

CROSS THE RIVER BEFORE YOU STIR THE ALLIGATORS

by Glen L. Beran, Superintendent, Imperial Grade/Chase County High School and NASA President



Beran

Educators are in the people business. Everything that we do is someway connected to a group of people. Sometimes it is easier to deal with buying two school busses than resolving one conflict involving two people. Keeping in mind that people come from diverse backgrounds and experiences and knowing why many people react as they do can help solve problems that arise.

A memo written by Ron Joekel and addressed to the Faculty of Educational Administration dated September 5, 2002 interested me. Ron wrote about the Diversity Among Generations whereby differing generations have been divided into three groups: 1) the Silents, 2) the Baby Boomers, and 3) Generation X. The characteristics of each group according to Dale Gaddy, president of

Association Team, Inc. in Fairfax, Virginia are as follows:

- SILENTS, (born between 1925 and 1945) influenced by the Depression and World War II, treasure their employment, are loyal employees, and joiners of organized groups. They traditionally work long hours and have remained the movers and shakers of activities/organizations throughout the latter part of the 20th century.

- BOOMERS, (born between 1945 and 1965) generally materialistic, loyal to employers if sufficiently rewarded, they have generally shown little interest in joining organizations during their early adult years, and have been referred to as the "me generation."

- X-ERS, (born between 1965 and 1985) products of dual-career or single parent households, are generally pragmatic and think employers value profits over individual worth. They don't see benefits of working long hours.

When dealing with students, parents, patrons, and staff we must always meet the challenges before us. Being fair while following limitations that are set by local school boards along with state and federal rules and regulations can be frustrating.

In the 1970s, one of the first experiences that I had as superintendent was dealing with a nationally imposed 90-day wage freeze. Certificated and classified staff were not all in agreement as to how this would affect them, as some had signed contracts prior to the wage freeze. These individuals felt that a contract signed before the freeze should be honored. Others, with inflation as it was,

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PUBLIC EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA: IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE!

by Scott Maline, Superintendent of Minden Public Schools

I am proud of my 27-year association with Nebraska K-12 public schools. Nebraska schools have a history of producing high achieving graduates, preparing outstanding educators, responsibly managing school budgets, and ensuring well maintained facilities. Nebraska citizens have worked hard through their vote and taxes to keep Nebraska public schools strong.

However, Nebraska is at a crossroads marked by increased diversity in cultures and in learning styles, under-funded public accountability standards for educators and students, and major shifts in what people do for a living. To help understand the current concerns, I will describe a picture painted over the past ten years.

Since 1992, the Nebraska Unicameral has established taxation and spending laws that have weakened educational opportunities for all Nebraska students. Specifically, the State of Nebraska has:

1. Limited annual school district spending growth rate to 2.5 percent, when labor costs require increases of five to eight percent.

2. Limited local school district revenue by capping the property tax levy at \$1.00, resulting in inadequate resource levels to meet the federal government's "No Child Left Behind" act and Nebraska, STAR program.

3. Lowered state aid to education projections and increased losses due to economic constraints, requiring school dis-

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The mission of the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA) is to be an effective leader for quality education and to enhance the professionalism of its members.



SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Submitted by Dr. Sara E. Landgren Associate Principal, Lincoln Southwest High School

As schools face increased programming costs with decreased funding, they must engage their respective communities to effectively respond and continue offering quality education. Research on school-community engagement revealed that high schools and their communities were not connecting. According to the Kettering Foundation “many Americans no longer believe the public schools are their schools” (Matthews, p. 2, 1996). In his book, *Is There a Public for Public Schools* (1996), Matthews concluded that public schools were slowly losing the support of their communities.

In a qualitative study completed for my dissertation, I examined the school-community engagement of twelve community members who were engaged with their nationally recognized public

high school. The study revealed four themes; the importance of education and school engagement in the community, school community engagement as a component of good parenting, the availability of engagement opportunities, and the importance of a welcoming climate projected by the high school regarding engagement.

Education and Community Engagement

All twelve informants stressed the value of a quality education. The subject school district was largely residential and most people who purchased a home in the district did so because of the high quality school system. Informants referred to an unwritten rule or perception about engagement that appeared to characterize the community-support the school and its programs. This sup-

port took a myriad of forms, from attending sporting events, to financial donations, to volunteering. The involvement in this district contradicted much of the research, which reported that parent involvement decreased as students moved to high school, even though the role of a parent was important for school success (Sanders, 1998).

Engagement and Parenting

When engaging with the school, each of the twelve informants shared that their own children served as the motivating factor for their engagement; they enjoyed knowing their children’s friends and teachers, felt they were modeling for their children the importance of education, and that as parents, demonstrating that they cared about the education their children received. Informants also shared that engaging with the school was an important component to being a good parent, as was being involved with their students’ lives and activities. School engagement was an effective way to attend functions while serving the school at large.

