

Health Insurance...No Longer Just a Benefit!!

by Al Inzerello Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent, Finance and Operations, Westside Community Schools



Inzerello

In reviewing historical health insurance information for our school district recently, I discovered a few quite interesting facts and some possible trends about a topic we consider as critical as we plan for our school districts.

Going back to 1997, health insurance premium rates for our employees have increased 101 percent. That's an average of 14.4 percent per year. In fact, health insurance premium increases were at a minimum 10 percent higher than salary increases each year during this period.

Over that same time period, we (like most school districts) have responded to the ever-increasing cost of maintaining a high-quality health insurance program for all our employees by choosing and negotiating higher deductible rate plans along with other measures. Also, since 1997, we have moved from the \$100

deductible plan to the \$500 deductible plan which we now have for all our employees this year. Will this continue in the future? If this same sequence of events repeats itself in the coming years, by the 2009/10 contract year we will be looking at a \$2000 deductible plan and a family coverage premium rate of over \$17,000 per year. This figure would approach 30 percent or more of an average employee's contract.

As we all know, this likely trend certainly moves the cost of quality health care for all of us well beyond the notion of just an added "benefit" employers include each year with employee salaries. In the future, we all need to consider our health care premium costs as a major factor within our total compensation package.

NCSA is now a significant player in determining the future of health insurance plans for our districts. Together with the NSEA and NASB, teachers, administrators and school board mem-

bers from across the state are working hard to manage the future health plan benefits and related costs for over 32,000 subscribers under the Educators Health Alliance Plan. Through its Board of Directors, premium rates, benefits and other terms of coverages are negotiated on behalf of all Nebraska educational employees covered under the EHA.

It is important for all of us as plan members to understand the key elements driving plan costs and premium rates and how the EHA Board is trying to control them. "Plan Provider Savings" are the discounts Blue Cross Blue Shield negotiates on professional, institutional, and other services including prescription drugs. These discounts drastically reduce the costs of health services for each of us before we are even billed. These discounts are usually never seen by our members.

The EHA will continue to urge Blue
(continued on page 11)

INSIDE...

22 Years (and Counting) After
"A Nation at Risk"2
The Art of Learning4
Changes in 21st Century
Education5
Essential Educational
Opportunities6
Book Review: *Setting the
Record Straight*7
Serenity Now8

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.

NAESP DISTINGUISHED PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR



Nyffeler

Roger Nyffeler, Principal at Central Elementary of the Kearney Public Schools, has been named the Nebraska Association of Elementary School Principals Nebraska Distinguished Principal of the Year for 2005. This honor comes after many years of outstanding service to the children of the Kearney Public Schools, as well as the children across the State of Nebraska.

Mr. Nyffeler has been an active edu-

cation and civic leader throughout his distinguished career at Kearney Schools. He is described as someone possessing exceptional interpersonal skills, which allows him to create productive relationships with parents, business leaders, and community organizations to the benefit of his students. His leadership on the development of a Performing Arts Center in his historic building was instrumental in moving that project forward. It was stated that one of his greatest strengths lies in his ability to get people

(continued on page 9)



TWENTY-TWO YEARS (AND COUNTING) AFTER “A NATION AT RISK”

by Dr. John Mackiel, Superintendent, Omaha Public Schools

Dr. Sellentin’s offer to reflect on the impact of the 1983 release of *A Nation At Risk* is appreciated. As NCSA members, we remain committed to efforts which ensure that the schools in our communities/state/nation serve all children and provide excellence in all educational opportunities. Many of us were committed to such pursuits long before the *Nation At Risk* report, and we remain committed long after the *Nation At Risk* report.

Despite the commitment of educators, our nation, however, is indeed “at risk.”

“What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—our captains of industry and Wall Street investment bankers are creating economic chaos and unprecedented decline in

market capitalization. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre and unethical economic performances that exist today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.”¹

Had the above paragraph been released twenty-two years ago by a federal commission, it would have more accurately reflected reality. Instead, twenty-two years ago a small band of educators (including a former Nebraska Commissioner of Education) conspired in an assault on public education and public school educators. In powerful Cold War language, America’s public school educators were charged with inadequacy and blamed for placing our country in economic danger. Since the infamous report of President Reagan’s “Commission on

Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk*,” many of us have watched with increasing concern as the forces of reaction have gathered strength in our country.

