 students across the state. The Council raises funds, primarily from the private sector, to support teacher training courses and workshops in addition to the development and/or dissemination of new curriculum materials. The Council is affiliated with the Joint Council on Economic Education and its network of Councils and Centers across the country.

The majority of the Council's resources are directed toward teachers. The Council's programs are based on the philosophy that it is most economical to train teachers and provide them with appropriate curriculum materials so that they may help students understand the American economic system and their roles as producers, consumers, and citizens. In the 1988-89 school year, the Council sponsored 38 workshops and courses that were attended by over 1,300 Nebraska teachers (*Annual Report 1989*). In the most recent session of the legislature, business sponsorship was primarily responsible for partial state funding of the Council's programs.

### ***Structural Reform***

Structural Reform, the third level of involvement, reflects the view that basic policy changes must occur in the public schools if the schools are to deliver quality education and provide citizens and workers who can prosper in the 21st Century. There are currently few school/business partnerships at this level and little of this kind of policy involvement.

**Structural Reform Programs in Place.** One structural reform program was funded by General Mills, which provided \$350,000 to the Minneapolis Schools to evaluate educational reform in selected Minneapolis elementary schools. Included in the reforms being evaluated are: determining the impact of smaller class size on student achievement, fostering teacher decision-making, and increasing parental involvement in schools (D. Gold 1988).

Recommendations were made for better serving the diverse student populations of the public schools by the California Business Council and the Achievement Council, a consortium of representatives from the largest corporations in the state. The consortium is particularly concerned about why minority and inner city students lag behind in academic achievement (Snider 1988).

One of the earliest and most widely publicized structural reform programs is the Boston Compact, developed by the Boston Public School System and 350 Boston businesses under the leadership of the Boston Federal Reserve Bank. High dropout rates and graduates inadequately prepared for college or the work force had become problems for the Boston economy, with its increasing demand for skilled workers in an overall shrinking labor market. Through the Compact, the business community, the public schools, universities, cultural organizations, and unions have been organized to focus the resources of a broad range of institutions on Boston's teenagers (Hargroves 1987).

In Chicago a new private demonstration school was designed to match the constraints of an inner-city public school and to be a research and development laboratory for improving urban education. Sears, Roebuck & Co.; United Airlines; Commonwealth Edison; Baxter International; and 12 other corporations invested more than \$2 million to create this elementary school as a model for educating inner-city children ("Chicago Schools Offered a Lesson by Corporations" 1988).

## Nebraska Partnerships

It appears that the school/business partnerships currently in place across Nebraska are quite similar to those in other states. Most partnerships provide system support or promote incremental change through funding or program involvement. There are few examples of Nebraska partnerships designed to promote major structural reform; there is only limited policy involvement. Virtually all of the projects have been established in the metropolitan areas or in the larger cities across the state. The cooperating businesses tend to come from the manufacturing and/or service sectors of the economy. Two possible explanations for the lack of agriculture-based partnerships may be that: (1) agriculture is not as highly organized as the other two areas; and (2) the employment opportunities for students in agriculture have decreased and will continue to decrease. There appear to be few partnerships in rural areas to promote economic development like those described in North Carolina and Kentucky.

Another difference between Nebraska and states that have more extensive school/business partnerships is the nature of the big city public schools in those states. Schools in Nebraska, even though they face the problems of drugs, violence, dropouts, at-risk students, and teenage pregnancy, do not face these problems to the degree that many urban schools do. Since the schools in Nebraska have not collapsed under the weight of these problems, there appears to be less need for businesses to become involved in school reform through partnerships.

Many of the major national school/business partnerships have been created in the cities where major corporations are headquartered. As there are very few Fortune 500 companies based in Nebraska, this reduces the extent and comprehensiveness of partnerships in the state.

In some states (California, Washington and Minnesota) businesses have formed independent consortia to examine the schools and make policy recommendations to the state government. In 1989, for the first time, this has begun to occur in Nebraska. Nebraska Futures, Inc. (NFI), the business-engendered corporation formed to implement the recommendations of *New Seeds for Nebraska* (Center for Economic Competitiveness 1987), has included proposals for structural changes to the schools in its recommendations for economic development. The Subcommittee on Curriculum of NFI's Human Resources Task Force made three proposals that constitute a real departure from the previously

established relationship between business and the schools. The Subcommittee proposed:

- (1) A complete review of the governance and organization of the Nebraska educational establishment, to include examination of funding, degree of local control, role of the Department of Education, and accreditation of teachers and teachers colleges.
- (2) A complete restructure of Nebraska schools beginning with the curriculum, based on a "new basics" curriculum to be adopted by all Nebraska schools.
- (3) Establishment of a greater level of accountability in the school systems of the state through a method of evaluating schools and teachers based solely on performance and achievement of students.

If even a part of these proposals is acted upon, it will indicate a radical change in the role of the business community in school affairs in Nebraska.

### **The Nature of Current Business Involvement in the Schools**

A company's willingness to become involved in partnerships with the public schools is often constrained by the company's size, wealth, growth potential, sense of civic responsibility, level of technology, need for trained employees, and non-financial resources that it can offer to schools (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Mann summarizes the potential contributions of business partners in this way:

The assistance offered by the business community will come from the areas business knows best: food services, payroll processing, security, public relations, auditing, capital budget projections, lectures by volunteers, field trips, and perhaps some scholarships or reserved positions for new graduates. There will be no unrestricted gifts and not much appetite for engaging the central problems of schooling. No superintendent will ask for and no business executive will promise to provide what cannot be delivered. (1987)

Virtually all business philanthropy to schools takes the form of a project; businesses are most willing to fund discrete activities with clearly defined goals. They choose projects that they can afford, and they seek projects that emphasize public sector and private sector coopera-

tion, avoiding projects that may foster conflict and controversy. These projects are usually not advocacy oriented, but are built on existing mutual interests, such as reducing the drop-out rate or improving workers' entry level skills. This search for cooperation may explain why most partnerships concentrate their efforts on system support or incremental change and avoid projects that attempt to promote structural reform (Mann 1987).

A further constraint on systemic reform is the changing pattern of philanthropy in the economic sector. Currently, the industrial sector of our economy targets 46 percent of its overall giving to education-related activities, while the expanding service sector targets only 25 percent of its philanthropy to education.

The total value of grants, goods, and services provided by businesses to schools is around \$28 million, a small fraction of the educational budgets of those districts (Levine and Trachtman 1988). In addition, there are other philanthropic interests competing for the business community's financial support. Businesses seek to develop broad-based community satisfaction by contributing to many of these interests as well as education.

In a study of 85 rural school districts, Trachtman reported that while some superintendents in small or rural districts welcomed increased business involvement in the schools, many school administrators had strong reservations about additional involvement (Levine and Trachtman 1988). Some school administrators fear that widely publicized, privately supported programs may confuse voters and weaken support for raising additional tax revenues to support schools. Furthermore, there is always competition for funds and partnerships with other groups—the band boosters, Scouts, the school yearbook, or the elementary school candy sales—and school administrators don't want to jeopardize these. This is especially true in school districts outside of large cities.

Finally, some business leaders are concerned about whether just providing more financial support to schools will bring about needed improvements. The total economic and social costs of some educational problems, such as the economic and social costs of dealing with the 700,000 students who drop out each year, may be so high that private sector support will be too limited to be effective. In addition to increased financial support, successful responses to such problems may include major long-term changes in the education system. But changes carry the

prospect of conflict and controversy, two characteristics that private supporters of public education seek to avoid. Business is more willing to support projects that ameliorate, not reform. Projects tend to be "low cost, low conflict, peripheral, and largely focused on the middle class" (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Most of the financial support from the business community will continue to come from taxes on business. However, private support can be used to narrow the gap between needs and available resources through funding of experimental programs, special projects, and research and development efforts. At the federal level, less than 1 percent of the education budget is invested in research and development. Some business leaders have urged that additional funds be made available for elementary and especially preschool programs, such as Head Start; improving the teaching of reading, math, and science in the middle grades; assisting at-risk kids; and creating job training programs—as well as supporting research to foster productivity gains (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

Some corporate leaders, especially those affiliated with the Committee for Economic Development, have called for increased public spending on education. The committee believes "that any call for comprehensive improvement in the public schools that does not recognize the need for additional resources is destined for failure" (*Investing in Our Children* 1985). These leaders encourage the corporate community to become advocates for public schools at the local level. According to one survey, 72 percent of chief executive officers support additional federal aid to elementary and secondary education (Shakeshaft and Trachtman 1986). While there has been a heightened awareness of public school needs, 70 to 75 percent of the educational contributions of large corporations are still directed toward higher education (Corporate Gifts 1988).

Unfortunately, the business community has sometimes called for reforms on the one hand while lobbying against tax increases and bond issues on the other. Fred Hechinger, educational columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote in the *Harvard Business Review*:

In the end, all these cooperative ventures will amount to little more than public relations unless the business community abandons its frequently schizophrenic posture; supporting the local schools while simultaneously instructing, or at least permitting, its lobbyists to support cuts in state and federal expenditures for public education and such legislation as tax credits for parents whose children attend private schools. Common sense should show the futility of any corporate policy that gives to the local schools with one hand and yet takes away funds with the other. (1985:136-144)

## **Partnerships in Small Communities and Rural Areas**

Most of the widely publicized school/business partnerships were developed in large, urban school districts. There is much less information about partnerships in smaller towns and rural areas. Even the Omaha and Lincoln public schools are quite different from the public schools in Boston, Chicago, New York City, or Atlanta, in terms of the problems facing urban school districts. Therefore, partnership models that address the unique features of Nebraska's schools—urban districts as well as small rural districts—need to be developed.

The Heartland Center for Leadership Development, a Lincoln-based consulting firm, "has visited, studied, and described communities that are meeting the challenge to survive with creative, positive, problem-solving approaches." Wall and Luther, two of the Center's researchers, have identified 10 strategies for making connections between schools and businesses in small communities.

1. **Chamber-School Committee Membership.** Appoint educators to Chamber of Commerce committees; appoint business people to school committees. Ask participants occasionally to report to their respective boards on what they are doing.
2. **Joint School Board-Chamber Meetings.** Schedule regularly a joint meeting of the School Board and the Chamber of Commerce to share information relevant to economic development.
3. **Economic Surveys by School Classes.** Ask high school classes or clubs to conduct community surveys to help determine current economic activities, trends, and projections.
4. **Career Awareness Days.** Ask local employers to act as "mentors for a day" for high school students as a means of career exploration.
5. **Teacher-Business Exchanges.** Sponsor a one-day "job exchange" program, asking teachers to work in businesses and business people to work in schools. Hold a follow-up discussion.
6. **Entrepreneurship Education.** Sponsor a class in the high school on starting and operating a small business, with guest

speakers from local businesses as an integral part of the instructional plan.

7. **School Facilities as Incubators.** Make available under-utilized school facilities as small business incubators. Hire students to provide support services.
8. **School-Based Businesses.** Initiate a program that will help students explore, start, and operate businesses filling gaps in available local services.
9. **Joint Economic Development Planning.** Ask the School Board, County Board, Town Council, and Chamber of Commerce to develop a joint area economic development action plan, using the unique strengths and contributions of each partner.
10. **Public-Private Partnership Leadership Development.** Develop a public-private partnership for leadership development, focusing the program on developing local capacity and nurturing local resources that are critical to economic renewal (1988).

The researchers recommend that a partnership should develop small, workable, success-oriented projects. They also emphasize that schools in rural communities may be the largest resource base in the community, so they may need to take the initiative in developing partnerships. Accessibility to, and familiarity among, school leaders and business leaders should facilitate partnerships in rural areas. The existing relationships between schools and businesses may already be quite healthy, providing the basis for additional program development.

Trachtman also reported on the extent of partnership programs in rural areas. She concluded that:

1. The amount of direct financial support, excluding taxes, is minimal.
2. Most of the involvement is in vocational classes. However, this tends to be broad-based vocational education, not a focus on specific job skills.



3. Partnerships are initiated by the school, not the business. The initiator is usually a resourceful teacher, not a school administrator.
4. The benefits of partnerships usually accrue to the teacher and his or her students, not the district. The district may not be fully aware of the partnership, as there is usually little publicity about the partnership.
5. Teachers involved in partnerships feel more connection with the outside world; they identify mutual concerns shared with local business interests. Their self-esteem is generally enhanced.
6. Superintendents report little involvement in school/business partnerships, though they do recognize the potential for such partnerships. (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

While it is too early to determine if partnerships in small or rural school districts will lead to systematic education change, Trachtman urged principals to become more informed about and more involved in creating local partnerships. She called for expanding partnerships beyond the high school into the elementary, middle, and junior high schools and providing counselors with better community job-related information. As teachers who are currently involved in school/business partnerships are responding to local needs, their involvement should be recognized and rewarded within the district.

### **Compatibility with the Curriculum**

Partnerships do not appear to threaten school integrity. To the extent that one can generalize from community to community, businesses have not shown much evidence of demanding specific programs that would shift the costs of job-specific training from the private to the public sector. Proctor and Gamble does not dominate the curriculum of the Cincinnati Public Schools, nor does Toyota dominate the curriculum of the Hayward, California, Public Schools. Narrow, job-specific vocational education is rejected; schools are encouraged to develop students' academic abilities and develop appropriate work-related attitudes. In those areas where the dropout rate is high, the private sector has encouraged the schools to develop programs to prepare at-risk students for employment and for higher education. There is little reason to

believe that curricula will be focused to meet the specific needs of the business partners.

According to De Young, many mainstream economists as well as some education reformers believe "that public schools are and by definition will remain inefficient places to teach occupational skills" (1989). Some economists believe that only by making these entrenched bureaucracies subject to market forces will reform occur. Radical economists stress the problems of developing worker skills in schools under siege by business leaders who are not interested in making the workplace more democratic and opening up the economy to full participation for disenfranchised groups (DeYoung 1989).

### **Some Policy Recommendations**

Because of the great number of small town and rural school districts in Nebraska, attention must be focused on schools as large resource bases for community economic development efforts. Although rural areas have not traditionally supported school-business partnerships and rural school administrators have often had strong reservations about organized business involvement in local education policy, there are many reasons why a new approach to school-business partnerships ought to be considered, and many approaches to be tried.

First, there is a need to move beyond the case-by-case, project-by-project approach, to a more systematic use of business resources in education. Even the federal government has encountered the limits of special projects as a method for reforming education. However, moving beyond the project approach will be difficult because businesses strongly favor this approach, which identifies them with a school or a program and provides good public relations. Moreover, businesses have a long history of sponsoring specific community projects.

Second, rural communities can use their schools as resources for economic development. Those strategies developed by the Heartland Center, which open communication and share resources among schools and businesses, are particularly appropriate to Nebraska's rural districts.

Finally, working through business consortia or trade associations is another viable way to broaden business involvement. School administrators may need to educate the private sector of the importance of long-term, general support for school reform. Additionally, new intermediary organizations like the California Roundtable may need to be created.

The business community—not only within each community, but across the state—has the knowledge and skill needed to be invested in community schools. Because small community growth and development are necessary for the economic welfare of the entire state, the results of school-business partnerships are potentially beneficial to the entire business community of Nebraska.

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*Michael Gillespie*

Art education has traditionally been of low priority in Nebraska's—and the nation's—schools. Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE) is a new approach that integrates the various facets of art education throughout the general curriculum. DBAE attempts to teach students critical reasoning skills so they may learn to make their own judgments rather than be manipulated through "technological image management." It also enhances the traditional art curriculum through multicultural study. Nebraska's Prairie Visions project can serve as a model to other states, which are increasingly recognizing the value of DBAE.

Serious efforts are underway to rethink and revise the way art is taught in the schools. Nebraska is a leader in an innovative approach known as Discipline-Based Art Education, and there is good reason to think that this approach, or one like it, will provide a way for art education to become integral to the curriculum rather than remaining the afterthought it has often been.

Virtually all advocates of general education call attention to the importance of knowledge of the arts as part of our cultural heritage and as an avenue of understanding what it is to be a human being. As the National Endowment for the Arts stated in *Toward Civilization: A Report On Arts Education*, there are four reasons why arts education should be important: "To understand civilization, to develop creativity, to learn the tools of communication, and to develop the capacity for making wise choices among the products of the arts." Nonetheless, the report concluded, "The problem is: basic arts education does not exist in the United States today" (1988).

Discipline-Based Art Education is an attempt to remedy that situation. The basic idea of the approach is to enhance art education by interrelating four disciplines: art making; art history; art criticism; and philosophy of art. To teach these topics in the classroom requires that classroom teachers become generally familiar with these areas of study

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and that they utilize a wider range of materials and methods—such as slides, books, discussions of general principles, and practice at justifying judgments about art—as well as the activities of making art. Implementing the approach thus involves a good deal of in-service teacher training as well as planning for optimal use of materials available in local districts and buildings.

### **Nebraska's Model**

In Nebraska the Prairie Visions project—a consortium of 23 school districts, the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Art Teachers Association, Educational Service Units, museums, colleges and universities, and other supporting associations—received a \$625,000 grant to help support the art education activities of the consortium for the next five years. While the Getty Center for Education in the Arts is the main source of support, the project has also received other funds from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, The Nebraska Arts Council, the Woods Charitable Fund, Inc., and the Cooper Foundation (Gale 1988).

The existence of the project in Nebraska and the receipt of such support are legitimate sources of pride. Just as important, however, is the fact that the discipline-based approach to art education is still in the process of being developed and perfected. There is a very real possibility that further elaboration and implementation in Nebraska may become a model for others around the nation. The evidence so far should make us rather optimistic about enhancing the quality of art education in our schools. In order to uncover the problem areas inherent in such a new project, Prairie Visions is placed here against the background of general education.