Availability of Engagement Opportunities

Matthews (1996) characterized engagement with the schools by parents as situational—parents engage with a specific school only as long as their child attends that school. The informants in this study were unique in their school-engagement. Nine informants began their engagement at the elementary level and followed their children to the middle and high schools.

School-community engagement in the district, however, permeated beyond parents. Informants shared that it was not uncommon for 7,000 to 8,000 people to attend a football game and cited the passage of the bond issue as another example of how ALL community residents remained engaged with the school in some capacity.

Welcoming School Climate

The residents of the community experienced a high school that, according to informants, was welcoming, inviting, and

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P E R S P E C T I V E S

by Jerry Sellentin, Ph.D., Executive Director



Sellentin

FROM HORACE MANN TO NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The goals of "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) have merit. Success for every child, identifying and addressing the needs of low-achieving students, employing highly qualified teachers, setting rigid academic expectations, developing comprehensive and responsible assessment and accountability standards. Instructional leaders would support these goals a hundred and ten percent. Yet the idea of "No Child Left Behind" is not a new idea that was born on January 8, 2002. From the time of Horace Mann in 1837 who fostered the idea of "universal access," America's public schools have been committed to the achievement of students.

Nebraska schools with its strong support of "local control" have demonstrated their commitment to students being successful and continue to raise the bar for student achievement with highly qualified teachers. Yet, Nebraska is directed by the Federal Government to follow the law of NCLB. In a letter dated October 22, 2002, Secretary of Education Rod Paige, in a very strong worded letter criticized states as "defenders of the status quo." The State of Nebraska is not a failing state with its education of all students and it certainly is not just maintaining the status quo. Nebraska has raised the bar with its standards, assessment of proficiency of the standards, and maintaining local control.

What is the problem? The problem is that Nebraska does not want the Federal Government to direct our schools. Increased requirements cannot be mandated without additional funding which is NOT available with NCLB. Annual testing is not necessarily learning or an indication of proficiency. Labeling schools as "failing" is not fair for a variety of reasons. If schools are not making the grade, changes need to be made and in

Nebraska, the Department of Education provides the help by first determining the reason. Are staff members in schools going to be challenged or turned off by being called "failures?"

Commissioner of Education Doug Christensen is on the right course for Nebraska as he speaks out for Nebraska interests. We hope he and the Nebraska Department of Education can find flexibility in working with President Bush and Secretary of Education Rod Paige in the implementation of NCLB and its goals for all students.

PRODUCTIVITY

Joel Baker, noted futurist, made the following observation at the 88th Annual Meeting of ASBO International: A study found that 92 percent of work time is under-utilized, and that includes schools, hospitals, and CEOs. He broke down the 92 percent: 23 percent is waiting for

something; 20 percent is doing things they shouldn't have been doing in the first place; 18 percent is the result of poor planning; 16 percent is not knowing how to do the task and 15 percent is doing something that should be delegated to someone else. Where could we increase our productivity if we changed our habits?

BOB AWARD

John Neal, Principal of Lincoln's Robin Mickle Middle School, has developed the BOB Award also known as the Bend Over Backward Award. It's given when someone sees someone do something good that should be recognized. The award is a traveling trophy which is "unique" in itself. There are no time limits on how long the trophy is kept by one person. For more information on the BOB Award, contact John Neal at 402/436-1216 or jpneal@lps.org.

Quote of the Day

"Making students accountable for test scores works well on a bumper sticker and it allows many politicians to look good by saying that they will not tolerate failure. But it represents a hollow promise.

Far from improving education, high stakes testing marks a major retreat from equity."
—U.S. Sen. Paul D. Wellstone, 2000

The complete text of the speech containing this quote can be found at www.schoolnewsservice.com

It's a good read for educators!



SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

by Marilyn J. Peterson, Ph.D., Federal Programs Director, Nebraska Department of Education

In Nebraska, every district has a school improvement plan as part of the accreditation requirements. School improvement is meant to be a positive thing – everyone striving to be better. No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the new federal legislation reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), uses school improvement in a more negative sense – something you have to do if you are not doing well. Whether seen with a positive or negative connotation, school improvement is part of our lives as educators.

Whatever the connotation, school improvement is about getting better. The purpose of schools is to educate students. Educating students can be defined as helping children become responsible adult citizens, mastering a set of academic standards, ensuring that each child achieves to his/her highest potential, etc. The question this article addresses is not “what” school improvement is, but “how” to accomplish getting better within the context of Nebraska’s schools.

In Nebraska, each district establishes the mission, goals and purpose of their schools within the expectations of their community. Within the fifty states, our state’s educational system is uniquely based on local decisions and local control. We have no statewide curriculum or state adopted set of textbooks. In L.E.A.R.N.S., we have established a set of content standards but districts must determine the curriculum and instruction to ensure that students are learning. Each district is assessing student learning of their curriculum and instruction through the STARS (School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System) assessments.