A Nation At Risk was the sanctioned catalyst which gave rise to twenty-two years (and counting) of mean-spirited, sustained attacks designed to turn American public schools over to private business. *A Nation At Risk* was a false story that produced false villains and false solutions. *A Nation At Risk* was the stuff of which delusions are made. This report also brought with it the disappearance of any discussion of the link between education and democracy; instead it linked schooling to economic issues (as if schools had any control over minimum wage, outsourcing jobs, and policies of the World Bank). The 1983 *Nation At Risk* report was not driven by concern for the welfare of American children. The state of the economy was the driving force, “...our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.”²

The mission of the nation’s public schools was also challenged as a result of *A Nation At Risk*—challenged to train children to serve the global economy rather than teach children knowledge and skills. The 1983 report advocated that the primary purpose of schooling was to defeat the Japanese, the Germans, and the Koreans in worldwide competition.

The time is long overdue for a legitimate “Commission on Excellence.” Rather than deliberately cultivating animosity toward public schools; rather than fabricating the dangers of American public school educators; rather than jerry-rigging a federal formula that will have every public school in America labeled and their social value eroded; rather than perverting the whole notion of public schools, wounding children in the process; focus should be placed on the real reasons our nation is

(continued on page 10)

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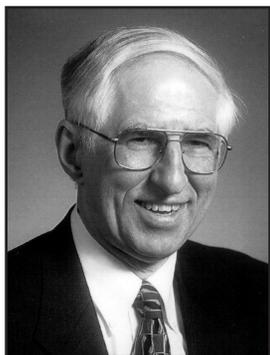
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PERSPECTIVES

by Jerry Sellentin, Ph.D., Executive Director



Sellentin

“ONE THING”

I recently received a book from Corner Stone Leadership Institute entitled, “Win

or Lose? You Choose.” Lee Colan, writes “Find Your One Thing” which I want to highlight as it applies to your school, you, and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

Mr. Colan writes about one of my favorite movies, *City Slickers*. In the movie, a group of friends from the city take a vacation to a dude ranch. Curley, played by Jack Palance, is a hard, crusty old cowboy full of wisdom who gives great advice to Mitch, played by Billy Crystal.

Curley: “You all come out here about the same age. Same problems. Spend fifty weeks a year getting knots in your rope – then you think two weeks up here will untie them for you. None of you get it. Do you know what the secret of life is?”

Mitch: “No, what?”

Curley: “This.” (Holds up his index finger.)

Mitch: “Your finger?”

Curley: “One thing. Just one thing. You stick to that and everything else don’t mean anything.”

Mitch: “That’s great, but what’s the one thing?”

Curley: “That’s what you’ve got to figure out.”

Leaders of Learning have to figure out the “One Thing” that defines a meaningful purpose for their schools. What is the “One Thing” that is most important and how do your decisions and actions relate to the “One Thing?”

I believe Dr. John Mackiel, Superintendent of the Omaha Public Schools, gives some serious discussion in his article, “Twenty-Two Years (and Counting) After a Nation at Risk,” (*page 2 in this issue*) of the “One Thing” that is most important, and that is to stand up for public education which has a role and responsibility for a better life for future generations.

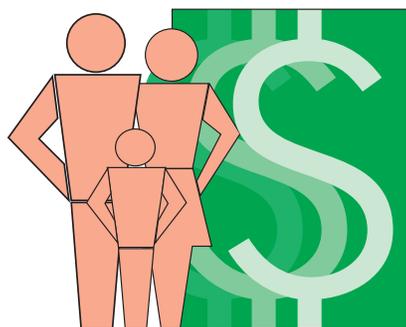
Standing Up for Public Education has made a major change from accessibility for a public education to all students being proficient as future citizens. In my opinion there is a major difference

between accessibility and being proficient. What is the “One Thing” you as a Leader of Learning are focused on that results in being more than proficient and leads to high achievement for all students?