Given some of the tendencies of our society, it is uncertain whether such a school reform stands a good chance of actually improving the abilities of those who receive the education. The view of general education advocated in this chapter emphasizes the importance of the enhancement of the human capacity to interpret and critically evaluate life situations through the development of ways of thinking about images. Education in the arts is one of the main ways to bring about this enhancement.

## **Images at Large**

From listening to educators, one sometimes forms the impression that formal education initially introduces young people to images. But that is far from being the case. Our children and ourselves are virtually inundated with images, especially as we continue to undergo the "graphics revolution" that places such an emphasis on the production and reproduction of images. And by and large, the images are put to manipulative and deceptive purposes.

Evening television, where most of our children and fellow citizens subject themselves to such messages, regularly uses our most significant symbols, metaphors and images to manipulate feelings. Important symbols of patriotism are shamelessly used to sell beer, and deep concerns about the family are utilized to peddle ever greater amounts of insurance. And these are just the advertisements; the quality of the programming is equally dubious. One of the main concerns about how images are used is the recent emphasis on "image management," especially in politics and political campaigns. It is apparently believed by some that the wise use of knowledge about images is rather naturally a matter of attempting to control others. As educators and concerned citizens we must ask what the prospects are for sensitivity to art and the interpretation of images in such an image-battered world.

## **Personal World Images**

Before turning to the specific question of schooling, let us note that there is already something image-like in what we bring to our life situations (Boulding 1956). Each of us has a sort of mental image or map of our world. Without thinking about it, we are able to place ourselves in the world spatially. We also place ourselves in time: each person reading this has a rough view of history as he or she sees it, including some important events in world history leading up to the present time and a rough sequence of events as they have occurred in his or her own lifetime.

In addition, this world image is a map of the social lay of the land. We all have a view of what the social world is like as we enter into it and attempt to live and act in it. Indeed, a great deal of peoples' world images are shared with others: especially in a single society at a single time, many of the components of world images are common at the same time that each world image is one's own.



It is important to note also that many components of world images are closely tied to values. What is most important, and in what ways, are things of which we all have preconceptions. When we come up against events, persons, experiences of different types, we each rate them, or rank them on some sort of implicit scale. Much of this is done unconsciously, though it may be done explicitly as well.

Just as important, world images are dynamic and changing, and they are used to interpret new experiences. New information can be handled in many ways. Much of it is not registered by the observer at all; it seems to pass through unnoticed. Often new information is rejected, for one way of maintaining stability in one's view of things is to exclude possible conflicts and incoherencies. Information that fits may, in many cases, simply be added as a unit to the world image. At other times, however, information (or conflicts) may accumulate until a major change must be made.

It is important to call attention to images of the world for three reasons. First, since we interpret the world through our world images, many people would like to influence them. Many of the debates about education are about world images, both those images of the people doing the criticizing and those of the students whose world images are being shaped and altered. And because values enter into the disagreements, the debates can be heated indeed.

Second, the emphasis on world images reminds us of the importance of the ongoing nature of experience. Some of the components of world images are generated by formal study, but others are not. The influences upon the world images of young people today are multifarious and often very persistent and assertive. Schooling is one of those influences, but it is not the only one. Therefore we ought to think of the tasks of schooling as somewhat limited rather than claim that schooling is responsible for every asset or deficiency we see in whole generations of people.

Third, thinking of human beings in terms of their capacity to interpret experience through the use of images helps us understand that, even if our claim for it must be limited, we need education to go beyond what we pick up without effort. Education allows us to go beyond the images of everyday opinion and mass culture to make ourselves capable of subtler and more comprehensive ways of interpreting the world.

## Art Education

It would seem reasonable that art education could play an important part in the development of such ways of thinking (Broudy 1987). Yet until recently Nebraska students, like American students in general, have had little exposure to art. According to the NEA report (1988), for instance, when adults are questioned about their exposure to courses in art history or appreciation, more than 80 percent say they had no such exposure by the age of 24. Of those who did have some course work, over 60 percent had it between the ages of 18 and 24. For many students, in Nebraska and elsewhere, art is a part of elementary school. But overall participation drops off rapidly beginning in the seventh grade. And even when art has been regularly included, it has often been what some teachers call the "hand turkey" approach; that is, students make standard projects thought to be appropriate for the next public holiday (the name comes from a popular Thanksgiving project). In addition, curricular materials available for more extensive involvement with art in the classroom have been relatively inadequate or unavailable; for many districts and schools, such materials have been acquired only beginning in the 1980s (National Endowment for the Arts 1988).

We must conclude that, on the whole, art education has not fared well in American education. Yet art education offers one of the main opportunities for the inclusion of reflection and criticism in schooling. It is surprising that this argument has not been a more persistent theme for education policy makers.

### *The Uses of Schooling*

Recognizing that each of us, and each student, has a developing world image, we should ask how we expect schooling to contribute to that image. To answer this question, it is helpful to start by asking, What are the uses of schooling?

Most people, when they think about what schooling is for, agree that we ought at least to be able to use it. In his recent book, *The Uses of Schooling*, Broudy notes that two standards are often applied. The first claims that those who have spent the time in school and put in a good effort should be able to reproduce on demand what was learned—a replicative use of schooling. Broudy claims such learning is often the object of much repetition and reinforcement in the classroom, such as with learning multiplication skills. Second, Broudy identifies an applicative

use of schooling, which goes beyond direct repetition to make connections between the interpretation of theory and practical problem situations in specific areas of life experience (Broudy 1988).

These two criteria have their appeal when it comes to debates about education because each directly connects schooling to the world of work. It is difficult for advocates of general education to avoid using such criteria, because they are apt to be fairly safe politically. The problem is that they do not work.

Though there is specific learned material that can be recalled, most people cannot replicate what they learned in school, at least not for very long. Who, for instance, would after 10 or 15 years care to take the exam for a history course, even one in which they earned a passing—perhaps even excellent—grade at the time? As Broudy says, "Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of items studied in school and on which successful examinations have been passed are not recallable in post-school life. They are not available for replicative use" (1988).

A similar point can be made about knowledge as professionally useful. Some people use schooling in this way if they end up practicing a profession, but most people do not use what is learned in school in this way. Broudy states, "The applicative use of schooling is a poor criterion for general education because, although characteristic of professional practice, it is so rare in ordinary life" (1988).

Since, by and large, schooling is not used in the ways suggested by these criteria, we are left with a dilemma: "Either the schooling was inadequate or the criteria are wrong" (Broudy 1988). Either we should quit teaching general science, literature, art, history, and mathematics because most of it is forgotten and not used in professional life anyway, or we should admit that looking for replication and application to professional life are not the criteria appropriate to general education.

The *associative* and *interpretive* uses of education are more apt characterizations of proper expectations of general education. To become an educated person, one must be able to draw upon stores of concepts, theories and images to interpret contexts in life situations in ways that go beyond what would otherwise be possible. As we saw in briefly summarizing the world-image notion, making experience intelligible by means of our ways of ordering and relating phenomena is something common to human beings. The main function of general education is to enhance this capacity.

The result of general education should be a fund or store with which one knows. The name Broudy gives to this fund is the *allusionary base*, which he defines as "the associative resources provided by schooling and experience plus the interpretive repertoire of concepts and images" (1988). By comparison with replicative and applicative uses of schooling, the associative/interpretive model allows for some selective forgetting that leaves developed capacities for interpretation even while details are lost. It is in this way that the studies of the arts and sciences have their impact. It is not accidental, Broudy suggests, "that the humanities or the liberal studies are not primarily learned for replication or application, but rather to furnish an imagic and conceptual store (an allusionary base) *with* which to think and feel" (1988). As it turns out, there is a point to the old saying that education is what you have left after you've forgotten what you learned.

### Discipline-Based Art Education

In the DBAE approach, the four areas of study interact so that history, philosophy, and criticism expand possible connections of art making to other parts of the curriculum. Such emphasis on the four disciplines enhances the ability of the curriculum to encourage development in cognitive abilities as well as to provide increased contact with culture and tradition. In Elliot Eisner's words, the study of art as "learning to perceive, create, comprehend and judge" aesthetic images may serve as both a meaningful access to culture and a major way to develop intellectual capacities (1987). In some ways this conception is quite a change, or implies one, for the arts as well as for the conception of art in education. The study of art in the DBAE approach is seen as an important component in the education of all students, not just the talented or those of a certain social standing. "To put it bluntly," says Broudy, "The fine or serious arts have traditionally been the concern of the upper social classes. . . . The idea that the children of all social classes needed to have schooling in the arts, therefore, is revolutionary, even in as democratic a society as that of the United States" (1988).

### *The Nebraska Project*

Nebraska—along with Florida, Minnesota, Ohio, and Tennessee, where similar projects are underway—has distinguished itself nationally by attracting funds. Nebraska's opportunity to assume a leadership role in art education lies in the ways that it works out and supports the

specifics of reform in art education. Much significant work has already begun.

One area where a lot of effort has gone, for instance, is in working out the specifics of the relationships among the four disciplines so that there is some plausibility that the general goals of cognitive development may be achieved. This has had to be done in a way that is accessible to teachers and usable in classrooms to achieve educational objectives. "DBAE is not a curriculum but an approach to art education," as Eisner has suggested (1987).

The Getty Center provided initial models for Prairie Visions, but those have been modified to reflect the needs of Nebraska and the talents and capabilities of those actively involved in the project. In order to fully discuss and plan such matters, Nebraska project leaders have chosen an organizational model that involves participants at all levels and attempts as much as possible to avoid the hierarchical organization that so often discourages the sharing of ideas. This approach, which makes a serious effort to hear the voices of teachers from the beginning, may itself prove to be an example for others to follow.

Another instance where it is necessary to reinterpret national models to better fit local needs and opportunities is the utilization of diverse cultural materials. In Nebraska, the artistic contributions of traditional perspectives within European culture have been balanced with those of Native Americans, African Americans, and women, groups often under-represented in cultural studies. Nebraska museums have also been well utilized. At the same time, Nebraska educators, like those in other parts of the country, do understand the need for international awareness of culture; today's students need to be aware of, for example, Asian, African, and Middle Eastern cultures as well as local ones. Challenged by the riches of cultural diversity, practitioners must carefully pick exemplars for study. In this effort they bring images from many cultures, including those formerly repressed, into public consciousness.

In both these dimensions (the interaction of component disciplines in DBAE and multicultural enhancement of art education curricula) Nebraska's Prairie Visions project may well be in a position to provide useful models for other states and regions of the country. Nonetheless, to meet this promise, those in responsible positions, especially at the state level, will have continually to monitor progress in translating goals into local and district practices.

### ***Challenges for Prairie Visions***

The Prairie Visions project confronts four major concerns that any similar project in art education must face. Each of these has to do with the difficulties inherent in reforming art education while keeping general education goals firmly in mind.

**Teacher Training.** As Eisner has pointed out, in the classroom the success of DBAE depends on availability of curricular materials and good teaching (1987).

School districts in Nebraska are gradually acquiring new art education materials. Although few of these are specifically designed for DBAE, they can be very useful. But a lot depends on the training of the teachers, especially because in many instances the teachers themselves will have had little experience with art teaching. This is particularly true at the elementary level, where classroom teachers may be asked to teach art without the aid of art specialists. The educational backgrounds of many teachers may not have prepared them for the exploration of art as a way to develop critical perspectives on culture. In addition, much of the subject matter of the DBAE approach will be new to many, even well-trained, teachers.

In the Prairie Visions project so far, the approach to this problem has been to offer summer institutes that give three intense weeks' exposure to the basic concepts of the disciplines. The first such institute, participated in by 150 principals, classroom teachers, and art specialists, was held in the summer of 1989.

The summer institute approach looks promising, but it cannot be counted on indefinitely. After the five cycles supported by Getty Center funds, there must be ways to continue and expand this sort of teacher training. As more schools and districts implement changes in art education, there will be a growing need for pre-service training of teachers as well. It seems imperative that colleges and universities make commitments to this training and plan to do so in ways that profit from the extensive experience provided by the Prairie Visions project.

**Evaluation.** The lack of student progress assessment standards is one of the signs of the low status of art among school subjects. Presumably, DBAE approaches in this schools will alter this situation. But it is not clear as yet what the standards or means of assessment should be. When large numbers of students are asked to make art, for example, it does

not seem appropriate to make the product the basis for assessment. On the other hand, it would run counter to the general education goals and the skills development orientation of the DBAE approach to resort to "objective tests" in order to evaluate performance in separate disciplines. This problem of assessing student performance is not faced by Nebraska alone; how to institute meaningful and appropriate evaluation in a field where that has not been a central concern remains a problem nationally.

**Art Making and Creativity.** The DBAE approach attempts to enhance the place of art in education by emphasizing its cultural significance and the ways experience with art can enhance general abilities of interpretation. In part, this reaction counters an earlier view of art education defined in terms of "creative expression" for a few talented people only. But there is a danger that reaction to this earlier view could become over-reaction; in emphasizing interpretation and culture, the creative aspects of art making might be played down too much. In anticipation of such a possibility, it should be kept in mind that the art making component has many facets that are not found elsewhere. As Eisner has emphasized, students can be uniquely challenged by projects for which there are multiple possible good solutions that can be discovered by different individuals as well as by the same individuals making and remaking the objects (1987). In other words, it is here that one finds the experience of using imagination to come up with good alternatives (in contrast to other subjects, where there is supposedly one right answer).

Several responses might help assure the continuing significance of art making in the Prairie Vision program. Boards and administrators who will make future decisions might seek state support for curricular materials that include resources for art making as well as conceptual and cultural approaches to art. Administrators could also assure that art projects are generally serious enough to carry educational content, avoiding the superficiality of "hand turkeys." And art teachers should be assured that art courses will not be seen as holding places for behaviorally difficult or otherwise intractable students.

Teachers can do much as well, especially in their efforts to devise projects that combine art making with other skills. In addition, teachers often could use local artists as resource persons; a remarkable number of artists are at work in Nebraska, and their abilities could be tapped to enhance the education of others. There is much in the person-to-person

contact with working artists and attempting to make one's own art that cannot be learned from studying criticism, history and philosophy.

**Problem Areas and General Education.** In all these potential problem areas the demands upon educational leaders will be to keep active development and local implementation in balance, especially once the excitement of large grants and national attention is over. The best way to attain this balance is to keep a view of general education, such as that presented in this chapter, in mind.

Teacher training is a good example. When it comes time for universities and colleges to take over the tasks of preparing classroom teachers, it will be imperative that cooperative ventures be established and maintained. Thus, for instance, if the goals of this new form of art education are kept in sight, there will have to be training for teachers in which art historians, philosophers, critics, and artists regularly participate. To simply have a course or two within colleges and departments of education will not do, for the whole DBAE approach is based upon the insight that the *ways* of thinking of the different disciplines must interact. Yet this sort of thing—requiring cooperation among departments, colleges and campuses—is notoriously difficult in today's highly specialized and bureaucratic institutions. To work through the details of such arrangements, we need to keep the goal of general education in mind, so that such a goal can function as a practical guide.

Similar considerations apply to the other problem areas. Given the strong beginning of the Prairie Visions project, such practical arrangements, even if difficult, are well within the scope of our present institutions, and we may have confidence that they will be made a reality. The possible outcome for the last problem area, images and society, looks far less hopeful.

**Images and Society.** The fourth challenge facing DBAE is its relation to the development and direction of American culture. Here we are forced to consider matters that go beyond local and state contexts. Earlier it was noted that one way to understand education is as an extension and refinement of our public and private world images, and that others may attempt to control and manipulate our world images (McClure 1986). We often find, for example, that the student who spent some time in school talking to a local artist, enriching his or her world view, may go home that evening to watch hours of television.



The National Endowment for the Arts emphasized that the development of abilities of critical assessment is one of the main reasons for arts education. The writers mention both the power of the arts to stir emotion and their capacity to both inspire and manipulate. They go on to assert:

Every child growing up in the United States is bombarded from birth with popular art and artful communication over the airways and on the streets. The purpose of arts education is not to wean young people from these arts (an impossible task even if it were desirable) but to enable them to make reasoned choices about them and what is good and bad.

Arts education can help make discriminating consumers. Understanding the art of design, for example, can lead to better industrial products, as the Japanese understood when they swamped our automobile market. Similarly, knowledge of design enables the citizenry to make informed choices affecting where and how we live. Understanding of the media arts could affect the Nielson and Arbitron ratings, which dictate the broadcast agenda. (1988:18)

Art education, it is said, is needed to develop capacities for critical evaluation. At the same time, the writers characterize choice in terms of being a wise "consumer" and seem to promise that, given arts education, we shall do better at economic competition. This interesting juxtaposition of claims calls attention to something very important about the prospects for projects such as DBAE: that schooling takes place in the culture at large, and there, in our daily lives, there is no lack of images. We are, as the NEA report says, bombarded with images. In addition, to use the word *consumer* in this sense creates an ambiguity that hides the fact that general education and education for economic growth may not be the same thing.

From the point of view of this chapter, the two goals of sensitive discrimination and economic development are really quite different. There is indeed a pressing need to aid young people in making reasoned judgments about the images they are bombarded with. But to promise greater production and improvement in the balance of trade as part of the same educational package is misleading. (If the balance of trade does not improve, should we conclude that it was a failure of art education?)

### Reproduction of Images

One of the main characteristics of our century is the number of methods that have been developed for reproducing images. Photography, mechanical means of reproduction and printing, television,

video, and "imaging" by use of computers and the transport of the results by electronic means, are common in our world. Awash in images of one sort or another from a very early age, our children hardly need education to introduce them to images.