Last October, districts submitted preliminary school improvement plans for the first time. We now have some data about what all districts are doing to improve their schools. Many plans were impressive! Districts identified many improvement efforts and activities that spanned across content areas and grade levels. The process of developing the plans was designed to be as important as the product. The process should

have brought together people from across the district to identify and describe what was to be entered into the plan. For some districts, this was an eye-opener. They discovered many good things were happening but often these things were not coordinated. People learned what other staff were doing and sometimes learned about duplication of effort. Some of the efforts and activities were effective but not focused primarily at helping the district implement its goals, mission or vision. This preliminary plan activity led some districts to re-examine their goals or to define new ones.

The first step toward improvement is to know where you are at and where you want to be. Without this, it will not be possible to know if you are making progress or getting better. With the establishment of content standards, each district has defined a set of expectations for student learning. The STARS assessments conducted already in Reading and Mathematics provide the first level of information on where students are performing against those standards. By examining this student performance data closely, a district can identify several important pieces of information. At a standards level, the district can tell if the curriculum and instruction currently being provided is sufficient for students to master the standards. This is not an evaluation of the fourth, eighth or eleventh grade curriculum and instruction though. To demonstrate mastery of the standards at these levels, the K-12 or preschool-12 curriculum and instruction must be designed to provide the foundations for the concepts, skills and processes measured at the designated grade levels for the standards.

The STARS assessment results provide information at the student level. By examining the performance of groups of students, a district can identify how well it is providing for the education of all students. Are boys learning at the same rate as girls? Are there sufficient special education services to ensure that students with disabilities are learning what is expected of all students? Is any group of students noticeably not mastering

what is expected?

Classroom-based assessments provide immediate feedback on how individual students are learning. There is no waiting for test results to tell a teacher how well the lesson was taught and how much the students learned. What is unfortunate, in my opinion, is that this assessment knowledge has often been provided only to the teachers at the grade levels the standards are assessed. The essentials of assessment should be part of every teacher’s skills and knowledge regardless of the grade level or content area.

Once a school has information on the current status and defined the expectations, the next step is to use that data to improve – accountability. School have always had many levels of accountability – personal, parents, taxpayers, district, and state. Without defined expectations, accountability was often unclear. If parents and the community were happy, the school was considered to be successful. Once expectations in terms of student performance are established and results are publicly reported, the accountability becomes more defined and intense.

The various levels of accountability involve different audiences and necessitate varied reporting. Teachers and principals need to know all levels of accountability – how well the standards are covered in the curriculum and instruction, how well the assessments measured what was taught, how well prepared the students are in the foundational information needed to master standards at a specific grade level, what opportunities have students had to learn the content, etc. These are school and district analyses. Teachers and principals need to analyze the data to see how individual students and groups of students are learning what is being taught and how much students are learning. Parents and community members want to know how well the school is doing in comparison to the state as whole.

School improvement under NCLB presents challenges to all educators. Not because the end goal of ensuring all chil-

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“FOUL OR FAIR? IN OR OUT? GOOD OR NO GOOD?: FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME AND THE LOVE OF THE KIDS!”

by Steve Wickham, Assistant Principal, Kearney High School; NSASSP Exec. Board AP Representative

If I had a dollar for every time I have heard, “Why do you do that?”, I could retire quite a bit earlier than early retirement will kick in! I’m talking about my vocation and my avocation: being a high school assistant principal and a sport official. Without much argument, many people would say that the assistant principalship is the toughest and most stressful of administrative positions in our ranks. Perhaps some superintendents might debate that case with the state of public school funding today. But day in and day out, the AP must face a quagmire of situations to “referee” that others don’t want to touch, including the building principals. For almost a quarter of a century, I have found my way of finishing off a week and “blowing off some steam” is to jump in a car with one or a group of guys and head to a court or field, donning a striped shirt and whistle, and doing the kind of refereeing

that is a lot different from what I do on a daily basis. Yet there are many parallels. Hence, the comments of why I would put myself through that after a stressful week comes into play. What I have come to realize, as the title states, I do both jobs because I love it – the association with the game and the chance to interact with kids in two arenas.

School is a myriad of competition. There’s the competition for grades, the competition to be popular or to gain a position of status, the competition for the affection of that “hot” girl in English class, the competition for scholarships or recognition, and for some, the competition of simply surviving the daily stresses of being a kid who is supposed to be approaching adulthood. In my position, I get to deal with those situations

and many more not mentioned. Add in the “parental factor” and the “teacher equation” and you have a calculus problem of sometimes overwhelming proportions. I feel fortunate that I work in a dis-



trict that supports the educational community and kids to work with that appreciate what the educational community offers them. But what I have found from my travels, whether it be the sport venue, visits to other districts, or communicating with colleagues at meetings across the state, we live in a pretty remarkable state that supports that educational community from Scottsbluff to Omaha and O’Neill to Superior.