What is the “One Thing” that is most important to you personally? Even after you have defined your “One Thing,” how do you stick to it with all the fires and new opportunities you face each day? How do you stay focused? Is it a trip to a dude ranch for a vacation?

The “One Thing” the Nebraska Council of School Administrators needs to continue to stay focused on is being an effective leader/advocate for quality education and to enhance the professionalism of its members. Persistence and determination of its 1,751 members and staff is the success of NCSA which is celebrating its thirty-fifth anniversary in 2005.

NSDLAF+ NOTES #21



School districts in Nebraska are the managers of large amounts of public dollars. While a great deal of emphasis is spent on “low bid” or “spending lids”, all school districts are the custodians of varying amounts of “cash”. With the exception of State Aid, most school districts can anticipate approximately twice

a year a significant amount of revenue from local property and related taxes. By the same token, school expenditures because of the large percentage related to personnel costs are fairly consistent from month to month.

In addition to providing for necessary cash flow, however, districts can also accumulate revenues for specific purposes such as debt retirement, capital expenses for facilities or certain depreciation or contingency obligations.

“Making money make money” relates to school business just like any other enterprise. Essentially every dollar in a district’s check book should be used for either revenue or for off setting the costs of financial services. While the investment of overnight or liquid funds is

important, it is also important to carefully put the time value of all funds to work. Planning the monthly cash needs carefully allows a district to invest idle dollars until a specific time.

The Nebraska School District Liquid Asset Fund + (NSDLAF+) was established and sponsored by both the NCSA and NSBA to assist districts in structuring a cash flow and maximizing the return on funds.

For assistance in cash-flow and financial management for your school district, educational service unit or community college, contact Cliff Dale, Senior Marketing Representative, PFM Asset Management LLC, 402-483-1678, or dalec@pfm.com



THE ART OF LEARNING

by Thomas Becker, Superintendent/Elementary Principal, Emerson-Hubbard Community Schools

This past school year was a new learning experience for me. I was hired as a first-year superintendent in the school district where I previously was the secondary principal. My fear, to start the year off, was the same one I suppose every first-year superintendent has – to prepare a budget that will work. I was delighted to receive the notice for the budget workshop to be held in Kearney and put on by the Nebraska Department of Education's school finance personnel.

I recall going down to Kearney to the budget workshop. I had my laptop and a three-ring notebook that had more information in it than I knew what to do with. At the end I remember thinking the workshop was excellent and it should be required for everyone who is planning to become a superintendent but before they are finished with their college course work.

After we were all finished for the day and I had put all of the "numbers" into the budget worksheets to get a start on my budget, I called one of the presenters over to me and asked her this question: "Where am I getting these numbers that I am putting into this budget?" Thank goodness most of the attendees already had left for the day since the presenter started to laugh out loud. The presenter then asked me if I was a math teacher in a former life. I told her I was and that I taught math for 23 years before moving into administration. She then called over the other presenters and said, "He wants to know where the numbers came from." They all repeated – he must have been a math teacher since they always want to know where every number comes from. They finally convinced me that I was not just pulling numbers out of the air though at the time I was not sure.

That was my introduction to budgeting. Now, I am not making fun of the staff at the school finance department. What I am showing is how naive I was about making my first school district budget. The good news is that the school finance department did help me come up with a budget. They will even help a new superintendent who asks the "dumb questions." They are very helpful and will take

the time to work through the development of a budget.

If you are new to the budgeting



process, take the time to sit down with the school finance department at a budget workshop. You will never regret the time spent with them. When the opportunity came to attend the budget workshop a second time, I signed up again even though the flyer said it was for first-year superintendents. This time I did

learn not to ask the same questions. I also learned much more about budgeting and where the numbers did come from and where they do go in the budget document. I am not saying I am any expert, just someone who knows enough now to be dangerous. Maybe I will try to attend another budget workshop this next summer, if I can sneak in without being noticed.

Besides working with the school finance department, all beginning superintendents should also find a mentor who they can ask questions of. NCSA can help you find one or you just ask one of the area superintendents who can squeeze some early morning time out of their schedule. I was lucky to find one who would spend from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. on several days answering my questions. I really appreciate the time he spent and his guidance and, yes, I have sent him a Christmas present.