"Images have a power in our world undreamed of by the ancient idolaters," as Mitchell has put it (1986). The emphasis on the surface and the appearance of things has become a part of life, so that it is hardly a choice of whether or not to participate. In American society today, "image management" has become both a lucrative business and a matter-of-fact 'necessity' in commerce, industry, politics, and interpersonal relations" (Ewen 1988). Historian Daniel Boorstin, in his book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, pointed to the "graphics revolution" and the impact it was having on our lives (1987). His claim was that we tend to use the new-found capabilities of images and their reproduction for purposes of manipulation and deception, especially self-deception.

Let us put this concern another way. In the earlier discussion of world image we saw that each of us, often in agreement with others, has scales of values that we tend to use to rank what we interpret of our experiences. In Western societies generally, and in the United States in particular, we tend to play up values having to do with action, cognition, and affectivity (production, analysis, feelings of pleasure and pain) and play down what is reflective or contemplative (Maquet 1986). The graphics revolution, once it becomes integral to the production process, makes this valuation even stronger. It seems clear, then, that there should be a decided emphasis not only on programs such as DBAE, but on the potential for critical assessment within them. Such a focus would require a renewed emphasis on general education as well.

But much is running in the other direction. It may be too much to hope that some schooling that aims at personal valuation and critical reflection will have much chance against the ever-growing manipulative and deceptive uses of the power of images. One is tempted to despair over the "susceptibilities of a culture gone from teleology to television in a generation" (Logan 1989). Perhaps one should conclude that our mass use of commodified images must inevitably infect the authenticity of all images. A more sensible, though less striking, stance would be, as Mitchell suggests, to bring some general critique of the use of images in society in line with ". . . the fact that the museum is (sometimes) the site of authentic aesthetic experience, the media (sometimes) the vehicle of

real communication and enlightenment" (1986). How shall we distinguish the sham and the authentic? A good general education should prepare us to tell the difference.

It may also cut against the political grain to advocate it. Projects such as Prairie Visions allow us to put general education to the fore in our thinking. But there are many pressures here and elsewhere to tie educational planning to economic development in ways that may make general education difficult or even preclude it. Whether we speak of universities or of local school districts, the pressures to treat education as an element of economic development at the expense of general education and the development of the all-round capacities of our children are very real. It will require some strong leadership, not only at the state level but also in the local districts, to maintain long-term commitments to general education. In the past we have always claimed to do both; to provide preparation for economic life and preparation for life. We have, of course, not succeeded, but we made the claim. We must hope that educational leaders keep making that claim.

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# Improving Life Chances for Children in Nebraska

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# 5

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To a great extent, the potential of a child's future is determined by his or her earliest experiences, including education. The life chances of children, both those who are presumed to be at risk and those who are presumed to have a wide range of opportunities, are examined and discussed in this chapter. Factors that help or hinder life chances are described, and data that serve as indicators of life chances are addressed. National and state data about children considered to be at risk of school failure are reviewed. These data indicate that educators, administrators and policy makers should work to increase the quality and availability of early childhood education in Nebraska.

A strong relationship exists between what children experience during the early years of their lives, their academic and behavioral performance by the time they complete the primary grades, and the life circumstances they will experience as adults. In fact, many researchers find that if children do not succeed in the first few years of school, their chances for later success, either in school or out, are not good.

Because of these links between early childhood and adult circumstances, attention must be paid to improving the quality of educational experiences in those early years. Programs that are developed to meet the needs of these children—particularly those who are at risk due to environmental or handicapping conditions—can promote increased achievement and higher levels of success for all children.

Several educational options are available for improving children's life chances. Although most such programs involve a variety of agencies, many are simply matters of school programs and school-related policies. Policy options and issues are suggested in this chapter to assist in the development of local and state programs to enhance school outcomes, both achievement and behavioral.

## **Life Chances and Determining Factors**

No one can predict with certainty an individual's fate based upon the circumstances of the first five years of life. But common sense and empirical data do indicate that some conditions and factors increase or decrease an individual's life chances. The term "life chances" includes personal (happy/unhappy, competent/incompetent, and productive/unproductive), social (responsible/irresponsible and participant/nonparticipants), and economic (employed/unemployed and self-sufficient/dependent) dimensions. The person with good life chances is one with a relatively high probability of being happy, competent, productive, responsible, socially participating, employed, and self-sufficient. Conversely, the person with poor life chances is considered at risk of being unhappy, incompetent, unproductive, irresponsible, socially nonparticipating, unemployed, and dependent. Life chances also include socioeconomic factors, family composition, prenatal and early childhood nutrition and health care, and educational opportunities. Whatever society does to improve the life chances for children increases the probability of their becoming adults with positive personal, social and economic dimensions.

### ***Socioeconomic Status***

Almost all available evidence leads to the conclusion that one of the most influential factors affecting a child's adult life is socioeconomic status (Coleman et al. 1966; *Performance Profiles* 1966; Kennedy, Jung and Orland 1986). Poverty, with all of the social and family disruptions that often accompany it, may affect the level of care before a child is born, a child's nutrition and health status, the stability of the family and home environment, the safety and richness of daily life, and the quantity and quality of educational opportunities. In short, to be born poor, especially within a poor community, is to drastically increase the likelihood of being at risk.

Poverty, with its associated complications, has clearly increased among women and children in the United States in the 1980s. The Children's Defense Fund projected that of every 100 children born in 1988:

- 20 would be born out of wedlock;

- 12 would be born to parents who divorce before the children reach 18 years of age;
- 6 would be born to families in which one parent will die before the children reach 18;
- 40 would live in female-headed households before adulthood;
- 13 would be born to teenage mothers;
- 15 would be born into households where no parent is employed;
- 15 would be born into households with a working parent earning a below-poverty wage;
- 25 would be on welfare at some point prior to adulthood (1988).

Although Nebraska figures are not quite as stark as some of the national data, the same conditions that face children and families across the country are also present here. In Nebraska approximately 146,000 children are under six years of age, and approximately 423,000 are under 18, making up about 26 percent of the state's total population. An estimated 86,000 poor children lived in Nebraska for the years 1983-1987; the average child poverty rate for those years was 18.7 percent, which represents about a 6.6 percent increase since 1979 and ranks Nebraska 25th among states for child poverty rate. The estimated median income of four-person families in 1989 is \$31,484, which ranks Nebraska 32nd in the nation (*A Vision for America's Future* 1988).

About half of Nebraska women with children are employed outside the home. Women whose children are school age and mothers who are also heads of households and have preschoolers are employed at even higher rates. In 1987 in Nebraska, 72,500 children aged five and under had mothers in the work force (Reed 1988).

### ***Early Childhood Education***

Researchers have found that a combination of young child characteristics, such as poverty and access to quality preschool experience, are important predictors of later success in life. The Perry Preschool researchers (Berrueta-Clement et al. 1984) reported that at 19 years of age, study participants who had attended a high-quality preschool program made greater gains in education, employment, and selected social behaviors than did a similar group without the same preschool experiences. The results included the following:



- As students, fewer participants in the preschool program were classified as mentally retarded (15 percent vs. 35 percent).
- More participants completed high school (67 percent vs. 49 percent).
- More participants attended college or job training programs (38 percent vs. 21 percent).
- More held jobs (50 percent vs. 32 percent).
- More supported themselves by their own (or spouse's) earnings (45 percent vs. 25 percent).
- Fewer were arrested for criminal acts (31 percent vs. 51 percent).
- Fewer were arrested for crimes involving property or violence (24 percent vs 38 percent).
- Participants had a lower birth rate (64 vs. 117 per 100 women).
- Fewer participants were on public assistance (18 percent vs. 32 percent) (1984).

Clearly, more research paralleling that of the Perry Preschool Project is needed to increase knowledge about how child characteristics and experiences are related to adult characteristics. Nevertheless, some cross-sectional information is available about age-related progressions in academic achievement. Group achievement test scores at nine years of age, for example, are good predictors of group scores on college admission tests.<sup>1</sup> Nine-year-olds who are below the threshold find catching up to their peers very difficult; those who are above are highly likely to succeed in later academic life.

Just as early achievement test scores predict later test scores, so do scores on college admissions tests predict college success.

Scores on both grade school achievement tests and college admission tests (SAT and ACT) show marked differences between low socioeconomic status (SES) and minority children and majority, middle income children. High school grades, however, are even better predictors of college success (Kifer 1985).

In schools where low-income children comprise 24 percent or more of the total school population, these children are particularly at risk of not achieving well. Members of families classified as low income for

eight or more years are also at such risk. The fact that relatively few white children live in poverty for more than five years while almost half of black children do may explain much of the disparity in educational achievement between these groups (Kennedy, Jung and Orland 1986; *Performance Profiles* 1986).

Living in sustained poverty creates an educational condition difficult for children to overcome, because of both home environment and lack of access to quality preschool. Equally important may be the disparity that sometimes develops between (a) the child's language and the images that underlie that language, and (b) the school's language and the nature of the images that the school assumes the child has formed (Washington, Gordon and Armour-Thomas 1987). Each child is required to learn the school's language, but often lacks the images that undergird it. The formation of a school language that is separated from substantive images may cause the child to view this language as essentially something to be memorized rather than understood, and the child consequently does not really grasp what is taking place in school (Santmire 1987). The difficulties that children sometimes experience as they move into the intermediate grades may be related to cognition as much as self-esteem, meaningfulness, and motivation.

At a practical level, a series of interrelated studies (Lazar et al. 1982; Gersten and Carnine 1983; Becker 1984) suggest that a combination of infant, preschool, and primary grade programs for at-risk children, especially where the parents are actively involved, can improve the achievement test levels and related social behaviors of nine-year-old children from low SES and minority families. The information now available about the programs that work for at-risk children tends to indicate that predicted college admission test scores, college attendance and achievement, and success in vocations not requiring college education can also be improved (Bronfenbrenner 1974; Lambie, Bond and Weikart 1974; Seitz, Rosenbaum and Apfel 1985; Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce and Snipper 1982; Berrueta-Clement, et al. 1984; Weiss 1987; Gersten and Carnine 1983; Becker 1984; Wang and Walberg 1988). An additional benefit of at-risk children's participation in high-quality preschools with strong parent education programs is that these programs have been shown to return a much greater financial benefit than they cost (Barnett 1985).

## **National and State Initiatives**

### ***History of Federal Involvement***

Federal involvement in early childhood education and child care has been sporadic and limited. The first significant federal initiatives took place during the Depression and World War II in the form of support for women who had entered the work force, but those programs ended immediately after the war. No other federal legislation for early childhood education or child care was passed until 1966, when Head Start was established as part of the War on Poverty (Grubb 1987). Head Start provides comprehensive educational and social services for children below kindergarten age who are in families with incomes below the designated poverty level. Federal funding for Head Start had never been sufficient to serve all the eligible children; only about 20 percent of children who meet eligibility guidelines are currently served (Head Start Fact Sheet 1987).

Federal legislation beyond Head Start has been introduced but not passed in Congress at least six different times since 1970. During the 1980s, however, pressure has increased on the federal government to take a more active role in assuring that quality child care services and educational opportunities are available to young children. In 1988, the 100th Congress considered five bills that proposed programs for child care and early childhood education. Of these, the Act for Better Child Care (the ABC Bill) received the most support. It contained provisions to make child care more affordable for low and moderate income families and to improve the quality and availability of all child care. The bill successfully moved through the committee process in both the House and the Senate and was debated on the Senate floor. However, the bill was stalled as a part of the budget reduction process. Most child advocacy groups anticipate that some form of child care legislation will be passed but question whether a significant level of funding will be appropriated.

### ***Non-Federal Policy Initiatives***

Interest in issues related to young children and families has burgeoned in recent years among a wide range of commissions, associations, and foundations. Several national groups associated with education and child welfare and specially formed commissions sponsored by corporations and nonprofit organizations have developed

strong position statements and sets of recommendations about policies and programs affecting young children and their families. The commission reports are having a significant effect on what states and locales are considering as they examine their own needs and alternatives. Table 1 provides a summary of the recommendations from a sampling of reports.

Perhaps the most far-reaching attempts to serve the needs of young children and their families are taking place at the state level. At least 15 states have enacted some form of early childhood education legislation in the last several years. Some of the plans are targeted toward low-income, at-risk children; others provide universal programs and services. These programs range from coordination among existing agencies and pilot projects to comprehensive projects available to all children, birth through age five.

Compared to many other states, Nebraska has seen little development of publicly funded projects for children below kindergarten age.

**Table 1 - Summary of Recommendations from Selected Association and Commission Reports**

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Early Childhood and Family Education: Foundations for Success. Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988.

1. Make high quality early childhood services universally available; concentrate public resources on programs for young children at risk.
2. Strengthen the capacity of families.
3. Assure standard of quality for early childhood programs.
4. Collaborate to provide comprehensive services to young children and families.

Right from the Start. National Association of State Boards of Education, 1988.

1. Establish early childhood units in elementary schools, focusing on children four to eight years of age.
2. Develop partnerships between public schools and other early childhood programs and community agencies to improve services to children and families.

NAEYC Position Statement on Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education Programs, Serving Children from Birth through Age 8. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986.

1. Establish developmentally appropriate early childhood education programs for all areas of a child's development.
  2. Employ early childhood teachers with college-level specialized training in early childhood education or child development.
  3. Limit the size of the group and provide sufficient numbers of adults to provide individualized and age-appropriate care and education.
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*Table 1 (continued) - Summary of Recommendations from Selected Association and Commission Reports*

<p><b>A Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education.</b> National Governors' Association, 1986.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide assistance for first-time, low-income parents of high-risk students.</li> <li>2. Develop outreach initiatives to assist young children that involve all community/religious organizations.</li> <li>3. Provide kindergarten to all five-year-old children.</li> <li>4. Provide quality early childhood development programs for at-risk four-year-olds.</li> <li>5. Provide parents with information on successful parenting practices.</li> <li>6. Stress continued improvement of programs in day care centers and preschools.</li> <li>7. Develop state and local structures for collaborative work among agencies.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged.</b> Council for Economic Development, 1987.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish early intervention programs to encourage pregnant teenagers and teen parents to remain in school.</li> <li>2. Provide prenatal and postnatal care for high-risk mothers.</li> <li>3. Provide parenting education and quality child care.</li> <li>4. Provide quality preschool programs for all disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds.</li> <li>5. Restructure schools to provide school-based management, smaller schools and classes.</li> <li>6. Develop programs for drop-outs and potential drop-outs that combine work experience with education in basic skills.</li> <li>7. Increase Head Start funding to levels sufficient to reach all eligible children.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Investing in Quality Child Care.</b> American Telephone and Telegraph, 1986.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support and subsidize high quality child care in the community.</li> <li>2. Serve as model employers, using corporate influence to improve child care policies and new initiatives.</li> <li>3. Create a national center for child care quality.</li> </ol>
<p><b>The Forgotten Half: Pathways to Success for America's Youth and Young Families.</b> The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship, 1988.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enhance the quality of youth-adult relationships, both in and out of the family.</li> <li>2. Expand community support, with emphasis on youth service and youth leadership activities, to help integrate all young people into their communities and the nation.</li> <li>3. Extend and improve current employment opportunities for more non-college-bound youth.</li> <li>4. Develop education and training policies through proposed new legislation, Fair Chance: Youth Opportunities Demonstration Act.</li> </ol>

The majority of Nebraska's prekindergarten programming has developed in the private sector. Nearly two-thirds of Nebraska children under five years old attend some form of preschool activity before making the transition to kindergarten, according to estimates by the Nebraska Department of Education. National data suggest that children of the middle and upper classes are twice as likely as poor children to have an educationally oriented prekindergarten experience. In Nebraska similar discrepancies exist. Parents who earn over \$35,000 per year are twice as likely as poor parents to use registered home day care or licensed day care centers. Parents with income below \$15,000 are most likely to leave their children in the care of relatives or unregistered day care providers (Reed 1988).

Prekindergarten early childhood educational programs take many forms, including part-day preschools or nursery schools, Head Start, programs for the handicapped, and child care centers and day care homes that have a defined educational component. These are offered by a great variety of sponsors, including private individuals, churches, colleges and universities, social service agencies, franchises, corporate owners, employers, the federal government, and public schools.

When a prekindergarten project is operated directly by a public school system, it must meet the minimum approval standards of the Department of Education's Rule 14. This means that teachers must be certified and endorsed for the assignment. At this time most prekindergartens located in public schools are not directly connected to the school district. Instead they are operated under nonprofit foundations established by the district. Some foundation-sponsored programs do, however, employ certified teachers.

The first Nebraska public school district to sponsor an educational program for children younger than kindergarten age was Westside Community Schools in Omaha, beginning in 1967. Several other school districts around the state followed, until nearly 10 were operating some kind of prekindergarten. Three districts—Omaha, Lincoln, and Plattsmouth—became early sponsors of Head Start (beginning in the summer of 1965). Omaha Head Start later came under private, nonprofit sponsorship, and the Omaha Public Schools provided their own program for four-year-olds until 1979.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, when budget limitations began, most of the publicly funded preschool programs were eliminated with the exception of Westside, Head Start in Lincoln and Plattsmouth, and a

few federally funded programs for migrant children. Within the past three or four years, a very modest interest in providing prekindergarten programs has returned in public schools. New programs have started in David City, Ralston, and Omaha, and the one at Westside has expanded to include a variety of options from part- to full-day care in the majority of the elementary buildings in the district.