As I mentioned earlier, I have been involved with officiating for over twenty years. I’m actually not sure how many years, but both football and basketball are somewhere around the quarter century mark. I actually took a year’s hiatus from basketball last year thinking I was done – I had lost my passion. Wrong! I’m back at it this year after very little

coaxing from a couple of my old partners. I missed the excitement of the game. And to me, there is nothing better than the magic of a high school football Friday. In my repertoire in addition to high school football and basketball, I work football at the collegiate level within the state and I even got smashed against the “dasher boards” in the National Indoor Football League last spring and summer. (This adds a whole new level to the concept of time management.) This all started way back in my undergraduate days at Chadron State College working high school basketball for some spending money with a guy who currently is a superintendent in western Nebraska. We were probably pretty pathetic back then, but if you had a car and a striped shirt and whistle, you could get games. Over the years I have had the pleasure of working with a multitude of officials, many of whom are school administrators today and many who still work as

I do. Lord knows, there are a lot more out there more noteworthy than I am.

As the advertisement I have seen on many occasions states, “activities are the other half of education.” It would sure seem to be a mundane state of affairs if we didn’t have that ball game, contest, match, or concert to attend and see our students perform. There is something magically unique about watching kids interact in competition, experiencing victory or defeat, and then achieving that growth from the event. We all know that life’s lessons are much more intense in how the kids handle the outcome of their success or failure in competition than if they never have the opportunity to compete. We all emphasize some kind of positive school activities for our students. We assistant principals very possibly

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CONGRATULATIONS TO...

☞ **Martha Bruckner**, Associate Superintendent Millard Public Schools, on being elected President-elect of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

☞ **Jim Tenopir**, Executive Director of the Nebraska School Activities Association, on being inducted into the Lincoln/Lancaster County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Lincoln Lodging Association's Star City Superstars Hall of Fame

☞ **Cheryl Blue**, Assistant Superintendent, Plattsmouth Community Schools on being elected to the board of directors of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

☞ **Connie Heinen**, Principal, Plattsmouth High School, being selected as the Outstanding Principal by the Nebraska Student Council members

☞ **Ken Bird**, Superintendent, Westside Community Schools, on receiving the AASA 2003 President's Technology Award

☞ **Pat Roschewski**, Nebraska Department of Education, on receiving her Doctor of Philosophy Degree

☞ **Greg Barnes**, Bertrand Community Schools Superintendent, on receiving his Doctor of Education Degree

☞ **Tammy Pickering**, Principal, West Lawn Elementary Grand Island Public Schools on receiving her Doctor of Education Degree

☞ **Mike Montgomery**, Superintendent, Southeast Nebraska Consolidated Schools, on receiving his Certificate of Specialization in Educational Administration and Supervision

☞ **David Wright**, Norfolk Junior High School Principal, on receiving his Certificate of Specialization in Education Administration and Supervision

☞ **Bob Michl**, Principal of Freeman High School, Adams, Nebraska, on receiving his Certificate of Specialization in Education Administration and Supervision

☞ **Don Cunningham**, Principal, Archbishop Bergan High School, Fremont, Nebraska, on receiving his Certificate of Specialization in Education Administration and Supervision

☞ **Bertrand Community Schools** on passage of the levy over-ride of 25 cents for another two years. In May 2001 Bertrand voters approved an over-ride of 20 cents

☞ **Kearney Meadowlark Elementary School** on receiving the National School of Merit Award by the National Center for Study of Time and Learning and the National Association for Year-Round Education. This distinction is awarded annually to only five schools in the United States.

☞ **Don Jones**, retired Superintendent of Pierce Public Schools, celebrating forty years of marriage

RETIREMENTS

The following have announced their retirements effective June 30, 2003:

☞ **Dale Adkinson**, Principal, Gordon Elementary

☞ **Jerry Barabas**, Superintendent, Fort Calhoun

☞ **Barbara Boettner**, Principal, Rohwer Elementary, Millard Public Schools

☞ **Ken Bowe**, Superintendent, Cambridge Public Schools

☞ **Lewis Evert**, Principal, Fullerton High School

☞ **Dennis Flood**, Special Education Director, Elkhorn Public Schools

☞ **Jed Johnston**, Principal, Cottonwood Elementary Public Schools. Jed will become Dean of Doane's College of Education Leadership

☞ **Gary Oxley**, Superintendent, Tri-County Public Schools

☞ **Frank Pantoja**, Principal, Gordon High School

☞ **Dale Reber**, Superintendent, Emerson-Hubbard Public Schools

☞ **Gregg Wibbels**, Principal, Central City Middle School

SYMPATHY

☞ **Paul Baker**, retired principal, on the death of his wife

☞ **Virgil Horne**, Assistant Superintendent, Lincoln Public Schools, on the death of his Mother

☞ **Keith Rohwer**, Superintendent, Nebr. City, on the death of his brother

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

[continued from page 2]

encouraged community engagement. "To be truly meaningful, such engagement must involve widespread participation in the development and ongoing review of the system's standards, vision, and direction" (Thompson, 1998, p. 54). This high school has engaged its community in numerous facets of the operation.