Now this year is my second year as a superintendent and the one thing we know about education is things change, sometimes very fast. With changes in state aid I now have a second job, that of elementary principal. I have no one to blame but myself since I was the one to propose the change to my Board. This addition has again required me to learn about something new, but isn't that what the world of education is all about? 

Congratulations NAESP Regional National Distinguished Principals

Region I Distinguished Principal
Mrs. Elizabeth Replogle, Beatrice Public Schools

Region II Distinguished Principal
Mr. Ron Giller, Bellevue Public Schools

Region III Distinguished Principal
Mrs. Beata Rudloff, Creighton Community Schools

Region V Distinguished Principal
Mr. Thomas Hain, Imperial Schools



CHANGES IN 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION AS SEEN BY A PRINCIPAL

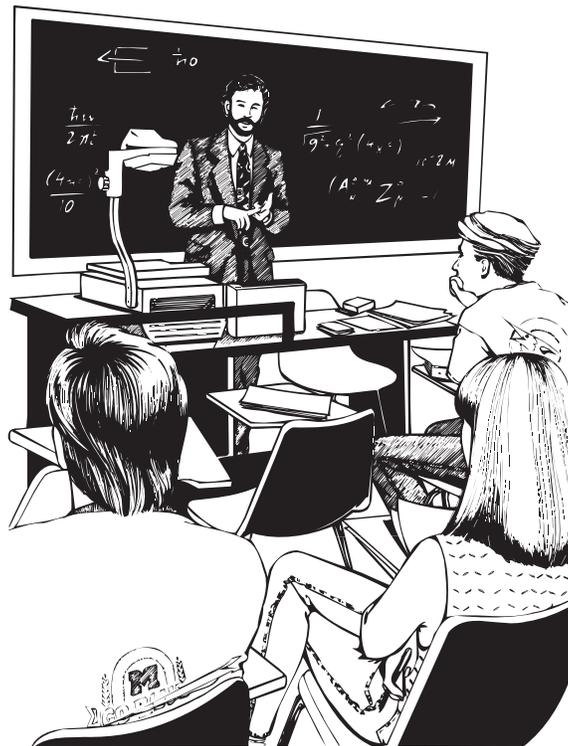
by Pam Cohn, Principal, Marrs Elementary School

Very few principals have the opportunity or curse of overseeing a multi-million dollar renovation to their building. After surviving the two-year ordeal, I have had time to reflect on how this experience has affected me personally, my students, my staff, my community and the district as a whole. R. M. Marrs School sits in a quiet neighborhood in southeast Omaha. Originally built in 1962, it first served as a Junior High School, then moved to the only K-8 building in Omaha Public Schools, then turned into a K-6 structure to open this Fall following the renovation as a 5-8 middle level magnet school specializing in the areas of mathematics, economics, and information technology. My tenure in this building has been since it was a K-8 structure to the present which has been in a period of eight years. Many changes in programming, staff, internal and external structures have occurred of which I have been a part.

As the first wrecking ball hit the building, I remember the many students and fine staff who inhabited that hallway and those classrooms. The relationships and knowledge that was imparted day to day, the excitement in the hallways as students passed from classroom to classroom, the lives that were touched and the many lives that touched me turned my mood into a melancholy state. Those memories now were merely dust floating into the air and touching the ground. Hundreds of mice fled the inner walls where they lived a long time. Ahh, if those mice could talk. What great stories would they tell? The only thing separating me from the past and the great future to come was a plywood wall, one of many that I would face in the two years ahead.

I can honestly say in retrospect that the dirt, dust, grime, gripes, fire and disaster drill changes, moves and many inconveniences caused by construction was well worth the end product. As the process progressed, I realized that not

only would the structure of the building change, put programming would also have to change to meet the needs of students of the 21st century. In addition to the weekly construction meetings, I was also involved in grant-writing meetings. Since we were to open as a magnet school we were applying for a magnet school grant to assist us in providing top



notch instruction and programming for our future students.