Limited school district sponsorship of prekindergarten handicapped projects began well before the passage of LB 889 in 1978. The prekindergarten handicapped services now required of all districts range from home-based programs to services contracted from other agencies such as ESUs, Head Start, and private preschools and child care centers. Many districts now operate center-based programs, and a few invite the participation of a limited number of non-handicapped children to more nearly approximate a mainstreamed setting.

### *Head Start*

In Nebraska, just over 2,000 children (an estimated 25 percent of those eligible) are currently served through 17 Head Start projects, which include 14 administered by the regional Office of Child Development in Kansas City and three administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Recent funding limitations have caused the enrollment to be limited to four-year-olds. Nebraska was one of the first states to develop a cooperative agreement with Head Start for the provision of services to children with handicaps: 10 percent of the children served in Nebraska Head Start projects must have verified handicaps (Nebraska Department of Education 1987).

### *Child Day Care*

All child care settings and preschools other than those associated with an elementary school approved or accredited by the Department of Education are required to be licensed by the Department of Social Services. These include child day care centers, group child care homes, family day care homes, school-age child care, and nannies in homes. They occur in various physical settings (home, commercial spaces, community buildings, churches, public schools, hospitals, etc.) and are supported through different funding formats (private, state and federal governments, public and private schools, churches, etc.). In 1987, roughly two-fifths of the 72,500 Nebraska preschoolers whose mothers worked outside the home were cared for in licensed and registered day

cares (Reed 1988). The remaining 43,500 were in the care of relatives and unregistered care providers.

The distribution of child care options is uneven across the state. About 11 counties have no available licensed child care, and others do not have enough licensed child-care capacity to meet the need. The highest number of child care options exists in Douglas and Sarpy Counties, but the demand for child care in these counties is also greater than the options available. Approximately 25,900 children under five years of age need child care in this area; only 9,700 licensed positions are available (Zipay 1987).

### *Task Force and Coordinating Councils*

While Nebraska does not have the number of comprehensive programs, or even pilot programs, that some other states do, interest and support for such efforts appear to be increasing. Until recently, little systematic development of specific policies and initiatives had taken place to address the issues and meet the needs of Nebraska's young children. However, some efforts are now under way.

1. In 1984 the Nebraska State Board of Education appointed a task force to make recommendations about kindergarten programs in Nebraska. The subsequent report, which was adopted by the board, recommended that kindergarten be universally available to all children five years of age and described a set of characteristics and outcomes developmentally appropriate for kindergarten children. The report also made specific policy recommendations to key groups involved with kindergarten education.
2. The Nebraska Legislature passed the Family Policy Act during the 99th session. Under this legislation, an interagency coordinating council, appointed by the governor, is to examine how best to meet the special needs of children five years of age and under and the related needs of their families. (See Chapter 6, "Early Childhood Special Education in the Next Decade: The Impact of Public Law 99-457 in Nebraska.")
3. In fall of 1987, the Health and Human Services Committee of the Nebraska Legislature appointed the Task Force on Quality, Affordable, and Accessible Child Care. The final



report of this task force contains several recommendations that have implications for education as well as child care, particularly in the areas of improving both program quality and staff training levels.

4. In June of 1988, the Nebraska Department of Education, in cooperation with about 30 agencies and associations, sponsored a conference for policy makers titled, "Investing in the Good Life: the Role of Early Childhood Education."
5. In August of 1988, the State Board of Education appointed the Early Childhood Policy Development Task Force to inform the board, to make recommendations for policy, and to suggest ways to bring about optimum coordination among the various state agencies that serve young children. The State Board of Education accepted the report of the task force in January 1989. During the 1989 session of the Nebraska Unicameral, LB-567 was introduced to provide funding for pilot programs that address the needs of at-risk children and their families.

### **Strategies for Improving Life Chances**

Certain assumptions about the possible and proper roles of social institutions in the lives of children guided this report. They are:

- Families have primary responsibility for their children; society should help families be effective in this role, not usurp it.
- Institutions that work with children and parents should use processes that lead to the optimal development of the children and their parents so that they become increasingly independent and competent.
- Education and care environments should focus on the child's entire intellectual and motivational development and well-being, including self-esteem, rather than being directed toward certain highly specific objectives.
- Society should value those who work with children—teachers, parents, day care workers, volunteers—and it should demonstrate that value in a variety of ways, including awards, media

recognition, salaries, and responsibility for planning and conducting programs.

- State policies can be formulated, funded, and implemented to encourage and assist in development of local programs to enhance important school outcomes and life chances.

## **Recommended Strategies**

As stated earlier, studies and experience have shown that appropriate early education programs for at-risk children can improve the life chances of children. The following recommendations address the strengths and needs of the family, non-family care services (such as day care), pre-schools, and schools.

**Strategy #1.** Provide state funding to plan and initiate a parent education program that builds upon the strengths of those in nearby states, such as Missouri and Minnesota.

This recommendation is predicated on the recognition that parents are the primary educators of young children. In Minnesota, family education is designed for children from birth to kindergarten age and their parents. The overall goal is "to strengthen families by enhancing and supporting the parents' abilities to provide for their children's learning and development and providing opportunities for young children to develop to their full potentials—socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually" (Engstrom 1988). Although programs have some common characteristics, details are determined at the local level, resulting in unique projects. All have active advisory councils, collaboration with other community resources and agencies, and licensed teachers. Weekly programs may include parent/child activities, discussion groups, newsletters, toy and book lending libraries, and parent education resource centers. The programs are financed through a combination of 60 percent local levies and 40 percent state aid.

In Missouri, the New Parents as Teachers Project began in 1981 as a pilot effort to demonstrate the value of early, high-quality parent education. Participants were provided with information about child growth and development, periodic screenings for their children, monthly visits by parent educators, and monthly group meetings. Evaluation of the pilot program indicated that those parents who participated had children who demonstrated advanced intellectual and language development, more positive social development, and fewer characteristics at

three years of age of being at risk. In 1984, the Missouri legislature authorized funding to Missouri school districts for participation in the program.

One way of examining the issue of parent education is to consider the amount of time that parents spend with their children. For example, children in traditional families, those in which at least one parent provides regular in-home care, spend almost all of their first five years under the care and tutelage of parents during waking hours. In those nontraditional families where no parent provides in-home care during the work week, children still spend more than half their time under the direct care of a parent. Because parents are responsible for this concentration of early education and care, Nebraska should give its first attention to the needs of parents as they plan and work with their children.

**Strategy #2.** The State Board of Education should (1) endorse the recommendations of the Task Force on Quality, Affordable, and Accessible Child Care; (2) adopt the proposed quality guidelines; and (3) authorize the Department of Education to administer procedures for the recognition of quality programs.

The Child Care Task Force's recommendations are included in LB-678, which is a priority bill in the 1989 legislature. LB-678 provides for the expansion of affordable, accessible child care. It places great emphasis on the need to improve the quality of early care and education settings through increased staff training opportunities and a program of voluntary accreditation of child care programs. It emphasizes the need for coordination among agencies serving young children.

Readily accessible day care is of critical importance to non-traditional families. Too often, however, accessibility is emphasized without sufficient attention to educational quality. Not only must non-family child care meet health, nutrition, and safety standards; it also must offer educational opportunities at least equivalent to what the family does.

Quality child care requires that providers combine the skills associated with care giving and those of teaching. In order to provide the care and education required by at-risk children, child care workers must be especially well educated. Strategy #3 outlines some specific recommendations toward improving the education level of care givers.

**Strategy #3.** The State Board of Education should take four steps to improve education in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades:

(1) require teachers in the primary grades to have specific training in early childhood education; (2) establish a field endorsement in early childhood education (birth through grade three or four); (3) recommend that districts use the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines on developmentally appropriate practices in reviewing curriculum and practices in kindergarten and primary grades; and (4) ask Nebraska colleges and universities that prepare teachers and administrators to ensure that those whom they recommend for teacher and administrator endorsement know and are able to implement NAEYC guidelines.

These four recommendations are consistent with the guidelines in the Nebraska Kindergarten Report and those of the NAEYC for children in preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades. During the four years since the Nebraska State Board of Education adopted the Nebraska Kindergarten Report, considerable progress has been made in many of Nebraska's schools in implementing its recommendations. The educational needs of kindergarten children do not differ sharply, however, from those of children in the early primary grades. This similarity in educational needs is acknowledged in the NAEYC report, which recommends content and processes for the primary grades that build directly from those described in the Nebraska Kindergarten Report. Early elementary education for children, especially for those judged to be at risk, should be patterned after the NAEYC statement and Nebraska Kindergarten Report.

**Strategy #4.** Nebraska should plan and fund a program that provides quality preschool for at-risk children not currently served by Head Start.

As mentioned earlier, fewer than 25 percent of children who are eligible for Head Start are served by it. Despite the need that exists for extension of Head Start, the federal government has made no serious attempts to make it available to all children who are eligible. In fact, little evidence exists that those children most in need are those who are being served. In order to meet the preschool needs of its at-risk children, Nebraska should plan and fund its own extension of Head Start.

**Strategy #5.** Nebraska should plan and fund a program to provide for prenatal, infant, early childhood, and primary grade health and social service care for children and families who live in areas now lacking adequate services.

States tend to overlook the particular education, health, and social service needs of those who live in less populated areas. The assumption seems to be that people who live in rural areas and small towns are self-sufficient and able to take care of all their needs without any special attention. In fact, as the superintendent of a small school district in Nebraska said at a recent conference, "I think that in Nebraska, particularly rural Nebraska, that if you are poor or if you have family problems and so forth, it is (considered) to be your fault, and there is a kind of a holier-than-thou attitude about it. . . ." The superintendent added that rural districts still have to work with children and youth from families that are poor or have problems in school. "A program [for parents and children] would fit very well into the role and mission of what I see rural schools of Nebraska becoming or should be becoming. . . . I can't think of a better way to work together than to develop better programs to help the high-risk youngster and to help families become better parents."

Nebraska has always acknowledged the need for education in rural areas. The time has come to ensure that the state's extensive rural areas have the same access to prenatal, infant, early childhood, and primary grade health and social service care as do more densely populated areas. Implementing this recommendation will both improve the life chances for children in rural areas and strengthen the future of the rural areas themselves.

**Strategy #6.** Nebraska should not mandate, or even encourage, standardized achievement tests for children in preschool, kindergarten, or the primary grades.

Scores on the SAT and ACT predict later academic success; they also are used as indices of school success as well as the success of schools in educating students. At least three potentially serious problems arise with the heavy reliance on such measures as indices of the success schools have in educating students: (1) schools may focus too much on having their students achieve on these tests rather than focusing on broader achievement issues; (2) such tests may discriminate against low-SES and minority students who do not have the same preparations for taking them that middle-income youth have; and (3) high school grades are better predictors of college success than are SAT and ACT scores. Although SAT and ACT scores have some values, both the school success of individual students and the success of schools in educating their

students must be viewed in a much broader perspective than that given by such scores.

**Strategy #7.** Nebraska should fund pilot projects for the education, health, and social services care of children from the prenatal months through age eight.

The purposes of these pilot projects would be to: (a) provide models for other Nebraska communities, (b) permit testing of program and process ideas, and (c) explore ways for different professional groups to work together. Two pilot projects should occur in urban areas, two in small towns, and two in rural settings. Each project should include a mixture of children who spend their out-of-school waking hours at home with a parent or parent-surrogate and children who spend these hours in an out-of-home setting. The Nebraska Departments of Education, Health, and Social Services should be asked to plan the effort to include the following: (1) choosing a set of six community/elementary school sites, securing proposals from them, and funding the projects; (2) developing plans to assure that funds controlled by the three different agencies will be used jointly to produce the best results at the local level; (3) locating the projects in schools that contain the highest concentrations of at-risk children; (4) assuring that each project's focus will be on children from the prenatal months through age nine; and (5) assuring that a developmental approach—one in which the integrity of the individual and culture are acknowledged—will be used in working with families and children. This effort should not be passive; it should include active ways for children and families to increase their personal, social, and economic life chances.

The planning effort for the pilot projects should bring together the intellectual and financial resources of the three cooperating departments. In addition, advice should be sought from carefully chosen consultants from states such as Missouri, Illinois and Minnesota that already have experience in this area. The state should fund these pilot projects at an annual amount of approximately \$30,000 plus \$500 per child beyond funding already available through Head Start, federal/state/local public school funds, Medicare, WIC, etc. The additional funding will be needed for start-up costs, program monitoring, and coordination of services as different professional and service institutions learn how to work together. The total cost to the state will be approximately \$1.2M annually.

## Conclusion

The link between early childhood experiences and adult circumstances is well researched and strong. Therefore, one of the most effective—and cost-efficient—methods to improve adult lives is to provide quality early education. Strategies that involve family training and service, interagency coordination, and education of intervention personnel prove to save money in the long run as they help at-risk children overcome barriers before they become impassable.

## Endnote

1. Group scores on the SAT in 1985 mirrored group scores of the NAEP reading tests taken when children were nine. Furthermore, differential improvements over the past few years by minorities in reading test scores at age nine show up on reading tests taken by 17-year-olds and SATs taken by high school seniors.

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# Early Childhood Special Education in the Next Decade: The Impact of Public Law 99-457 in Nebraska

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# 6

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Nebraska has served handicapped children from birth to age 21 through special education and other services since 1978. But in 1991 Public Law 99-457 will include federal funding for preschool services and incentive grants for infants and toddlers. Because Nebraska has already been serving these populations, it will not receive new funds under the new law. States that will be taking advantage of the incentive funds will be looking to Nebraska—and other states with experience in serving handicapped infants and preschoolers—for precedence. Although under P.L. 99-457 policy has been set at the federal level, key state policy considerations remain. These include choosing the size of the population to be served, how to best serve the entire family, fostering interagency case coordination, developing appropriate intervention personnel, and solving funding problems.

Nebraska has provided special education and related services to handicapped children from date of diagnosis, or birth, to five years of age through Nebraska Revised Statute 79-3315, passed by the State Legislature in 1978. It is one of four states to have done so since then. In the fall of 1991, Public Law 99-457, the amendment to and expansion of the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), will be implemented. This law mandates rehabilitative services for all handicapped children from age 3 through 21 (Part B), whereas previously services for handicapped children began at age 5. The law also includes incentives to serve handicapped infants and toddlers and their families from birth (Part H).

In addition to children who qualify for services under existing rules, there is a population of children who are at risk for developmental problems and could benefit from services, but who do not currently qualify. These at-risk children experience biological and/or environmental difficulties that carry significant risk of developmental delay according to standard norms in the psychomotor, cognitive, or affective

domains. These risks include a lesser likelihood of completing school and decreased levels of productivity (Barnett 1988).

States can receive money for planning and developing a system of community-based early intervention services not only for handicapped infants and toddlers but also for children who are at risk for developmental problems. Part H of P.L. 99-457 defines handicapped infants and toddlers as individuals from birth through age 2 who are in need of early intervention services because they: (1) are experiencing developmental delays as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures in one or more of the following areas: cognitive development, physical development, language and speech development, psychosocial development, or self-help skills; or (2) have a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay. The term may also include, at a state's discretion, individuals (from birth to age 2) who are at risk of having substantial delays if early intervention services are not provided. Each state is to define what criteria will be used to designate children as at risk if the state chooses to serve them.

### **A Legislative History of P.L. 99-457**

Systematic federal funding for early intervention programs for developmentally disabled children began in the late 1960s, when demonstration projects for children under 8 years of age were funded under the Handicapped Children Early Education Program (HCEEP). This discretionary government program continues to the present. Hundreds of projects funded over its 20-year history provide the base of experience upon which P.L. 99-457 was built, particularly in regard to services responsive to the needs of children and families, as perceived by the families. However, the HCEEP program was discretionary, so when the Education for All Handicapped Act was passed in 1975, the provisions did not apply to children under age 5. Shortly after the passage of that act, greater activity was observed in the area of early intervention.

Initiation and passage of P.L. 99-457 was based on the assumption that the type of early intervention services to be delivered should be beneficial to handicapped children and their families. Under the new law, an Individual Educational Program (IEP) is required for children age 3 and older. For infants and toddlers from birth through age 2, an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) is required, including assignment

of a case manager to facilitate the coordination of services. When the qualifying child is an infant or toddler, the amended law specifies that the family is to be included and the "strengths and needs of the family in relation to their child" are to be addressed in the IFSP. The IFSP is to be written by an interdisciplinary team including the parents or guardians.

The emphasis upon family involvement implies an expectation that benefits go beyond the direct benefits to children and their families, and out to the community as a whole. In addition, early intervention services are expected to be ultimately cost-effective. The argument is that by supporting and strengthening the family in accordance with their perceived needs, the state will better help families meet their children's needs, and costly out-of-home care may be avoided. Thus, both stronger families and decreased total costs will result.

### **The Nebraska Context**

The Nebraska system of community offices of retardation led the way in the deinstitutionalization movement of the 1960s. Nebraska LB 403, passed in 1973 anticipated P.L. 94-142 by mandating public school responsibility for all handicapped students 5 to 18 years of age (and later to 21 years of age), despite the severity of handicapping conditions. In 1978, the Nebraska legislature passed the Special Education Act mandating public school responsibility for serving children with handicaps from the date of diagnosis to the traditional school age of 5 years.

In 1986 then-Governor Kerrey appointed the Nebraska Department of Education as the lead agency responsible for implementation of P.L. 99-457 in Nebraska. But this does not mean that the Nebraska Department of Education must itself deliver or pay for the services provided. In 1987 Governor Orr established, according to federal statutes, the Interagency Coordinating Council to provide leadership in implementation of P.L. 99-457 within the state of Nebraska. Thus the state is now well into a four-year preparatory period during which planning, revising statutes and regulations, training, coordinating, creating interagency agreements, and implementing mandates must occur.