Recommendations for School Administrators

The following recommendations made for school administrators are

based on the findings of this study. The intent of the recommendations is to help school administrators manage effective school-community engagement programs.

1. Provide adequate guidance and support to all staff to establish a school climate and culture that welcomes the involvement and presence of community members;

2. Develop specific outlines or guides for community members to help them understand their role and the task at hand, while honoring their commitments;

3. Trust organizations (boosters, parent, and other groups) to create and

conduct activities with limited guidance. This can be achieved by establishing a positive relationship with officers of such groups;

4. Be sensitive to frustrations that may occur with even the most engaged community member. Create ways to address such frustrations to avoid eventual disengagement.

School-community engagement is a powerful tool for school success. High schools must commit the time and effort to provide the optimal atmosphere for their community to become actively involved to continue to maintain quality schools. 

NSDLAF+ NOTES #7

Bond issues in 2003! With the current state of the economy, coupled with the impending gloom surrounding the



legislative session, it may seem illogical that districts would consider bond issues in 2003. In reality, whether intended or not, the legislative actions of recent years have forced districts for several reasons to consider bond issues for capital needs. First, since the \$14 building fund levy has been incorporated into the levy lid, many districts have lost the flexibility of accumulating funds for anticipated facility improvements and large maintenance type projects. Second, the needs involved in building modernization have been magnified in two major ways. Technology enhancements, for sure, have multiplied necessary structural upgrades to accommodate larger electrical and communication capacities. The fervor associated with asbestos contamination has now given away to attention to air quality. Third, programs change and the traditional k-12 educational format now includes pre-school and precludes segregating students with specialized needs away from the home attendance center.

Districts contemplating bond issues should make sure to use the services of the Nebraska School District Liquid Asset Fund (NSDLAF) as a partner in the planning process. The investment of bond proceeds or accumulated building funds is an important component in the effective fiscal planning for any major capital task. Consider NSDLAF as a planning partner with the architect, underwriter and local staff.

For information contact: Cliff Dale, Vice President, Ambac Securities, Inc. 402-483-1678 or cdale@neb.rr.com. Ambac Securities, Inc., the provider of investment alternatives, is endorsed by both the NCSA and NASB.

CROSS THE RIVER...

(continued from page 1)

doubted that it would be over in 90 days. All of their concerns had to be listened to and with communication with other governmental officials, it was pointed out that this was not just a unique local problem. Fortunately most of the staff fell into the generation of SILENTS, loyal employees, who could see this as just a temporary setback and that salary raises would be forthcoming.

A wage freeze today would be handled differently, as the staff is predominately made up of BOOMERS and X-ERS. The situation would need more one-on-one, or smaller group sessions.

We are always facing changing times and newly named programs such as the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and all of its amendments, A Nation At Risk, and many others. Now comes the latest project called No Child Left Behind. This federal legislation mandates testing of children, more professional expertise of staff, parental information, rating of schools, just to mention a few. With planning and the help of the community, schools will be stronger because of this new external push. Using people from diverse generations to serve on committees, study groups, or to brainstorm ideas often helps to find solutions

to problems that were really not that big to start with. People tend to compromise if they know how others feel about the situation.

Sometimes people don't fit into generational categories. One area may be dealing with people where it involves athletics. More precisely parents of athletes. Here is when all the generation descriptions fall away and parents become experts on the particular sport being addressed. Solving a conflict between coach and parent can be very frustrating as the opinions are usually in total contrast.

What I am trying to say is that educators are in the people business. Educators are working with and for parents and patrons that often fit into the generation profile of SILENTS, BOOMERS, or X-ERS. And let us not overlook the students as they can provide knowledge and insight that may be very useful. You may be working with all four generational groups at the same time. My advice is to study the problem at hand, get all the facts together, think about how you're going to handle the problem, and keep in mind the differences in the generations. In other words "cross the river before you stir the alligators."

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

(continued from page 4)

dren are learning and that no child is left behind isn't a worthy one, but because this piece of federal legislation attempts to prescribe the means of reaching the goal through applying a uniform template on more than fifty very different educational and assessment systems. The goal of 100 percent of students at a proficient level by 2014, though unrealistic, is worthwhile pursuing. The difficulty lies in the legislation's prescriptive manner in which progress toward the goal will be measured, the negative implications for any statistical or real lack of progress, and the political arena in which all of this will take place. I think all Nebraskans would agree with the goals of NCLB and the need to be accountable. But, our educational system historically

has required each district to locally devise their way of reaching their goals and being accountable. Through Title I's school improvement requirements, schools across the nation, including Nebraska, have recently experienced the backlash of accountability that is both public and political. Making educational progress a political issue changes the tenor of accountability to where making headlines and winning polls is more valued than seeing changes that improve staff and students lives. We must take the responsibility to ensure that our efforts to improve focus on improving staff and students' lives and we must do so within the context of our educational system as it exists.