As the brainstorming began, many questions needed to be answered. How would the classrooms be configured, what technology would be needed to support which program, what qualifications would new staff need to work in this building, what would be the most effective way to teach mathematics that would garner the optimum achievement level in students? How would we structure the day for students and staff, how do you incorporate economics into the day to day curriculum, how do you get that small portion of students to read at grade level, how do you involve parents

and the community, how do you show accountability? The questions were mind boggling. Where do we start, how do we begin? What a fantastic opportunity to create in essence the perfect school!

I wanted to create an environment where students would want to come to school and be excited about learning, where staff would have all the resources they needed to execute the job in an efficient and effective manner, where parents and community members would feel welcome at all times, where students could best be prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The use of tables instead of desks became the norm. Students were encouraged physically and mentally to work in groups.

The first order of business was of course to "get the right people on the bus." An inventory of magnet school participation was created that prospective teachers would have to complete. This gave me an indication of their philosophy on instruction and to see if our views complemented one another. The inventory covered items such as delivery of instruction, classroom environment, and staff development, views on extra duty hours, parent contacts, recruitment activities, innovation, community involvement, professional relationships, and use of technology. Staff that wanted to remain also completed the inventory.

The structure of the school day was also a key consideration. After working in an elementary setting, I was convinced that longer blocks of time were necessary to encourage the flow of learning and necessary for students to complete authentic projects in an exemplary manner. Out went the traditional eight-period day. Ninety-minute blocks of time were provided for the core subjects with common plan time for the grade-level teams, enabling them to plan for relevant interdisciplinary units, have time for staff development and student concerns on a daily basis. The only bells heard during

(continued on page 8)



Essential Educational Opportunities For All Students

by Joe Higgins, State Board of Education Member

The most important decision made by the State Board of Education in the past two years has been our effort to frame and advance the debate among policy makers on how best to achieve high-quality educational opportunities for all Nebraska students. For too long the discussion among Nebraska's education policy makers has focused on the "costs" of educating our students rather than on the "benefits" of providing high-quality educational opportunities for every student. Our conversations and actions should be about the decisions necessary to raise student achievement for every student every year. Clearly the cost to society of not educating all students in accordance with their ability is far greater than the cost of insuring that all students have high quality education opportunities regardless of where they live, their social economic status, the language barriers to their learning, or their special learning needs.

The first task of statewide policy makers is to make sure we focus the conversation on "the right thing." For us "the right thing" right now is the implementation of the Essential Educational Opportunities Policy adopted by the State Board of Education in December. The adoption of this policy was a necessary first step in the process of "directing the statewide debate." This policy statement adopted after more than two years of input from parents, educators, and taxpayers across the state sets "essential education" parameters for all school districts in providing equal curriculum opportunities for learning for all students. As we move from Board policy to State Regulation the discussion will need to continue prior to full implementation of these requirements for schools seeking State accreditation. These regulations will be designed to insure that all students are prepared for continued life-

long learning upon graduation from an accredited school in Nebraska.

Most Nebraska students currently attend schools that already meet these curriculum requirements. Some districts will need to make some changes in their curriculum offerings. Setting minimum standards for course offering throughout the curriculum will insure that all students have an equitable opportunity for a high-quality learning program.

The next step in this process is insuring that our school districts have the resources necessary to meet these new accreditation regulations. LB 467 "Creating Essential Educational Oppor-

The first task of statewide policy makers is to make sure we focus the conversation on "the right thing." For us "the right thing" right now is the implementation of the Essential Educational Opportunities Policy adopted by the State Board of Education in December. The adoption of this policy was a necessary first step in the process of "directing the statewide debate."

tunities for All Students" now before the Legislature is an effort to do just that. Now is the time for a full discussion and debate over the issues included in this Legislative Bill. The importance of providing increased learning foundation opportunities for all "at-risk four-year-out" children, all day every day kindergarten for all students, increased distance learning opportunities, efforts to attract and retain highly qualified teachers for every classroom, all need to be discussed, priorities set, and, resources directed to those priorities. Recent studies suggest that for every \$1 we invest in early childhood education and improving K-12 stu-

dent achievement we save up to \$17 in later spending designed to provide services for students who fall behind or drop out prior to high school graduation.