Some of the factors that contribute to Nebraska's unique position in the implementation of P.L. 99-457 (Part H) are the legislative history and current mandate, the size and stability of the population, and the relative stability of personnel in the state government. These factors are particularly applicable to the coordination of services by several agen-

cies. In fact, one strength that contributes to Nebraska's opportunity to be on the cutting edge of family and child legislation is the degree to which middle management staff in state-level agencies know one another and have a history of working collaboratively on implementing policy where the actions of one agency affect the other.

The Nebraska Legislature passed the Family Policy Act in 1987. This legislation asserts the importance of a ". . . caring social unit, usually the family, to the development of children." It stipulates that when children and families require assistance from any component of state government that every reasonable effort shall be made to provide service by the least intrusive and least restrictive methods and as close as possible to the home community. While conceived independently of special education legislation and with much greater breadth in its implications, the Family Policy Act is entirely consistent with the spirit of P.L. 99-457 and can provide guidance regarding policy issues to be decided in implementing the expansion of P.L. 99-457, (Part H) in Nebraska.

### **Elements of a Statewide System**

P.L. 99-457 stipulates that each state develop a system consisting of a comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary program of early intervention services for all handicapped infants, toddlers, and their families. The components of this system are outlined below and the Nebraska effort in each is summarized.

**The definition of the term "developmentally delayed" that will be used by the state in carrying out the program.**

Current eligibility criteria specify significant disabilities or health problems (Rule 51). The Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) Task Force is proposing that the state continue with the current definition of special education outlined in Rule 51.

**Reasonable goals and timetables for making appropriate early intervention services available to all handicapped infants and toddlers in the State.**

Through LB 889, child-focused early intervention has been available. Issues in the legislation yet to be addressed include case coordination and services to address family needs.

**Performance of a timely, comprehensive and multidisciplinary evaluation of the functioning of handicapped infants and toddlers and family needs to appropriately assist in their development.**

Child assessment capability is generally good in Nebraska, either through school diagnostic personnel or special services such as Barkley Center and Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute. Assessment of family needs is being addressed by the ICC Task Force on IFSP and case management.

**Development of Individualized Family Service Plans and the provision for case management services.**

Again, the ICC Task Force on IFSPs is developing recommendations in this area. It has published a child-focused and family-centered philosophy and a listing of case management functions.

**A comprehensive child-find system and a system for referrals to service providers that includes timelines and provides for participation by primary referral sources.**

If eligibility is left as is, then current child-find efforts would seem adequate. If eligibility is extended to include at-risk children, then child-find efforts will need to be addressed.

**A public awareness program on early identification of handicapped infants and toddlers.**

Again, if no change is made in the definition of handicapped, the level of awareness is generally good, with perhaps a need for some attention to nursing personnel and the medical specialties of family practice and obstetrics. Changes in eligibility would necessitate some additional personnel training.

**A central directory that includes early intervention services, resources, and experts available in the state, as well as research and demonstration projects being conducted in the state.**

An Information Referral Service is operated jointly by Education and Vocational Rehabilitation. This may need to be revised or updated with the inclusion of family services. Also, a system to operate across all agencies included in the ICC should be considered.

**A comprehensive system of personnel development that includes training of public and private service providers, primary referral sources, and persons who will provide services after receiving such training.**

The state has certification for early childhood special education, and colleges and universities have developed programs in this area. However, no systematic plan exists for any other disciplines involved in early intervention efforts. NDE has sponsored training activities for specific disciplines and the early childhood State Education Training Series (SETS). An HCEEP project, Getting Started Together, has provided inservice for two years. An ICC Task Force is working in this area.

**A single line of authority in an agency designated by the Governor to carry out: (1) general administration, (2) identification and coordination of all available funding sources, (3) resolution of interagency disputes, and (4) entering into formal state agency agreements.**

A task force has just begun working on these issues.

**A policy pertaining to contracting or making other arrangements with local service providers.**

Rule 51 addresses provisions for contracting. As family service needs are addressed, a greater use of contracting may occur.

**Procedural safeguards with respect to early intervention programs.**

Rule 51 addresses this component.

**A system for compiling data regarding the early intervention programs (which may be based on a sampling of data).**

Such data will need to be integrated into the central directory.

In 1988 the NICC identified four major issues that it wished to address and formed four task forces. These groups, each chaired by a council member, also have membership representation beyond the ICC itself to include persons who are key resource people in the development of policy. The issues which these task forces are addressing include: (1) definition of eligibility, (2) guidelines for Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs) and case management, (3) interagency cooperation and agreements, and (4) personnel preparation.

## Defining the Target Population

The legislative intent of Nebraska's Special Education Act in mandating services from the date of diagnosis is to provide service to the most severely handicapped infants and toddlers. Qualifications for eligibility in Nebraska Department of Education Rule 51 comprise a most conservative definition of developmental delay. If Nebraska continues with its present policy, which is an option under P.L. 99-457, it will serve only those children who meet these tight eligibility criteria (see box, page 106). Table 1 presents the numbers of children (birth through age 2) served in Nebraska from 1979 through 1988.

Many states are considering serving children who are identified as at risk. Estimates of at-risk children vary widely depending upon the definition. Three categories are prevalent in the literature: (1) established conditions, (2) biological risk, and (3) environmental risk (Tjosem 1976). Meisels points out that these categories are not mutually

Table 1 - Children Under 3 Served by Nebraska School Districts, 1979-1988.

Age Group	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988
Under 1	40	30	59	47	53	60	61	53	4	37
Age 1	78	101	119	125	144	147	152	133	136	149
Age 2	139	161	173	187	200	239	250	270	239	257
Total	257	292	351	359	397	446	463	456	416	443
Total births	26,199	27,335	27,164	26,954	26,254	26,099	25,540	24,425	23,813	24,000 (est)

Source: Nebraska Department of Education.

exclusive, but they are useful in developing a definition of the population to be served (1988). While in principle a definition can be developed independently of an estimate of the numbers of individuals who will be encompassed by such a definition, in practice the numerical implications will be considered as these numbers will provide the information necessary to make projections.

When P.L. 94-142 was passed, the proportion of school-age children projected by the United States Department of Education as eligible for service was 12 percent. The United States Department of Education, in its Ninth Annual Report (1987) to Congress on the Education of the Handicapped Act, reported a survey of prevalence rates of 3- and



5-year-olds served by 26 states as ranging from less than 1 percent to a high of more than 5 percent of the population. A recent national analysis of children below 5 years of age who were enrolled in services showed an overall prevalence rate of 2.4 percent (Meisels and Wasik, in press). Such figures can be difficult to interpret because each state may define eligibility differently. Based upon these reports, however, a consensus seems to be developing regarding a prevalence rate of about 2 percent

**Nebraska Criteria for Serving Children Birth to 21 Years  
According to Nebraska Department of Education Rule 51, 1987**

1. **Hearing Impaired** - In order for a child to be verified as hearing impaired, a hearing loss must be documented that has been determined to or can be expected to produce significant delays that would: result in standardized test scores falling 1.3 standard deviations below the mean in one or more of the following areas: receptive language, expressive language, and speech production or cognition; or result in a social/behavioral handicap.
2. **Mentally Handicapped** - In order for a child below age five to be verified as mentally handicapped, the evaluation shall include the analysis and documentation of: at least a two (2.0) standard deviation deficit in intellectual functioning, with at least a 1.3 standard deviation deficit in adaptive behavior; or at least a two (2.0) standard deviation deficit in adaptive behavior, with at least a 1.3 standard deviation deficit in intellectual functioning; or a medical condition or syndrome which can be expected to produce such delay in later childhood.
3. **Orthopedically Impaired** - In order for a child to be verified as orthopedically impaired, the evaluation shall include the analysis and documentation of a signed, written report from a physician which describes the severe motor impairment and any medical implications which would describe: impaired motor functioning which is expected to significantly interfere with educational performance; the child's level of educational or developmental performance; and any muscular or neuromotor impairment or skeletal deformity that limits the ability to move about, maintain postures, manipulate materials required for learning, or perform activities of daily living.
4. **Other Health Impaired** - In order for a child to be verified as Other Health Impaired (excluding an autistic condition), the evaluation shall include the analysis and documentation of a signed, written report from a physician that describes: the current health status and gives any medical implications of the impairment; a chronic or acute health impairment which results in reduced efficiency in educational or developmental performance because of a temporary or chronic lack of strength, endurance or alertness; and the child's level of educational or developmental performance.
5. **Speech-Language Impaired** - In order for a child below age five to be verified as speech-language impaired in the area of language, the evaluation shall include the analysis and documentation of scores from comprehensive standardized language tests (which may include but not be limited to vocabulary tests) which shall be at least 2.0 standard deviations below the mean for chronological age (a standard score of 70 or below as compared with age peers).
6. **Visually Handicapped** - In order for a child to be verified as visually handicapped, he or she shall be verified in one of three categories: blind, legally blind, or partially sighted.

of birth to 3-year-old children being eligible as handicapped or at risk when a combined risk definition of biological and socio-cultural factors is used.

**Advantages of Providing Early Intervention for At-Risk Children.** Several advantages are gained by serving children in the at-risk category. This supposition is clearly stated in the following quotation from P.L. 99-457:

Congress finds an urgent and substantial need to enhance the development of handicapped infants and toddlers and minimize their potential for developmental delay; reduce the education costs to our society, including our schools; minimize the likelihood of institutionalization; and enhance the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their infants and toddlers with handicaps.

Early intervention can help to minimize the impact of developmental delays in at-risk children, prevent secondary problems, or prevent the exacerbation of primary problems in children with known disabilities. To date, however, program evaluations on early intervention programs have not included information regarding such possible outcomes.

Reviews of literature in the area of early intervention have varied from concluding no benefits in terms of child developmental gains to modest positive effects for early intervention. However, one of the difficulties in examining comprehensive services in this area is the lack of consistency or meaning in outcome measures, particularly for children with significant disabilities. The lack of detailed reports is also a problem with regard to the population of children included in a sample, the lack of differentiation among outcomes within studies that served heterogeneous populations, and the lack of long-term follow-up.

An argument frequently made, but also lacking substantial data at present, is the potential cost savings of early intervention, which may alleviate the need for special education services during the traditional school years. More information is now available regarding the cost savings of early intervention programs. However, with the exception of the Perry Preschool Project data (Barnett 1988), little information is available regarding long-term follow-up of children who have received early intervention. (For information on the Perry Preschool Project, see Chapter 5, "Improving Life Chances of Children in Nebraska.")

The positive results of the Head Start Program show that providing services to preschoolers considered to be at risk does reap benefits, both economic and social, in later life.

Nebraska needs to specify an at-risk definition to include some combination of biological and/or environmental risk criteria, and it must extend early intervention services, including family support. While this decision may more than double the number of birth to age 3 children served (from approximately 400 children under age 3 per year to approximately 1,000), many of the primary components to mandate, implement, monitor, and evaluate program servers are represented in Nebraska under the existing entitlement and discretionary programs operated by agencies represented on the ICC.

**Disadvantages of Serving At-Risk Children.** Before a decision is made to mandate services to at-risk children, several potential disadvantages should be considered. The first issue is to determine what, if any, possible untoward effects may result in being labeled at-risk. The primary concern here is that such a label may stigmatize a child or set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy, teaching a child that he or she has a lowered capacity to learn. A related concern is whether families might become stigmatized. A third issue concerns the reliability of assessments in accurately identifying children in need at less than two years of age when ecological traits are recognized as critical in determining who is at risk. McCall has repeatedly pointed out the lack of predictive power of infant assessment tools (1982).

Although it will be a difficult task, Nebraska educators, child care professionals, parents, and policy makers have demonstrated that they are willing to take steps to define the term *at risk* and provide services in order to strengthen the developmental opportunities for all citizens.

**The Individual Family Service Plan.** Perhaps the provision of P.L. 99-457 (Part H) that generates the most discussion is the mandate of Individualized Family Service Plans for children under age 3. According to Section 677 (d), an IFSP must be developed for infants or toddlers and their families.

The IFSP is a written document containing the following elements:

- (1) A statement of the child's present levels of physical, cognitive, language, speech, and psycho-social development, as well as self-help skills, based on acceptable objective criteria.

- (2) A statement of the family's strengths and needs relative to enhancing the development of the family's handicapped infant or toddler.
- (3) A statement of the major outcomes expected to be achieved for the infant and toddler and the family; the criteria, procedures, and timelines used to determine the degree to which progress toward achieving the outcomes is being made, and whether modifications or revisions of the outcomes of services are necessary.
- (4) A statement of specific intervention services necessary to meet the unique needs of the infant or toddler and family, including the frequency, intensity, and method of delivering services.
- (5) The projected dates for initiation of services and the anticipated duration of such services.
- (6) The name of the case manager who will be responsible for implementation of the plan and coordination with other agencies and persons.
- (7) The steps to be taken in supporting the transition of the handicapped toddler to services provided under Part B of P.L. 99-457, to the extent such services are considered appropriate.

Some of the above provisions are similar to those of traditional early intervention service plans, such as in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) specified in P.L. 94-142 and currently used in Nebraska for handicapped children, from birth to age 21. Provisions related to identifying family strengths and needs and outcomes are new requirements.

It is obvious from the IFSP requirements that a number of issues will need to be resolved, such as who is the family, and what range of services will be available. The state has a responsibility in the resolution of these issues. A suggested response to questions such as these comes from "Recommended Practices for the Individual Family Service Plan" (Turnbull et al. 1989). This is a document prepared by the Office of Special Education Programs by the Association for the Care of Children's Health (ACCH), under contract with the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NEC-TAS) at the University of North Carolina.

The answer to the question of who makes up the family potentially affects how well the child and family are served as well as the breadth of services to be considered in an IFSP. The reality of contemporary society is that the traditional nuclear family no longer represents the majority of households. The extended family of relatives, neighbors and friends may be reasonably considered an integral part of the family support system for any family. Persons such as aunts, boyfriends, babysitters, foster grandparents, and child care practitioners may well be primary child caretakers and/or central to long-term family support. Any definition of family support needs to be flexible enough to include such persons when identified as family by the parent and/or guardian. To do otherwise would be to disempower families by denying their own senses of self and imposing a stranger's definition.

The ACCH report suggests that P.L. 99-457 does not mandate "family assessment"; it simply directs gathering information about family strengths and needs relevant to their children's development, urges that the families themselves should determine what aspects of their family lives are relevant to their children's development, and suggests that only those strengths and needs should be identified. Similarly, the report recommends that families determine their own levels of involvement, which can vary over time, and that goals for the children and families should be determined collaboratively. This perspective is concordant with the Nebraska Family Policy Act and has the advantage of limiting rather than expanding the range of issues to be considered at any one time.

**Interagency Cooperation.** P.L. 99-457 mandates the use of resources from a number of different federally funded programs to provide services to infants and toddlers and their families. The expectation implicit in the legislation is that states will develop interagency agreements to enable various agencies to work together to coordinate resources in the most cost-effective manner in order to meet child and family needs.

Experience in working with the families of children from birth through age 2 who currently qualify for services under the categories identified by Rule 51 has taught that the fabric of the service system has holes in it. Few people are aware of the full range of services available to children and families, the many different funding sources that exist, and the different qualifying conditions and coverages. If family-centered services are to be coordinated, a central registry is needed. Per-

haps an on-line computer listing needs to be developed, which can be readily kept up to date and easily cross-indexed for points of service entry. A variety of such systems currently exists (Yajnik, Mayfield and Wuori 1987; Yajnik and Wiles 1988). Also needed is a way of qualifying families for services across existing agencies without their being required to make separate, physical applications at each agency. Case managers are needed who have skills in brokering services across agencies where responsibility for service delivery or financial support is unclear.

An ombudsman or brokering board should be empowered to negotiate solutions across funding sources/agencies upon request from a family, case manager, or agency. This board should be authorized at the state and federal levels so that families are not advised to move to another county or school district in order to qualify for services. The state of Florida is moving toward delivery of integrated services by providing case coordination services through specially trained nurses located in each county. Initial reports from this program suggest that it is cost-effective and that families like it (Reiss, Lefton, and Freedman 1989).

In Nebraska the number of children currently qualifying for services under Rule 51 is sufficiently small and stable so that restructuring does not seem a worthwhile effort. However, should Nebraska decide to serve at-risk children, the numbers of children and families requiring services will increase. The range of services required by such children and their families might be quite limited or handled most readily by school-based parent training programs, since schools are one of the most accessible and "normal" or non-stigmatizing community service agencies. Such training programs do not currently exist for families of at-risk children.

**Preparation of Personnel.** If Nebraska stays with its current definition of eligibility under the Special Education Act, then the personnel pool necessary for direct intervention with handicapped infants and toddlers appears to be adequate. School districts are not reporting acute difficulty in obtaining qualified personnel for this age group. But if eligibility requirements are changed, personnel needs will change as well.

In 1981, certification criteria for early childhood special education were developed and accepted by the Nebraska Council on Teacher Education (NCTE). While the certification criteria addressed future

personnel needs, an immediate need arose for personnel as the mandate for services began in the fall of 1979. A clause was placed in Rule 51 to enable schools to hire personnel already working with handicapped infants, toddlers and preschoolers, despite the fact that few were certified teachers. This grandfather clause enabled a relatively smooth transition from the Office of Retardation programs—which had been the primary providers of services to infants and preschoolers—to public school-funded programs for children with verified handicapping conditions.