UPCOMING EVENTS...

FEBRUARY 4-5—LABOR RELATIONS

February 4—Pre-Conference
 “Collective Bargaining”
 1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
 February 5 - Conference
 8:00 a.m. - 3:15 p.m.
 For more information contact Angie
angie@ncsa.org

NASES/NDE JOINT MEETING FEBRUARY 13-14

Cornhusker Hotel - Lincoln
 For more information contact Angie
angie@ncsa.org

MARCH 2 & 3 NATM 2003 SPRING CONFERENCE & UNL PRECONFERENCE

March 2—Preconference: “The Shape of
 Space” featuring guest speaker Jeff
 Weeks - 1:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
 Grand Island Midtown Holiday Inn

MARCH 3—NATM SPRING CONFERENCE: “SHAPE OF MATHEMATICS: GEOMETRY CONNECTIONS”

7:30 a.m.—Grand Island Midtown Holiday
 Inn - Grade levels: 8-16
 Stipend: \$120 for attendance; limit of 50
 participants
 Registration: cost \$20 paid to NATM
 c/o Janice Vosler, NATM
 48640 879th Road, Atkinson, NE
 68173. For more information con-
 tact: De Tonack, NATM President,
dtonack@lps.org, 402/489-8097

APRIL 9—GRIT CONFERENCE

Cornhusker Hotel - Lincoln
 For more information contact Angie
angie@ncsa.org

APRIL 24-25—NASES SPRING CONFERENCE

Ramada Inn - Kearney
 For more information contact Angie
angie@ncsa.org

APRIL 28-30—NASBO STATE CONVENTION

Holiday Inn - Hastings
 For more information contact Angie
angie@ncsa.org

APRIL 28—EOP CONFERENCE

Holiday Inn - Kearney
 For more information contact Angie
angie@ncsa.org

**ADMINISTRATORS' DAYS
 JULY 30-AUGUST 1
 KEARNEY, NE**

“FOUL OR FAIR? IN OR OUT? GOOD OR NO GOOD?: FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME AND THE LOVE OF THE KIDS!”

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wouldn't have as stressful of a job to do if all kids became involved in some aspect of school life beyond the classroom doors. This brings me to why I do what I do. I really enjoy the feeling of stepping on the court or field—the “power,” if you will, of being in control and having the ability to run a smooth contest. But our supervisors and coaches will tell us officials that we should not have an effect on the outcome of the game. We should just make sure the game flows and we are there to simply enforce the rules to make it fair. Very simplistic, but I am in agreement. In parallel to that, my daily task is to do the same thing. I am important in the smooth “flow” of the school and maintaining a fair and equitable life for students inside the schoolhouse doors. But, at this juncture, there becomes a difference to the parallel. If I don't have an effect on the life of the student then there could be a “foul” called on me.

After what seems to be thousands of

contests over the years as an official and fifteen years as an assistant principal, I have seen many amazing things. From comebacks to blowouts and graduates to dropouts, I have learned that you have never experienced it all. Kids as well as adults learn lessons every day. I had a unique opportunity to be a part of history this year by being on a sport officials' panel for the first ever Nebraska Sportsmanship Summit in Kearney in November sponsored by the Nebraska Coaches Association and the Nebraska State Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association in conjunction with the Nebraska School Activities Association. What an amazing success as over 900 students and school personnel from all corners of the state were in attendance. So many positives came from this and it has already made a difference in the attitudes of the players, coaches, and the fans. I mention this only because this experience has further cemented my foundation that there are

so many outstanding things happening to enhance the future of our youth.

Tomorrow I will go back to handling my daily tasks: discipline problems, truancy, concerned parents, and teachers who just want to teach and not worry about social ills. But on Friday, I will travel to some gym, run up and down the court blowing off that “steam” from a hectic week, get yelled at by fans who think paying \$4.00 at the door gives them the right to say whatever they want to me or my partner, collect a few bucks for working the game, and then head down the road with the knowledge I did my best (hopefully). Then, on Saturday, I will attend one of our school's games and keep the student body “rowdies” in line and then chaperone the dance afterwards. Or, possibly, I will get a rare night at home with my family. Wouldn't that be novel? Has it all been worth it? Have the lessons-learned benefitted me as well as others? Ask an official—ask a school administrator. Ask one of those insane people like me who do both! I would venture to say they will, without hesitation, tell you, “you betcha! I love it!” 

A JOURNEY TO THE NEW DIGITAL INFORMATION AGE

by David H. Hahn, CEO, ispi of Lincoln, Inc.; CEO, Digital Partners, Inc.