Providing every student with a highly qualified teacher in every class may be the single most important step we can take to insure improved student achievement. This will require increased efforts to attract and retain our best and brightest young people to the education profession. Let's debate the priority of adding mentoring programs for new teachers, additional contract time for improved professional development activities for all teachers and administrators, additional instructional planning time, and tuition reimbursement opportunities for teachers seeking graduate courses to update their professional skills. Nebraska continues to prepare a significant number of high-quality teachers in our colleges and universities only to see many of our graduates choosing higher paying employment outside of education, teaching in other states because of higher salaries, or leaving the education profession after two or three years. We can do a better job in keeping our outstanding educators in the classroom where they provide the best opportunity for improving student achievement.

Improved distance learning opportunities may well be our best opportunity to see that students in sparsely populated areas of our state have access to a full curriculum offering. This will require additional resources as we update the ability to deliver multiple curriculum offerings each period of the school day. The debate on the establishment of priorities within the limits of our resources is a debate that requires the participation of all who want to see Nebraska renew its historic commitment to providing high-quality educational opportuni-

[continued on page 11]

Book Review by Ron Joekel

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT (Second Edition)

Written by Gerald W. Bracey

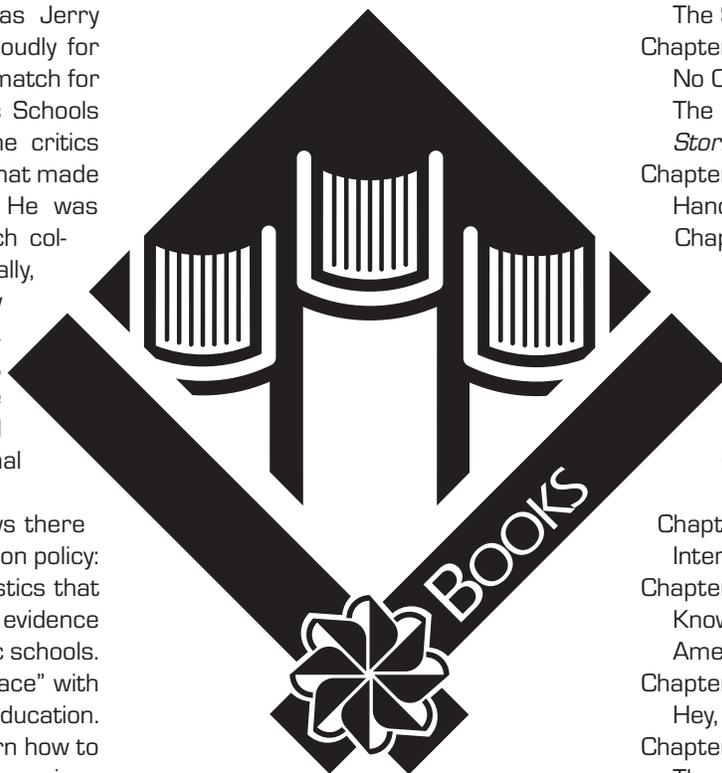
Heinemann Publishing, ISBN: 0-325-00594-X (2004)

Are you looking for a great reference to respond to misconceptions about public education in the United States? If so, this is the book you absolutely must have. I suspect some of you have heard Gerald Bracey at a national conference or have read his reports in the Phi Delta Kappa journal. One of the first people I met on the national scene when I went to PDK as Executive Director was Jerry Bracey. He was speaking out loudly for public education and a perfect match for PDK's Advocacy for the Public Schools Project. He was answering the critics with good solid research data that made a lasting impression on me. He was hired to do a monthly research column in the *KAPPAN*. Additionally, each fall he gives his Bracey Report in the *KAPPAN* (14th. Report Oct. 2004). In 2003, the PDK column received the Interpretive Scholarship Award from the American Educational Research Association.