Traditional agency programs do not handle well those children who are medically fragile or who have unusual family situations. For example, in a single-parent family here in Nebraska, one of a set of twins qualifies for special education and for respite care paid for by Medicaid. The other twin does not qualify and must be taken out to day care when the mother goes to her low-paying job, while a registered nurse comes in to care for the handicapped twin. A better solution would be to have a trained respite care worker take care of both children in the home. This person would not be as expensive as a nurse and would be able to handle the target child's medical and developmental needs as well as take care of the other twin. Unfortunately, no programs are available that tailor respite care training to management of specific medical conditions, and no insurance coverage is readily available to pay for such persons could they be found.

Nebraska teacher preparation programs have been providing some course work in early childhood special education since 1979, when the Nebraska Department of Education Special Education Office, sponsored a series of three courses (one on infants, two on preschoolers) through the State Education Training Series (SETS). Over the past 10 years these courses have been offered at the University of Nebraska at both the Lincoln and Omaha campuses, and for professional growth credits through a number of local school districts, educational service units, and agencies such as Head Start throughout the state. Participants in these course offerings have included parents and representatives from various disciplines interested in children and family needs and services.

In addition to the SETS training, from 1985 to 1988 the Department of Special Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln offered 15 hours of graduate credit courses with a specialization in infants to a

multidisciplinary group, most of them already serving in infant intervention roles.

The content of these offerings includes a heavy emphasis on skills needed in working with parents as well as direct instruction of children. The SETS courses do not, however, have a specific component on case coordination. The infant specialization series had one course directed toward working with parents and families. The primary additional training issues needed to be addressed to fully implement P.L. 99-457 are the areas of case coordination and elements of an IFSP, particularly identification of family needs and intervention strategies directed toward meeting those needs. Consideration should be given to incorporating case coordination into the training program of professionals in education, human services, social welfare, nursing, and associated disciplines so that this service may be provided by the team members whose disciplines are most relevant to the needs of the individual child (Finkler, Jackson, and Robinson 1989).

### **Funding P.L. 99-457 (Part H)**

Population stability probably will continue in Nebraska, and the growth in numbers of handicapped infants, toddlers, and preschool children will be slow. Under the current qualifying definitions of Rule 51, approximately 1,600 handicapped children below five years of age enroll in special education each year in Nebraska. The below-age-three group includes approximately 400 children and is quite stable in size.

By legislative choice, all handicapped preschool programs in Nebraska are primarily funded with federal dollars, and all special education programs for children five and older are funded with state and local dollars. According to the Special Education Act, the preschool funding formula now provides 90 percent reimbursement to local school districts. Federal funds for planning and programs associated with P.L. 99-457 may not be used to supplant financial commitments or services that would have been paid for from other public or private sources. In addition, the state may not reduce medical or other assistance or alter eligibility to the detriment of handicapped children under Title V (Maternal and Child Health Act) or XIX (Medicaid). The range of costs for educational programs varies, of course, according to the type of program and services required.

Four new types of expenditure allocations are associated with P.L. 99-457: the costs of case management for children from birth through



age two; a broader array of services to families; a consideration of services to at-risk children; and personnel training, family training, and counseling. New programs, such as delivery of services in child care settings, may be needed because of the large proportion of families with children under three years of age where both parents (or the custodial parent in single-parent families) work outside the home. Integrated preschool experiences using existing community and private facilities may be desirable for the three- to five-year-old child. Integrated or mainstream settings are desirable because they represent the least restrictive educational environment and should be chosen if suitable for the child's developmental needs.

Case management costs also vary depending on the purpose and complexity of case management services. Numerous health insurance companies have instituted case management procedures for medically fragile children in an effort to achieve cost containment. Case management costs in Nebraska for a wide range of health, school and family services for severely involved medically fragile handicapped children ages birth to two were estimated by Project Continuity, an HCEEP federal demonstration project at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Meyer Children's Rehabilitation Institute (MCRI). The MCRI researchers found that case coordination services offered by social service, education, and nursing professionals averaged about \$350 per child per month for personnel costs, ranging from one to 44 hours of case management time (Finkler 1988). If overhead increases that figure by 50 percent, the costs might average \$525 per child per month. Due to the highly specialized nature of services provided to children below five years of age and their families, projecting average costs is very difficult. The MCRI project focused on advocacy of child needs and brokering solutions to service problems as necessary, so its estimates may be higher than those of other approaches.

With early assignment of case coordinators, families of qualifying infants and toddlers may be referred as soon as possible to a broader array of services such as respite care, homemaker services, visiting nurses, family counseling, and pilot parents. Focusing on family needs will raise issues regarding the adequacy of financial resources and need for family support. The emphasis will be to coordinate resources rather than to increase resources.

Barnett, Escobar and Ravsten (in press) found that a program to teach parents to help their language-handicapped preschoolers in

ordinary activities at home produced greater gains in language development than did a five-day-per-week, center-based program. This one-semester parent program was reported to cost only about \$700 per child. This is much less than the figure of \$4,000 to 6,000 usually cited for providing language services to preschool handicapped children.

Finally, changes in eligibility could either increase or decrease costs. A recent review by Barnett described the cost-benefit analysis of the Perry Preschool Program, in which services to mildly handicapped, disadvantaged children were provided at a cost of \$6,200 per year plus transportation, and the benefits of such programs obviated costs up to \$20,000 over the elementary school years (1988). Barnett also cites a study suggesting that children could be served in mainstream settings at lower than average cost (1988). Itinerant specialists working with children in regular day care centers and kindergartens found gains in language abilities and later reductions in special education placements. The cost was less than \$500 annually per child (Weiss 1981).

Obviously, program costs can vary greatly, and their total social benefits as well as immediate cost should be considered in choosing among them. Three strategies may be used to pay for the additional costs, assuming that parents are in the home, interested in services, and willing to pay for them. The first one moves costs to the parents, who are given training to, for example, facilitate language development. Such cost-shifts to families may be justified, particularly for at-risk children where program costs are low, the shifted costs to families are low, and the benefit expected is great.

A second strategy is to seek financing from other sources. Funds for case coordination may be permissible for some children from Medicaid, from the Maternal-Child Health Care program, and from private insurance companies. Similarly, funding may be spread among federal, state, and private agencies to provide aid that facilitates needed services, such as a funding agreement to provide insurance for private respite care workers.

The third strategy would be to change programs to either less costly or more costly but more beneficial formats. Integrated preschools are one possibility, using existing programs. Alternatively, schools might offer both integrated preschool and day care programs, the latter funded by parents, which would cover part of the overhead costs for the school-based program and use existing physical facilities. Certainly, combinations of all three strategies are possible.

## Recommendations

Nebraska should consider expanding its definition of eligibility for infants and toddlers to include children who are at risk for developmental problems. Further, certification should be broadened to include persons with nursing, social services, human development, and early childhood education backgrounds so that these persons could provide direct intervention services.

At-risk children are usually children with whom other agencies are already involved in some element of service provision, as most at-risk children come from families who meet poverty level guidelines. Specifically, many of these children may qualify for programs for low-income children through the Department of Social Services and Department of Health. The personnel involved in those programs are, of course, nursing and social work personnel. Some states have employed strategies such as providing some specialized course work at the associate degree level for personnel working in child care programs. Other states have included licensed practical nurses or home-maker personnel as a potential cadre of people who could be appropriate personnel if they had some additional child development information and training.

Another issue with respect to personnel that needs to be addressed is the level of expertise of the service provider for children who possess medically complex conditions. The numbers of such children are small, but their health care and developmental needs are very complex. Services addressing these health care and developmental needs should be coordinated with one another. Nurses, while prepared to meet the needs of such children, are generally precluded from serving in a primary developmental intervention role by current education certification standards.

In summary, several policy-related issues exist in regard to current use reallocation, training, and preparation of personnel interested in early intervention programs. The issues raised bridge interagency planning and regulating procedures. University and college preparation programs and state agency officials and departments must address the issues of case coordination and family needs. Needs for information in this area can probably be addressed through inservice training programs. *Getting Started Together* (Jackson, Hays and Robinson In press) provides a federally funded model of inservice training located at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

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# Nebraskans and Educational Pluralism

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# 7

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Equality of educational opportunity continues to be a goal of public education and of the communities served. To meet the diverse needs of racial and ethnic minorities and female students, policy makers must untangle layers of government guidelines, while attending to the goals of local constituents.

The under-representation of minorities among public school graduates, and gender and race inequality in school teaching and administrative staffs, are discussed in this chapter. Community attitudes toward pluralistic goals and integration in education are highlighted, and suggestions are made for coordinating the diverse needs of all students.

Secondary school graduation rates remain high in Nebraska compared to other states, so many Nebraskans have become complacent about educational policy at the elementary and secondary levels. Most Nebraskans continue to have good faith in the public schools, even though Nebraska's levels of local and state financial support are among the lowest in the nation. When student sub-populations are separated from overall rates, however, the data reveal a statewide problem in a variety of educational arenas. For example, minority students continue to have higher dropout rates than do white students in communities throughout the state.

In recent years, much of the educational equity discussion in Nebraska has centered on integration efforts in Omaha public schools. In addition, Hispanic, Native American, and African American residents have demanded cultural representation in their schools, as have white parents who see cultural and educational pluralism as an enhancement for their children.

Nebraska's education of female students is also less adequate than overall rates suggest. While Title IX of the Federal Education Act of 1972 guarantees access to athletic and vocational programs, female students are still following educational paths that lead to lower achieve-

ment in math and science than male students experience. Women who complete their educations still achieve lower economic returns for their academic success: a woman with a high school degree continues to earn on average less than a man who drops out of school at the eighth grade, and earnings of female college graduates average less than those of male high school graduates (Welch 1980; Lepo 1989).

Considerations of equity in the schools are also tied to the economic development of Nebraska. Communities such as Hastings and Norfolk have attracted immigrant labor groups as they've begun new economic enterprises. New workers are bringing their cultures and their families into a state that must be proactive, not reactive, to issues of cultural diversity in education. Educators and economists also argue that the success of the new generation of workers—scientists, mathematicians and engineers—is dependent upon the expansion of women's education into non-traditional fields and the full utilization of all students' talents. Nebraska educational, occupational and pay inequities for minorities and women reflect those at the national level and will have policy implications into the next century.

Most Nebraskans agree that education must address the needs of diverse racial and ethnic groups and treat women fairly in educational and economic sectors statewide. Recent national reports on education, however, question the goal of equity and suggest that by focusing on equity we risk losing, or have already lost, educational and economic excellence (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983; Task Force on Education for Economic Growth 1983). Many concerned parent and policy groups have advocated a range of programs, including "back to basics" training, increasing resources for science and technology teachers and programs, reducing programs for disadvantaged students, or narrowing affirmative action policies to very specific programs instead of the curriculum in general. Without considering the impact on minority and female students, some have argued that these steps are a renewal of commitment to educational excellence.

Striker (1985) and others have cautioned that such policies may aggravate inequality over the long run as significant resources are shifted from special needs and equity educational programs into competitive academic programs for accelerated students, especially in the sciences and mathematics.

A critical policy issue is whether educational equity and educational excellence are at cross-purposes. Dewey's vision of educational

pluralism and Coleman's emphasis on equality of outputs in early desegregation efforts provide a foundation for investigating: 1) the extent to which educational equity for all students is hampered by racism or sexism in Nebraska schools, and 2) whether the inequities discovered can be addressed without compromising educational excellence.

### **Educational Pluralism**

Over 80 years ago, John Dewey and other school reformers envisioned an American educational democracy that would respond to the waves of immigrants arriving on the eastern and western shores and crossing the southern borders of the United States. The public school system was to create a "democratic dialogue of communities" focused on the "improvement of society." This pluralistic model was based on a notion that all cultures could contribute to the social fabric of the community, and that schools could contribute to that process by maintaining the language, customs and beliefs of each cultural group. It was unclear from Dewey's writing precisely how this democratic dialogue would be supported, but it was clear that he saw a role for culturally distinct voices within the schools.

Early educators debated the potential negative effects of school attendance on women's reproductive and domestic functions. Although some advocated equal educational opportunities for women, many schools denied admission or curricular options to female students on the basis of their sex. While Dewey did not address the educational needs of girls and women in any detail, the establishment of women's academies and colleges was well under way by his time. The voices of women and minorities in the public schools were still silent at the beginning of the 20 century, largely due to social and economic forces that would not be challenged until the mid-1900s.

A history of educational proscriptions such as legally segregated schools, the denial of minority student admission to public institutions of higher education, and the lack of minority parents' input into their children's education by restrictive voting processes or the establishment of separate Bureau of Indian Affairs schools created a complex system of discriminatory access, race segregation, and low educational achievements for many minority groups. Moreover, females in every racial and ethnic group lagged behind their male peers in high school completion and college attendance until the past decade.



The individual men and women who successfully challenged these institutional processes led the way to several decades of legal and educational changes (*Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* 1954; the 1964 Civil Rights Act; *Larry P. v. Riles* 1972; Title IX of the 1967 Equal Education Act), which generated new challenges for educational policy makers. Legal solutions to segregation and unequal access eventually led to some curricular change, the inclusion of minority and female students and staff in the educational process, access by women to traditionally male training and athletic programs, and school integration. Yet, despite these legal reforms, insidious forms of racism and sexism persist in our schools and stifle the democratic dialogue.

### Measurement of Equity and Integration

The tie of equity for minority students to school desegregation was supported by research in the 1960s, which set guidelines for a new definition of educational equity. Coleman noted that prior educational research and policy definitions focused on equal inputs; that is, all students start with the same resources and are exposed to the same educational curricula and facilities. In this situation, inequality of output (low high school graduation and college attendance rates for minorities and women) was justified on the basis of a "fair competition" model. Coleman noted that much of the early school reform work was directed at equalizing student inputs through Head Start programs, reading readiness, etc. His controversial findings in *Equality of Educational Opportunity* demonstrated that access to facilities accounted for very little difference in student outcomes such as reading, math and language scores. However, factors such as student socioeconomic background and race continued to account for significant differences in student achievements (Coleman et al. 1966).

As a result, Coleman recommended a shift to equality of outputs as a national goal for education (1968). This shift has influenced policy debates on educational achievement for disenfranchised groups, but its implications are rarely discussed explicitly in terms of cultural pluralism. For most educational policy makers, the enhancement of minority student education has focused on struggles between neighborhood school proponents (in opposition to desegregation) and the development of remedial adjunct educational programs. The focus on educational equity for women has revolved around affirmative action and access to programs already existing within the schools. Both school

desegregation and affirmative action programs have been based on numerical representation of minorities and women at the outset of the educational process, with little attention to the outcomes in educational and economic gains for these groups.

Teachers, researchers and theorists are aware that mere exposure to schooling is not a sufficient condition for learning and improved achievement levels. From Dewey's point of view, all students (and parents and community members) must be engaged in the schooling dialogue. Allport, in *The Nature of Prejudice*, pointed out that the conditions for a democratic dialogue are more complex than merely mixing racial and ethnic groups (or providing co-education) (1964). Desegregation (contact between racial and ethnic groups) is merely the starting point for true integration of minority and majority students. Allport specified a set of educational factors that enhance integration once desegregation has taken place, including explicit administrative support, a multiethnic staff, involvement of parents of all ethnic and racial groups, and a pluralistic curriculum.

Howe built on her own experiences in Mississippi's Freedom Schools, drawing on the "discussion circle" of African American teachers and students to suggest some solutions in her book on women and education: *Myths of Co-Education* (1986). Howe considers the place of women in education as it has been distorted by stereotypes, the omission of women's contributions, discrimination, sexual harassment, and lack of role models. Her solutions encompass not only the removal of these barriers, but also the inclusion of women's voices in the subject matter (such as history and literature by and about women); in the classroom (as teachers and as active student participants); and in educational politics (as principals, deans, and board of education members).

### **Racism and School Policy**

Dewey's vision of a plurality of cultural and ethnic communities within one school system was consistently challenged by others, not only philosophically, but also in the policies that structured the developing public school system at the turn of the century. Educational historian Elwood P. Cubberly argued that "Popular education has everywhere been made more difficult by [ethnic minority] presence. . .and our national life has been afflicted with a serious case of racial indigestion." (Quoted in Itzkoff 1970: 123)

Cubberly and others wanted and received restrictive immigration policies at the federal level to reduce racial and cultural diversity in the school population. Those groups targeted for restriction were many of the eastern and southern European groups that contributed to Nebraska's ethnic heritage.

In time these early educators came to support a more moderate base for educational policy, which arose from the popularized image of the school as a "melting pot." Ethnically diverse cultural elements were to fuse ". . . into one common nationality, having one language, one political practice and one ideal of social development" (Carlson 1975). Based on a model of cultural dominance, most of these educators and their community supporters expected that English language, customs, laws and norms would form the base for any educational dialogue.

Much of the curriculum of public schools today reflects such policies. The exclusion of non-English languages from the basic curriculum, the omission of non-European histories and cultural contributions, and the emphasis on English customs and laws reflect the success of past monocultural educational policies. R. Moore cites the example of racist history texts:

Some history texts will discuss how European immigrants came to the United States seeking a better life and expanded opportunities, but will note that slaves *were brought* to America. Not only does this omit the destruction of African societies and families, but it ignores the role of northern merchants and southern slaveholders in the profitable trade in human beings. Other books will state that the Continental Railroad *was built*, conveniently omitting information about the Chinese laborers who built much of it or the oppression they suffered. (1988: 273)

These assimilation and exclusion models implicitly assert a subordinate or nonexistent status for minority student cultures and languages in the curriculum of the schools and in the larger society. Advocates for minority cultures have proposed a variety of models that challenge this institutionalized racism and that fit more closely with Dewey's model of cultural plurality. In such a model, the cultures of all students represented in the school population are supported explicitly by the curriculum.