As a boy, I learned by connecting the dots, by linking thoughts and ideas together; sometimes tracing ideas and information forward; sometimes retracing my steps to make sure I understood some previous point or idea, and then trudging ahead in my exploration of the world...in this case the green and white and beloved *World Book Encyclopedia*. The "see also" notes at the bottom of each article of information lead me to further learning and exploring. They linked me and seemed to involve me to a vast, wider world than was known to a small-town boy in rural Nebraska.

As a man, I search Google or All-The-Web for bits and pieces of information; exploring ideas, gaining facts, understanding events; all in an attempt to inform my decisions about business, family, and faith.

Between the '60s of my boyhood and the '90s and '00s of my manhood, a marvelous story of connecting the dots occurred; largely unnoticed but impacting our everyday lives in subtle and dramatic ways. Before the New Millennium (1999) I took a digital tour. In that year, I

visited the computer science department at UCLA where the first Internet connections were made in 1969, by some professors and students experimenting with "packet based" communications. I also flew to the other coast and

took a late-night-and-maybe-not-authorized tour of the MIT Media Lab where research into such things as "communityware" and "new learning" are going on under the direction of Nicolas Negroponte, author of "*Being Digital*." And, in the same year, I was able to hear the

explanation of how two-way electronic linking, called hyperlinks, became foundational to what we call the World Wide Web; from its inventor, Tim Berners Lee.

And last week, when I chatted with my high-school senior son about going out to dinner, we both sought information about a particular restaurant. I reached for the yellow pages and he "looked online." Aaron retrieved the information before I could even open the book to the right section, smiled, and then clicked on the links to maps and reviews.

And on that day, I understood that the way of learning I had experienced with



the beloved *World Books* had now seeped into everyday life for the youth of our state. Their state of mind is more imbued with digital learning, data searches, and two-way linking and knowledge questing than was possible even as little as five years ago. Aaron was learning with digits, I was searching with atoms.

The heart of education remains the formation of the educated person; the knowledgeable and independent individual. The Digital Information Age challenges us all to align and use these technologies in a manner that advances that core. My view is that the best approach is for schools to advance into the widespread use of these technologies for the advancement of a cohesive learning environment – providing a digital linkage of student, school, parent, and community. Now, as budgets shrink and state aid seems to vanish, the central role of schools, and education, for every community needs to be learned, relearned, and affirmed daily. This can be accomplished with digital, and Internet technology that permits us all to be linked and informed and involved.

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NOMINATIONS SOUGHT...

NAHPERD, the Nebraska Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance is seeking nominations of elementary and secondary professionals for Outstanding Educator awards. Nominations only require a name and address of the nominee and no paperwork on your part to nominate. If you know of an individual or program that you may want to nominate, contact Debra Kaplan at: dkaplan@westside66.org for further information.



IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE!

(continued from page 1)

districts to cut programs necessary for students to achieve at or above grade level.

4. Reduced special education reimbursements from 94 percent to 70 percent.

5. Reduced the state's responsibility to increase revenues for K-12 school systems by replacing actual assessed valuation of property with adjusted property valuation.

6. Torn communities apart by forcing school districts to hold levy over-ride elections.

The result of the "no new taxes" campaign proclaimed by Nebraska Governor Johanns, and other elected officials, has placed additional burden on an already over-worked property tax system. In the last three years, over 70 of the 284 school systems had to hold levy over-ride elections to pay monthly bills. Many got bank loans in September to cover payroll. School buildings are in shambles and offer unsafe learning environments. Put simply: the current property tax-dependent system is not producing enough resources to sustain support of quality educational opportunities to all Nebraska students.

Additionally, the Nebraska Unicameral's education and tax policy actions have widened teacher salary inequities, left school districts inadequately competitive for quality educators, and expanded the inequities in quality learning opportunities for students.

In 2002, Nebraska teacher salaries were the 43rd lowest nationwide. There is a \$7,000 salary gap for first year teachers, and a \$9,000 gap for teachers with graduate degrees. Every year Texas school districts recruit significant numbers of student teachers from Nebraska colleges. Those districts offer graduating students approximately \$10,000 more than similar Nebraska position openings. Teachers are leaving for better pay in other states, and Nebraska school districts do not have enough resources to adequately compete. This would be intolerable to businesses profiting from tax incentive programs.

Looking to the future through teacher education institutions does not present a better picture. In 1999-2000, three math teacher candidates graduated from the second largest state teaching institution: the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

According to the "Report of the Nebraska Legislature's Task Force on Teacher Salaries, September 2000," 25 percent of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's 1999 teacher graduates chose not to go into teaching. Many opted for professions that are more lucrative. Only 37 percent of all graduates of Nebraska teachers, colleges stay and teach in Nebraska schools. Since Nebraska school districts offer substandard salary levels, it is no surprise that young teachers are leaving. Yet, the Nebraska Unicameral remains mute.