Gerald Bracey says he knows there are three kinds of lies in education policy: lies, damned lies, and the statistics that reactionary reformers tout as evidence in favor of dismantling our public schools. In this book, he goes "face to face" with the opponents of quality public education. If you read the book you will learn how to discredit them in your own discussions by using the very logic and statistical analyses they purport to have on their side. Bracey bores right in on specific topics like vouchers, schooling funding, charter schools, and comparisons to international test scores; themes around which agitators have created a host of mythological American school failures from the flimsiest of evidence. Bracey begins each chapter (essay) in the book with a question you might commonly hear in conversation about these alleged shortcomings, to which he gives a brief sound-byte ready rebuttal. He proceeds with a full length explanation, replete with statistical data and talking

points that fully support his assertions.

Bracey begins with the Nation At Risk report and the seeds of dissatisfaction that it sowed moving to the present day federal intrusion into schools that has promoted several political careers. Bracey attacks the seeds of anti-public education advocacy and identifies threats to quality teaching and learning,



responding with good data to refute the critics. Using the good data provided by Bracey, every school administrator should feel confident to take on the foes of public education in their community.

The book is divided into 17 chapters and each chapter begins with a question related to the chapter that is posed in the fashion that media and critics of education have utilized. He then provides a succinct answer that educators can use in responding to that question. Here are the titles of the 17 chapters and I think you can see that he covers the field very well:

- Chapter 1
More Years in School—Dumber Kids?
- Chapter 2
Lousy Schools—Lousy Workforce?
- Chapter 3
Poverty: Grinding Down Achievement
- Chapter 4
“Plummeting” SAT Scores
- Chapter 5
The Shrinking SAT Elite
- Chapter 6
No Child Left Behind:
The Perfect Law—as in *The Perfect Storm*
- Chapter 7
Handing Over Schools to Business
- Chapter 8
Charter Schools Go Off Course
- Chapter 9
Vouchers: A Good Way
to Destroy Public Schools
- Chapter 10
“Dumb” Teachers
- Chapter 11
Rising Cost, Flat Scores
- Chapter 12
International Comparisons
- Chapter 13
Knowledge Nostalgia: The Dumbing of
America?
- Chapter 14
Hey, Big Spender
- Chapter 15
Throwing Money at the Schools
- Chapter 16
Public versus Private Schools
- Chapter 17
Hanging In or Dropping Out?

Every administrator and educator needs to read this book in my opinion, as it provides good answers and superb data to respond to critics in your community and throughout the nation.



SERENITY NOW!

by Mark Wragge, Principal, Fillmore Central Public Schools

Fans of the sitcom *Seinfeld* will quickly recognize that expression, and as administrators we may find ourselves wanting to scream, "SERENITY NOW!" There are moments when we could use some serenity to think, align our thoughts, or plan our next move. Some days that time is not easily found. That's when it's important to know what we believe – because all of the small decisions we make must align with our big picture. Additionally, we must remember, the main thing is the main thing.

So what is the main thing? In his book, *Monday Morning Leadership*, David Cottrell writes, "Keep the main thing the main thing." Cottrell sites three ideas regarding the "main thing:"

- Equip your employees
- Provide outstanding service
- Make a profit.

What is the main thing for school administrators?

Is it equipping our staff with all the necessary training and in-service? Is it providing outstanding service? Is it politics? What about discipline? Parents? Meetings? Personnel issues? Special education issues? Assessments? AYP? Social work? Acquiring resources? Medical issues? Communication with the public? Supervision? Teaching and learning? Collaboration with different agencies?

It's hard to decide what the main thing is with so many issues on our plate. For me the main thing is my vision for what I want my school, students, and staff to do well. That vision is built around my philosophy on education and leadership. I

believe a vision, supported by your belief system, will help you skillfully address all the issues mentioned above.

Find your philosophy, or if you don't have one create one – and then remember it, post it in a spot where you'll see it. Reading it "grounds you" and keeps you focused on the main thing.

In closing I want to employ the word serenity again – in an adage that most of us have heard before, and I like to remember. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference." Those three characteristics – serenity, courage, and wisdom – together with your vision and philosophy on education and leadership will help you, "Keep the main thing the main thing." 

Changes in 21st Century...

(continued from page 5)

the day are the 7:45am bell and the 2:30pm. Otherwise, classical music permeates the hallways.