Cultural integration goes beyond mere school desegregation, beyond the incorporation of holidays, heroes and heroines. A culturally pluralist curriculum includes: 1) the history and cultural contributions of all racial and ethnic groups, 2) a component of cultural awareness and sensitivity that is interpersonal as well as curricular, and 3) use of the language and

social norms of each group in the day-to-day activities of the school (Itzkoff 1970; Allport 1964).

Scholars and teachers debate the structure and consequences of including minority cultures in the schools, including the effects of Black English and English as a Second Language programs on the learning of basic skills. Policy makers, however, most often omit considerations of race and ethnicity from their decisions. The institutional or societal discrimination that results is reinforced by the policy structure of the curriculum and staffing patterns.

Such institutionalized discrimination can be manifest in organizational rules and procedures that disproportionately affect minority students; the cumulative effects of past discrimination in hiring and promotion that leave schools controlled by predominantly white and male authority figures; and deliberate or accidental acts of discrimination due to ignorance, insensitivity, provincialism, or entrenched habits (Benokraitis and Feagin 1986).

### **Inequity in Nebraska School Enrollment and Staffing**

As is shown in Table 1, the percentage of 16- to 17-year-olds who stay in school is higher for boys and whites than it is for girls and minorities, with the exceptions of black females (whose attendance level is higher than black males and slightly higher than white females) and Japanese students. These 1980 data reflect a continuing inequity in outcomes for minority students when compared with whites. This is most evident for Native American and Vietnamese students, and Hispanic females. These findings suggest that the policy goal of educational equity has not been reached for minority students.

**Table 1 - Percent of Persons Age 16-17 Enrolled in Public/Private School, 1980.**

Race/ethnicity	Percentage of Males Enrolled in School	Percentage of Females Enrolled in School	Percentage of All 16-17 Year Olds Enrolled in School
White	91.0	89.6	90.3
African American	86.6	90.5	88.5
Hispanic	80.5	73.5	76.9
American Indian	*	*	77.5
Vietnamese	*	*	72.2
Japanese	*	*	100.0

\* Data by sex not available.

Source: 1980 United States Census. *Nebraska*. Table 201.

Some racial and ethnic minorities are also overrepresented in special education placement, and attention has been drawn to school policies on referral and identification of special needs students (Oakes 1985). In Omaha, the high placement of African American students in special education classes and their lower representation in advanced placement classes are inequities that have been raised as important community issues.

A growing body of research links staffing patterns and racial inequity for students (Richards and Encarnation 1986). Minority teachers are important role models for both minority and majority students. Additionally, it has been recognized that the presence of minority teachers in minority schools helps to produce an ethnically diverse curriculum and reduces violence against teachers (Richards and Encarnation 1986). Civil rights groups have demanded the hiring of minority staff and the inclusion of minority curricula for equity purposes.

Minorities are poorly represented among Nebraska public and private school teachers. Teaching staff under-represent the amount of diversity that exists in the state by a serious margin (table 2). Whites account for 95 percent of all Nebraskans, yet they hold 97.5 percent of teaching positions in elementary and secondary schools. African Americans comprise more than 3 percent of the state population and more than 5 percent of the student population, yet their teaching cohort is less than 2 percent. Hispanic populations compose almost 2 percent of Nebraskans and more than 2 percent of students, but Hispanics hold only 0.6 percent of teaching positions, or one-third of the distribution one would expect on a basis of equity. Native American and Asian populations make up 0.5 percent of the state's population each, but

Table 2 - Staffing and Enrollment in Nebraska Schools, by Race, 1987-88.

Race/Ethnicity	Teachers	Percentage Students*	State	N of Teachers
White	97.5	90.6	95.0	25,289
African American	1.7	5.1	3.1	431
Hispanic	0.6	2.3	1.8	148
Native American	0.2	1.0	0.5	60
Asian	0.1	0.8	0.5	12

\*Numbers in this column do not equal 100 percent; ethnicity was not available for non-resident students, who represent 2.4 percent of total enrollment.

U.S. Census Bureau. *Nebraska*. Table 192. Nebraska Department of Education. *Statistics about Nebraska Elementary and Secondary Education, 1987-1988*.

they, too, are seriously under-represented in teaching cohorts at 0.2 and 0.1 percent, respectively.

### Sexism and Schooling

Women's access to all levels and aspects of education has been established as a legal right. However, equal access to school programs has not fulfilled the demands for sex equity in the schools. "Sexism is a way of seeing the world in which differences between males and females, actual or alleged, are perceived as profoundly relevant to important political, economic and social arrangements and behavior" (Ruth 1974: 53). Institutionalized sexism is the arrangement of men and women such that men are systematically elevated to positions of power; it is a valuing of men above women.<sup>1</sup> This valuation includes not only sexist materials in the curriculum, but also the patterns of classes and majors taken by students and the staffing hierarchy of the schools.

Most policy makers do not question the equity of female representation in the schools because of the contemporary tradition in which teaching is seen as a female-dominated occupation. In Nebraska today, women comprise 69 percent of the teaching staffs, but that statistic masks significant institutional patterns. Simply put, women have moved into those teaching roles that are the most closely tied to traditional feminine cultural roles, that have the least structural authority, and that hold low prestige and few economic rewards. Table 3 reveals a hierarchy of power in Nebraska's schools. The largest proportions of women are clustered at the bottom of the teaching and administrative staffs with primary roles as elementary school and kindergarten teachers and

Table 3 - Gender Distribution of Teachers and Administrators in Nebraska Schools, 1987-88.

Staff Position	Percentage Male	Percentage Female
Superintendents	99.7	0.3
Secondary principals	96.3	3.7
Elementary principals	74.0	26.0
College/university teachers	65.0	35.0
Secondary teachers	48.0	52.0
Special education teachers	33.0	67.0
Elementary teachers	22.0	78.0
Kindergarten/prekindergarten	1.0	99.0
Teachers' aides	4.0	96.0

Source: 1980 U.S. Census Bureau. *Nebraska*. Table 217. Nebraska Department of Education. Statistics, 1987-1988.

teachers' aides. In contrast, men are concentrated in postsecondary teaching and educational administration. There is one female superintendent (the top position) in the entire state.

One very interesting pattern in both national and state data on teachers is the influx of men into the special education category. In 1970, fewer than 1 percent of all special education teachers were male, but by 1980 men composed almost one-third of the special education teaching cohort. Special education teachers enjoy the highest average salaries of any of the elementary or secondary school teachers, and during the 1970s, when decisions were made to mainstream more educationally challenged students, many more of these higher-paying positions opened up. Men moved into them at much higher rates than did women. One policy implication is that encouraging men or women to shift positions in this hierarchy of teaching statuses appears to require financial incentives.

Overall, these data indicate that school staffing patterns teach male and female students a very traditional lesson about institutionalized power and authority. At the elementary school level, principals are predominantly male (74 percent) while teaching staff are predominately female (78 percent). As students move up in their educational careers, they see that higher-level teaching staffs are more male dominated. This pyramid of power reinforces many messages of institutionalized sexism.

Male/female job distinctions do not often attract the attention of policy makers. "National attention has been paid to the teacher who separated blue-eyed and brown-eyed children, and gave privileges to one group that were denied another. . . . Yet attention to sex equity has met more limited policy attention" (Potter and Fiskel 1977: 13). In fact, though there has been federally mandated policy to address racism in the schools, there has been no such policy to address sexism in school. Girls generally attain higher scholastic achievement, particularly in the early years of schooling. This masks sexism in the schools that supports one of America's most widely cherished traditions: that males and females are different in almost every aspect, or that males and females must be different. "This is what makes translating sexism in the schools so difficult to the general public and to policy makers" (Potter and Fiskel 1977).

But staffing inequities are not the only sexist messages students receive at school. Teachers interact differently with male and female students, encouraging males to be more active participants in the class-

room (Frazier and Sadker 1973). Classroom curricular materials often present women as second-class citizens (Sadker and Sadker 1979). In addition, teachers and counselors encourage different educational and occupational expectations for male and female students with similar skills (Moore and Johnson 1983).

These gender-related experiences parallel those of racial and ethnic minority students, although the patterns of interaction and expectations may differ somewhat. For example, counseling tools such as occupational inventories encourage those students with strong interests in human relations to identify with social service tasks. These jobs (nurse, social worker, counselor, teacher) tend to pay much less than those jobs that have similar educational requirements but are considered more technical and less person oriented, such as public administrator, accountant, or technician (Moore and Johnson 1983). In this way, females are encouraged by supposedly objective tests to move onto educational paths that limit their earning potential.

The policy implications of sexism in the schools go substantially beyond equal access issues. Nonsexist, pluralist educational programs require significant curricular change, teacher and staff training, and additional resources to accommodate increased numbers of females in non-traditional curriculum areas. They also require a careful assessment of outcomes for female and minority students, not only in terms of educational achievement levels, but also by the subject areas and educational opportunities that link students to occupational opportunities and enhanced incomes. Other important things to provide are role models, mentors to women in educational administration, child care for educational workers and student parents, and support for female students to address issues of sexual harassment or assault on their campuses.

### **Community Attitudes and Public Policy**

Institutional discrimination of all types is inconsistent with Dewey's ideal of a pluralistic dialogue in the schools. Yet many people believe the myth that cultural pluralism (primarily in the form of a melting pot) already exists in the public schools, and deny the existence of systematic racism or sexism. Nebraska data confirm that, while citizens of the state hold to a general belief in cultural pluralism, they resist specific curricular reforms that would ensure that pluralism.



The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Surveys for 1980 and 1985 provide detailed information on community attitudes in Nebraska that reflect issues of pluralism, race/ethnic equity, and sex equity.<sup>2</sup> The data discussed below address these issues as well as the type of educational model Nebraskans see as the goal for public schools.

Attitudes toward educational pluralism in the schools were obtained from a set of four questions. Respondents indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with each of the following statements: 1) Classroom rules should take into account the cultural background of the child; 2) Improving neighborhood schools is better than integration to provide equal educational opportunity; 3) Classroom discussion of racial problems is unsuitable for elementary school students; and 4) The curriculum needs major revisions if it is to meet the needs of minority students.

An attitude most open to pluralism would evoke a positive response to questions 1) and 4), a negative response to 2) and 4). A single scale was created by assigning a score of "1" to each response in agreement with statements 1 and 4 and for disagreement with statements 2 and 3.

Scores on the educational pluralism scale ranged from zero to four, with a high score indicating agreement with pluralism in schools.

Respondents were also asked to rate overall neighborhood school quality, and to state general goals for the public schools. Attitude patterns were observed through a study of social and economic background characteristics of respondents, including age, sex, educational background, race, and rural or urban residence status.

### *Support for Educational Pluralism*

Nebraskans varied in their support of educational pluralism (table 4). In both 1980 and 1985, solid majorities agreed that classroom rules should take into account the cultural background of the child. Nebraskans also support early educational attention to cultural and racial issues; in 1985, over 72 percent of respondents disagreed that elementary school is too early to begin such classroom discussions, up from 64 percent in 1980.

However, a large number of Nebraskans did not believe that major revisions should be made in the curriculum to meet the needs of minority students, and support for such revisions declined over time (46 percent in 1980 and 37 percent in 1985). Also between 1980 and 1985, the percentage of Nebraskans supporting the use of neighborhood

Table 4 - Distribution of Responses to Educational Pluralism Questions

Question	Percent Agree	Percent Disagree	Percent Don't Know	Total N
Classroom rules should take into account the cultural background of the child.				
1980 respondents	63.1	26.6	10.3	1,909
1985 respondents	64.3	28.4	7.3	1,850
Programs to improve neighborhood schools would be better than school integration to provide equal educational opportunity				
1980 respondents	67.2	18.6	13.5	1,904
1985 respondents	73.0	17.7	9.0	1,849
Classroom discussion of racial problems is unsuitable for elementary school students.				
1980 respondents	24.8	64.0	11.2	1,907
1985 respondents	21.6	72.1	6.2	1,849
School curricula need major revisions to meet minority student needs.				
1980 respondents	45.6	33.0	21.4	1,904
1985 respondents	37.2	45.0	17.6	1,847

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

schools over school integration programs rose slightly, from 67 percent to 73 percent. These findings suggest that Nebraskans are equivocal about the process used to gain integration and pluralism. It is, however, clear that a majority of residents in the state solidly support pluralistic goals for the schools.

A pluralism attitude scale for questionnaire respondents is displayed in table 5. In both 1980 and 1985, more than 74 percent of the total sample of Nebraskans scored two or more points on the scale, and less

Table 5 - Educational Pluralism Attitude Scale Scores for Nebraska Questionnaire Respondents, 1980 and 1985.

Number of Responses Indicating Pluralistic Attitude	1980		1985	
	Percent	N	Percent	N
0	7.2	138	4.9	90
1	17.8	341	17.1	317
2	30.5	585	33.2	615
3	30.7	589	31.5	584
4	13.0	250	13.3	246

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

than 7 percent scored no points. The trend from 1980 to 1985 is for increased support of educational pluralism. In general, then, Nebraskans support a model of educational democracy similar to that envisioned by Dewey, but this is complicated by the preference for neighborhood schools over school desegregation to achieve equity and hesitancy to revise school curricula to meet minority students' needs.

Analysis of these attitudes by socioeconomic variable (table 6) shows considerable variation among respondents. Highly educated Nebraskans show more support for pluralistic education, as do respondents aged 26-40. The higher scores among younger respondents may reflect the more recent influence of multicultural education practices on the public at large. Finally, rural and urban residents support pluralistic curricula in their schools at about the same rates.

Table 6 - Support for Educational Pluralism by Education, Age, and Residence.

Background Variables	Pluralism Scale Score	Level of Significance
<b>EDUCATIONAL DEGREE</b>		3.160*
Less than high school	2.20	
High school degree/GED	2.29	
Associate/junior college	2.56	
Bachelor's degree	2.47	
Graduate degree	2.49	
<b>AGE</b>		6.861*
18 to 25 years	2.27	
26 to 40	2.53	
41 to 55	2.27	
56 to 75	2.28	
75 and over	2.33	
<b>RURAL/URBAN RESIDENCE</b>		2.03†
Rural farm	2.28	
Rural non-farm	2.53	
Town or city	2.27	
Lincoln	2.29	
Omaha	2.33	
<b>PRESENCE OF SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN</b>		1.06†
No school-aged children	2.33	
School-aged children	2.27	
<b>RACE</b>		

\*Significant beyond the .01 level

†Not statistically significant

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

### *Quality, Pluralism, and Race/Ethnicity*

A significant debate among policy makers and concerned communities regards the effect of diversity; whether efforts for equity influence educational quality. Overall, Nebraskans have been described as having high expectations for their public schools, rating their schools positively and getting good educational outcomes at a bargain price (Hudson and Kasten 1987). Table 7 shows that when ranking public neighborhood schools on a scale of 1 = "very good" to 5 = "not good at all," most Nebraskans rank their schools fairly highly (closer to one than five). However, differences occur among three racial and ethnic groups: Whites and Hispanics are significantly more satisfied with their neighborhood schools than are African Americans. Racial or ethnic background does not strongly distinguish attitudes toward pluralism, although African Americans have slightly higher scores on the pluralism items than either Hispanics or Whites.

Table 7 - Rating of School Quality and Pluralism by Ethnicity.\*

Rating	White	Hispanic	African American	Level of Significance
Quality of public schools in neighborhood	1.678	1.735	2.354	9.03†
Educational pluralism	2.307	2.317	2.525	0.79

\*Composite rating on scale of 1 = very good, 5 = not good at all.

†Significant beyond the .001 level.

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

### *Diverse Goals: Pluralism and Excellence*

A final concern for educational policy makers and communities is the diversity of goals that can be met by public schools. As discussed earlier, reports such as *A Nation at Risk* and *Action for Excellence* suggest a belief that efforts toward pluralism may detract from emphasis on overall excellence, especially regarding basic skills. Nebraskans have varying views on the purpose of public secondary schools, and this may provide a clue to the resistance to major curricular changes to meet minority students' needs. Table 8 shows that 27 percent of all Nebraskans rate preparation in basic skills as the primary purpose of secondary schools, while 26 percent see employment preparation as the major goal. Note

Table 8 - Perception of the Purpose of Secondary Schools, by Ethnicity.

Purpose	Total Percent Agree	Percent White Agree	Percent Hispanic Agree	Percent African American Agree
Provide basic skills	27.1	27.7	23.2	13.9
Prepare for employment	26.2	25.6	37.7	58.8
Prepare for college	17.2	17.2	39.1	18.2
Some combination	28.5	29.4	0.0	9.1

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

that Hispanic and African American respondents agree more strongly with the preparation for employment factor. This may signal a need to articulate a program of basic skills and employment skills that include minority, female, and special needs students in significant proportions throughout all vocational and academic preparation programs.

Seventeen percent of survey respondents see the purpose of secondary schools as primarily to prepare students for entry into college. Interestingly, Hispanics have a substantially larger proportion of respondents who see this as an educational priority in secondary schools.

Approximately 29 percent of respondents stated that some combination of educational goals is necessary, reflecting the multipurpose setting which actually exists in the schools. We already have a diverse set of goals in the secondary schools. The next step is to bring those goals into the dialogue on cultural diversity and equity for minorities and women, with specific attention paid to the institutionalized aspects of racism and sexism that exist in the public schools.