The Nebraska constitution makes public education the paramount responsibility of the state. Many states are solving their public education crisis by asking Supreme Courts to examine the inequities in educational opportunities and the inadequacies in financial support for public education. Grassroots organizations pushing for constitutional challenge of school finance systems are gaining rapid support throughout the US. Briefly, cases favoring the plaintiff contain rulings similar to Nebraska's current situation.

- The Arkansas Court relied on the state's recently developed standards for student achievement and accountability to charge the state with providing adequate funding to allow the system's students to achieve the expected outcomes.

- In similar findings, the Washington court required "sufficient funds" from "dependable and regular tax sources" as a measure of reducing reliance on property taxes.

- The North Carolina court rejected defendant's arguments that local school mismanagement rather than lack of oversight and inadequate funding by the state caused low performance by at-risk students. Judge Manning concluded, "It is up to the executive and legislative branches to provide solutions to the constitutional deficits with at-risk children. These branches can no longer stand back and point the fingers at individual school systems."

- The Ohio court in ruling the school finance system as unconstitutional ordered the state to change the foundation-aid formula; the emphasis on local property taxes; forced borrowing by school districts; and insufficient state funding for school buildings.

- New Hampshire changed its tax system in response to rulings by the New Hampshire court. In Claremont II, the

court declared the then-current education finance system unconstitutional because it violated the state constitution's requirement that all state taxes be "proportional and reasonable." Under that system, taxpayers in lower wealth school districts paid as much as four times the local property tax rate of those in higher wealth districts.

It is of further interest to note cases where the defendant won. For example, in *Gould v. Orr*, the Nebraska Supreme Court concluded that equal funding is not a constitutional guarantee. However, the Court also found that plaintiffs had failed to allege that funding disparities result in "inadequate schooling" and failed to demonstrate that the education students in lower-spending districts are receiving did not meet constitutional requirements. On the Campaign for Fiscal Equity website (www.cfequity.org), it states, "This holding appears to leave the courthouse door open for a new lawsuit on an adequacy, claim, something alluded to in the concurring opinion."

The inequities and inadequacies in Nebraska's public school system are noticeably embarrassing. Is it time to take the Nebraska school finance system to court? Has it become too difficult for Nebraska state senators to fight against the political money trail in this state? Who is willing to fight for Nebraska schools and Nebraska school youth in a way different from the status quo? Our school youth and public education system are showing signs of failure that may prove irreparable.

In Nebraska's Bill of Rights, the following statement is made, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, however, being essential to good government, it shall be the duty of the Legislature to pass suitable laws to encourage schools and the means of instruction." Education is a fundamental right in Nebraska. That is: the needs of school youth must come before everything else! Nebraska needs to align education and tax policy to reflect this core value.

As a long-time educator in Nebraska, I am calling upon my colleagues to unite through grassroots coalition initiatives to fight for the rights of Nebraska's school youth. 



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Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

| | | |
|----|--|--------------|
| 4 | NCSA Executive Board, 8:30 a.m. | Kearney |
| 4 | NASA Executive Board, 5:00 p.m., Ramada Inn | Kearney |
| 5 | NAESP Region V, 9:30 a.m., Valentino's | Ogallala |
| 5 | NSASSP Region V, 10:00 a.m., Valentino's | Ogallala |
| 5 | NAESP Region III, 3:00 p.m., Wayne State College | Wayne |
| 5 | NSASSP Executive Board, 3:00 p.m., Midtown Holiday Inn | Grand Island |
| 7 | NAESP Region II, 8:30 a.m., ESU #3 | Omaha |
| 13 | NAESP/NDE Joint Meeting, 1:00 p.m., Cornhusker Hotel | Lincoln |
| 19 | NSASSP Region III, 2:00 p.m., ESU #1 | Wakefield |

MARCH

| | | |
|----|--|--------------|
| 12 | NSASSP Region I, 5:30 p.m., Misty's | Lincoln |
| 12 | NASA Region IV, 10:00 a.m., ESU#10 | Kearney |
| 19 | NASA Region V, 12:00 noon, Eagles Club | Bridgeport |
| 20 | NAESP Executive Board, 9:30 a.m. | |
| | Holiday Inn Midtown | Grand Island |
| 21 | NAESP Region I, 2:00 p.m., | |
| | Evelyn Hamlow Elementary | Waverly |
| 26 | NASA Region III, 9:00 a.m., Lifelong Learning Center | Norfolk |
| 26 | NAESP Region II, 9:30 a.m. | |
| 26 | NAESP Region V, 9:30 a.m., | |
| | Western NE Comm. College | Sidney |

AASA - February 20-23 - New Orleans, LA
 NASSP - February 21-24 - San Diego, CA
 ASCD - March 8-10 - San Francisco, CA
 NSBA - April 5-8 - San Francisco, CA
 NAESP - April 12-15 - Anaheim, CA

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