### Communities, Public Opinion, and Policy Implications

In the 1985 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 79.4 percent of all adults surveyed responded that the quality of their neighborhood public school was very good or fairly good. But it should be significant to policy makers who are considering the contrasting challenges of excellence and equity that some minority groups continue to see their neighborhood public schools as significantly deficient in meeting their students' educational needs. In addition, a sizable proportion of respondents—11.4 percent—indicated that they did not know whether their neighborhood schools were doing a good job.

The diversity of opinion about proper goals for public schooling—college preparation, basic skills teaching, or employment preparation—highlights the difficulty of setting a singular policy. There is also a dichotomy between Nebraskans' general support for educational pluralism and their resistance to changing the content of the curriculum or the population of neighborhood schools in order to generate a "democratic dialogue" as described by Dewey. Clearly, there is a need for public relations and increased communication between schools and their communities about the value of ethnic diversity and the contributions of women.

A review of the findings in this research show that there is a basis for building statewide and local pluralistic programs. Most Nebraskans support general educational pluralism and the development of programs at both ends of the ability spectrum. Support for curricular enhancement is consistent for even the earliest years of public education and is stable across rural and urban school settings. This support is strongest among the younger and more highly educated residents, suggesting that the public schools have already moved toward instilling pluralistic values. The one contradiction to pluralist goals arises in Nebraskans' loyalty to the concept of the neighborhood school as opposed to integration.

Nebraska's dropout rates, however, suggest that the goal of equal outcomes has not yet been met, and that meeting it depends upon future programs and policies that will go beyond desegregation toward pluralist, non-sexist educational strategies. Most importantly, these data suggest that strong leadership is needed in developing educational goals and programs for the future. Removing institutional racism and sexism among staff is a prerequisite to implementing any pluralistic program for students.

Effective leadership strategies for these educational goals should parallel the model set out by Dewey. The first tasks are to generate considerable dialogue and then agreement about what is to be accomplished, then to allow people enough flexibility and power to be part of the overall effort. This may mean expanding the involvement of parents of disenfranchised students at as many educational policy levels as possible, in larger numbers than before. It will also take recognition by policy makers that Nebraskans support educational pluralism in the curricula and policies of their public schools.

How the educational needs of minorities and females are to be addressed will be set at several policy levels: by federal, state and local

communities; by educational administrators within their own districts or buildings; and by classroom teachers within their day-to-day curricula. Curricular changes cannot and will not be accomplished by isolated classroom teachers. To adequately address the issues of racism and sexism, all levels of policy structure must be involved.

While federal laws have mandated access to programs for minorities and females, they have not set policy for cultural inclusiveness or sex equity in classroom curricula. At the state level, resources have been made available through the State Department of Education, which maintains offices of sex equity and race equity. Their resources for anti-racist and anti-sexist training of teachers and administrators can be further tapped. The teacher training programs in our public higher education systems must expand the slim resources currently invested in teacher training classes on cultural pluralism and women's educational issues.

The state of Nebraska does not collect information on the representation of minorities and females in special needs or advanced placement programs, or their high school preparation for advanced training in the sciences, technology, and business. But 1987 data from Omaha Public Schools do show over-representation of minorities in special education classes, especially for students classified as mentally retarded (Gill 1988). Data on Nebraska schools also show inequitable staffing patterns, with under-representation of minority and female student and state populations, especially in administration and education past the elementary school level. Most importantly, educational completion rates for minorities and females continue to show patterns of inequity.

There are many reasons to focus on equity and integration for students in public elementary and secondary education. Philosophically, the notions of equity and pluralism are core values of American society. Pragmatically, our current economic structure requires a flexible, diverse schooling system to enhance the skills of all students. The potential loss of whole categories of creative, contributing individuals through institutionalized sexism or racism should be confronted on a system-wide basis.

## Endnotes

1. The term *sexism* may appear to be neutral, and some maintain that women, too, may be sexist. But that is not how sexism functions in our society. Sexism maintains that men are superior to women in every way that matters socially, economically or politically, and it reinforces this data through institutionalized power arrangements.
2. The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey provides information on the attitudes and backgrounds of a representative sample of adults, eighteen years of age and older, living within the state. It is a statewide telephone survey of noninstitutionalized adults. The random digit dialing procedures and representativeness of the sample have been discussed in Booth, White, Johnson and Lutze (1980). In 1980 and 1985, separate samples were drawn, with total respondents of 1,907 and 1,851, respectively.

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# At-Risk Youth in Suburban Nebraska

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# 8

*John W. Hill*

For the greatest part, Nebraska's students are succeeding in school. However, there are students who experience early school failure and early school refusal, students who are "at risk" for leaving school before receiving their high school diplomas. Data from a school district were analyzed as a critical case example to uncover characteristics, achievement, and cognitive skills of identified students at risk in order to answer questions about these perplexing youth. Policy initiatives are discussed.

Concern for students at risk has been expressed at the national level (Ekstrom 1987; Wehlage and Rutter 1986; Wehlage and Smith 1986) and the state level (Miller and Tuley 1984; Austin Independent School District 1982; Blum and Spangehl 1982; Martin 1981; and O'Connor 1985). Recent Nebraska task force papers developed by the Nebraska Council on Vocational Education and the Nebraska Department of Education also emphasize the factors contributing to school failure and dropping out.

At-risk, or troubled, youths are more likely than other students to drop out of school before receiving their high school diplomas. They often turn to drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, gang membership, teen pregnancy, and even suicide. Conditions most often thought to be associated with at-risk students are poverty, neglect, special education diagnosis, and racial minority status. The behaviors associated with being at risk are poor attitudes and efforts in school, failure to complete assignments, and truancy.

While not all at-risk youth turn to self-destructive behaviors, many face a lifetime of financial dependency. A recent study indicates that in 1985, 60 percent of men and 50 percent of women between the ages of 18 and 24 years who lacked any college education were living at home with their parents. Moreover, of the 3.1 million families headed by non-college men and women under 25 years of age, 30 percent had incomes

below the poverty level, compared to 11.4 percent for all other families ("Youth and America's Future" 1988).

### Nebraska Students At Risk

The impression held by many people is that youth at risk live only or primarily in large urban centers. However, a troubled youth is defined as someone who lives in a "cycle of failure," with no significant person in his or her life—a much broader interpretation (Monroe 1989). As a result, even in Nebraska's suburban school districts, one finds significant numbers of youths at risk.

This research is based on a study of at-risk students attending a suburban Nebraska school district during the 1987-1988 year in grades 7 through 11. These students were identified as failing two or more core subjects in either semester and/or having 12 or more unexcused absences in either semester—grounds for automatic failure. Thus, at-risk students in this study were not identified on the basis of ascriptive characteristics, such as race, poverty, or special education diagnosis, but rather because of their observed behavior in school. This study concerns only those students considered at risk and who were in attendance during the 1987-88 school year; the data do not pertain to those students who dropped out or did not attend school during this year.

While this study is based on a single case, it is a representative case according to the "critical case method." Critical case studies are designed to test specific hypotheses about the existence or prevalence of certain social conditions. *A critical case is one in which the researcher is least likely to encounter the relevant social condition; if the condition is discovered there, it is likely to occur on a broad scale. Thus, if at-risk students live in this sample school district, which is relatively affluent and racially/culturally homogeneous, then troubled youth likely live throughout Nebraska, not just in the inner city districts.*

Table 1 is a profile of students at risk in the school district studied. Boys and girls at risk constituted 30.3 percent of the total junior high school population (grades 7 through 9) and 33.5 percent of the high school population (grades 10 and 11). These figures are comparable to urban school districts nationwide. However, unlike typical inner city schools, this student population is relatively affluent and racially homogeneous (see table 2). Moreover, the at-risk students are not predominantly minority; nor are they especially likely to be diagnosed as requiring special education.

Table 1. Profile of At-Risk Students\* for the School District Under Study, 1987-88.

	Junior High School			Senior High School		
	(n = 1,439)			(n = 908)		
	n	Percent of Total Students At Risk	Percent of Total Class	n	Percent of Total Students At Risk	Percent of Total Class
Boys	221	51.0	15.3	173	56.7	19.0
Girls	216	49.0	15.0	132	43.3	14.5
Total	437	100.0	30.3	305	100.0	33.5

\*Failing two or more core subjects in either semester and/or having 12 or more unexcused absences in either semester, grounds for automatic failure.

That so many girls were found in this study to be at risk may be viewed as a surprising finding. It seems that whatever the conditions contributing to the phenomenon of early school failure and early school leaving, they most certainly should be considered "equal opportunity," as far as gender is concerned.

The best predictor of at-risk behavior in this suburban Nebraska school district was found to be socioeconomic status (SES), which was measured in this study by participation in the free and reduced lunch

Table 2. Characteristics of the Student Population Compared to At-Risk Students for the School District Under Study, 1987-88.

Characteristic	Percentage of Entire Student Population	Percentage of At-Risk Population
Special Education Diagnosis*	7.8	10.2
Free and Reduced Lunch†	11.1	17.6
Race:		
Black	2.5	2.5
Hispanic	2.1	2.1
Asian	1.7	0.6
White	93.3	93.1
Native American	0.3	0.4

\*Children participating according to Rule 51, Rules and Standards for Special Education Programs, 1987. Of these students, 70 percent had specific learning disabilities, 15.7 percent had behavioral disorders, 10 percent were mentally handicapped-mild, and 4.3 percent had other handicapping conditions.

†Children qualifying for free and reduced lunch according to federal income guidelines.

program. By this standard, 17.6 percent of at-risk students were judged to be of low SES, while only 11.1 percent of the student body as a whole was.

The second most powerful predictor of at-risk behavior was special education status. While 7.8 percent of the entire student population participated in special education programs, 10.2 percent of the at-risk population did. The large percentage of special education students who were identified as at-risk (70 percent of whom were identified as learning disabled) is not surprising. In 1985, Zigmond and Thornton reported an alarmingly high (54 percent) dropout rate for learning disabled students. Eisner's 1987 estimates were more conservative: 42 percent of learning disabled secondary students dropped out, compared with 16 percent for other special education students.

While this study was not about dropouts per se, the relationship between at-risk behaviors and permanent school leaving for Nebraska's special education students can not at this time be ruled out.

### Achievement and Cognitive Skills of Nebraska At-Risk Students

At-risk youths are often thought to be either undiagnosed special education students or students who are above average in intelligence but rebelling against society. The data in table 3 suggest that overall total

Table 3. Variance Between Potential and Actual Achievement in Total Student Body, At-Risk Students, and Special Education Students for the School District Under Study, 1987-88.

	1. Actual Achievement* (Achievement Score)	2. Potential Achievement† (Cognitive Score)	Variance
	Percentile	Percentile	Difference
Total students	68.3	70.7	-2.4
Total students at risk	49.8	53.8	-4.0
Total students in special education	17.9	25.5	-7.6

\*Measured by the California Achievement Test (CAT) total reading score, which includes reading vocabulary and reading comprehension subtests; the total language score, which includes language mechanics and language expression subtests; and the total mathematics score, which includes mathematics computation and concepts and application subtests.

†Measured by the Test of Cognitive Skills (TCS), which yields a Cognitive Skills Index (CSI) that replaces the term *IQ*. The CSI includes the following subtests: verbal reasoning, memory, sequence, and analogies. The mean for the CSI is 100, and the standard deviation is 16 points. The CAT and CSI were standardized in the Fall of 1984 and Spring of 1985 with a national probability sample of 300,000 students.

achievement (49.8 percentile) and cognitive skills (53.8 percentile) scores for combined students at risk compare favorably to those of other children nationwide; they are achieving right at the national median. However, compared to total local students' achievement scores (68.3 percentile) and cognitive skills scores (70.7 percentile), they fall short.

While little is known about the perceptions of at-risk youth, conversations with them suggest that they feel unimportant and irrelevant in a student body that is predominantly college bound. In Nebraska's schools, where students consistently perform above the national average, average performance is considered to be failure. The educational policy issue is how to treat average students as worthwhile members of the school community in order to keep them from dropping out.

Table 4 shows the achievement and cognitive scores as well as the differences between them for junior high school and senior high school students in several categories: all students (boys and girls), in special education, participating in free and reduced lunch minority, and experiencing school difficulties—in attendance, grades, and both.

The data show that, as students progress in school, the difference between their potential and actual achievement diminishes. The change over time is particularly marked in students with school difficulties, showing that if at-risk students can or will stick with school, they will have a better chance of living up to their potential or even overachieving.

Which students will stay in school and which will drop out is still an unanswered question. Will it be the most capable students at risk who leave school early? Or will it be the least capable students, those who come to school faithfully even though they receive failing grade after failing grade, that eventually drop out? Often the at-risk students who have the best self-concepts leave school to take jobs where they are valued and viewed as a success. There they receive daily confirmation for their capabilities along with a paycheck that represents a job well done instead of a report card that often symbolizes a job failed.

The at-risk students in this study are achieving within the average range; they are achieving, for the most part, up to their cognitive skills index potential; and they appear academically capable—until they are compared to total combined school district student achievement (68.3 percent) and cognitive skills (70.7 percent) averages. Therefore, if the study population is representative, then not only are Nebraska's students in general learning well, but even those students who have

Table 4. Achievement and Cognitive Skills Scores for All At-Risk Students and Sub-Categories, in Junior High School and Senior High School for the School District Under Study, 1987-88.

	Junior High Total			Senior High Total			Combined Total		
	Achievement	Cognitive	Difference	Achievement	Cognitive	Difference	Achievement	Cognitive	Difference
	- - Percentile - -			- - Percentile - -			- - Percentile - -		
Boys and girls	48.5	56.3	-7.7	51.1	51.3	-0.2	49.8	53.8	-4.0
Special education	23.7	33.2	-9.4	NA	NA	NA	23.7*	33.2*	-9.4*
Free and reduced lunch	41.9	54.8	-12.9	38.2	38.4	-0.2	40.0	46.6	-6.6
Minorities	39.8	52.1	-12.3	35.7	32.5	3.2	37.7	42.3	-4.6
School difficulty:									
Attendance	56.6	62.8	-6.1	62.9	62.1	0.8	59.7	62.4	-2.7
Grades	29.3	42.0	-12.7	40.9	41.0	-0.1	35.1	41.5	-6.4
Both	33.5	44.7	-11.2	41.9	44.3	-2.4	37.7	44.5	-6.8

NA = no data available.

\*Junior high school total.

attendance problems and grade problems that could lead to automatic failure are also, paradoxically, learning well. Unfortunately for these students, they are not achieving at a competitive level. Because of the discouragement they receive, they may view school as only being of real importance to those students who ultimately will be seeking entrance into colleges and universities.

### **Policy Strategies for At-Risk Students**

At-risk students are not confined to inner city school districts. Thus, the problem of at-risk or troubled youth is potentially a statewide concern.

The most common approach toward at-risk youth in Nebraska is a "treatment to do nothing" strategy; most school districts emphasize college achievement and target their scarce financial and personnel resources to their college-bound students. This laissez-faire strategy assumes that it is not the responsibility of the school district to take care of youth with average intelligence who are achieving up to their potential but lack the motivation to study and attend school.

A second approach would be early identification of at-risk youth based on socioeconomic background, and making preschool programs and related enrichment activities available to them, even if they do not have a special education diagnosis. This strategy, of course, would require major adjustments for all school districts; however, research consistently shows that early intervention is the most effective strategy for helping youth who are at risk in our society. (See Chapter 5, "Improving Life Chances for Children in Nebraska.")

Nebraska school districts might also continue to target lower socioeconomic families for enrichment programs throughout the elementary school years. These activities might include extra time with teachers trained to handle the cognitive and noncognitive needs of students, as well as "play" time on personal computers and other high tech equipment that youth from middle class homes may take for granted as part of their home environment.

Finally, a strategy for older students who are hopelessly behind in accumulating course credits for graduation is to introduce graduate equivalency programs as a part of the high school curriculum. A part of this strategy might include the restructuring and re-organization initiatives that are being discussed by Nebraska educators. Deregulation, teacher decision-making and empowerment, parent involvement,



accountability for outcomes, and a reshaping of the work that teachers and students do are all features of this movement. At the heart of the restructuring movement is the goal of making school a more interesting and engaging experience for students. This goal has particular relevance for the at-risk students discussed above.

The most important challenge for Nebraska education policy makers is to rethink the value assumptions underlying current approaches to older at-risk students. Moving lower achieving students to alternative schools, for example, simply creates a "moving average"; once the students with "D"s, and "F"s are taken away from the regular school setting, the "C" students' performance is below the new average, and they become the new school failures.

In-school programs, options, and opportunities which will meet the legitimate power needs of students, so they may be less likely to turn to street alternatives, are needed.

What matters most is that we have programs for students—honors or average, at risk or not—that open tomorrow's doors, ushering them *all* through high school and onto important tasks in life.

The most immediate challenge is to insist, with one voice, that students at risk remain in existing school programs, during the regular school day, and to work together toward that goal. Programs that establish external alternatives should be discouraged.

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Joe Gaughan, Assistant Superintendent, Omaha Public Schools, Omaha, Nebraska

Richard S. Hargesheimer, Director of Research, Nebraska Legislative Council

Bill Lock, Research Analyst, Nebraska Legislative Council

Linda Lyman, Administrative Assistant, Prairie Visions: The Nebraska Consortium for Discipline-Based Art Education, Nebraska Department of Education

James E. Ossian, Superintendent of Schools, Waverly, Nebraska

John F. Riedler, Psychiatrist, Omaha, Nebraska

Jerry Schenken, President, Pathology Center, Methodist Hospital, Omaha, Nebraska

Larry R. Vontz, Deputy Commissioner of Education, Nebraska Department of Education

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