Keeping with the philosophy that students take responsibility for their learning, student-led conferences continued to be the norm for this community. Students discuss their portfolios with their parents and show them evidence of work that represents the grade received on their report card. Goals are then set for the following quarter. The vision is that the portfolios will become electronic within the next two years.

Students complete instruction in the extra-value standards through exploratory units held once each quarter. Upon the completion of these units in an advanced or proficient manner, students are awarded with pins and recognized in an all-school assembly. Achievement in math is awarded with a monthly Bicycles for Success program.

State-of-the-art technology is key to attracting and retaining magnet school students. Palm pilots are used in the classrooms. Two MAC labs are on the first floor and two Gateway labs are on the second floor, giving the students an

opportunity to learn dual platforms. Two plasma screens, a holo-pro screen, and a computer kiosk don the massive commons area. This technology shows student work and accomplishments through power-point and IDVD presentations. A bank is on site once a week and with the help of Wells Fargo, students become tellers and take other students' deposits, giving them an opportunity to experience a career in banking. Students also run the "Bird's Nest" the school store. They sell, restock, and keep track of inventory as well a monthly profit and loss statements.

A vision for the perfect school is that it would be year-round. So much time is wasted on take down and put up, not to mention the knowledge not retained during the summer months. Since that is not a reality, we will provide the next best thing which is enrichment programming during the summer. The plan is to have different "houses" of learning. We will provide the house of mathematics, the house of information technology, the house of economics, and the house of Latin American Cultures this summer. Students will have intensive instruction in those areas 6 hours a day for four weeks.

The new school opened its doors for the first time last August. While we have accomplished much, there is still more to do. What I have learned is that in order to be successful, one must constantly examine what is going on around you and make changes to facilitate optimum experiences in teaching and learning. Stagnation breeds mediocrity. School administrators need to be in sync with the current research and need to be actively involved in curriculum issues. Our current political structure demands it and our students, parents and communities deserve the best educational opportunities that public schools can offer.

I am grateful to have had the experience of opening a new school. It gave me the opportunity to dream what could be and continue to work toward excellence in education. R. M. Marrs Magnet Center... "Where your future begins" can be compared to a field of dreams where futures begin. It is an exciting future for our new staff, a challenging and rigorous future for our students and a future of collaborative partnerships with our parents and community. 



CONGRATULATIONS TO...

☞ **Midge Odermann Mougey**, Principal at North Platte, Jefferson Elementary School, on obtaining her Doctoral Degree

☞ **Dan Hoelsing**, Superintendent, Laurel-Concord, Coleridge, on obtaining his Doctoral Degree

☞ **Jim Putman**, appointed Director of Teacher Certification, Nebraska Department of Education

☞ **Ken Bird**, Superintendent, Westside Community Schools, on being recognized by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln at Founders Day with the Educational Achievement Award

☞ **Paul Hillyer**, Director of Instructional Services, Owatonna, Minnesota, on being appointed Superintendent of the Columbus Public Schools

☞ **Grant Norgaard**, Principal, Columbus Centennial Elementary School, on being appointed Superintendent of the Leigh Public Schools

☞ **Alan Ehlers**, Principal, Sandhills Elementary School, on being appointed Superintendent of Dorchester Public Schools

☞ **Ryan Lindquist**, Principal, Con-

estoga Elementary School, on being appointed Elementary Principal, Elkhorn Public Schools

☞ **Cynthia Wendell**, Superintendent, Arapahoe-Cambridge Public Schools, on being appointed Superintendent of the Holdrege Public Schools

RETIREMENTS:

☞ **Bruce Epstein**, Superintendent, Ogallala Public Schools

☞ **F.J. "Butch" Forsberg**, Superintendent, Lyons-Decatur Public Schools

☞ **Brad Cabrera**, Superintendent, Sutton Public Schools

☞ **Kelly Wood**, High School Principal, York Public Schools

☞ **Steve Srb**, Special Education Director, Papillion-LaVista Public Schools

☞ **Myron Lembke**, Elementary Principal, Bridgeport Public Schools

☞ **Michael Redelff**, Elementary Principal, Nebraska City Public Schools

☞ **Nate Stineman**, Superintendent, Southern Valley School

NAESP Distinguished Principal of the Year

(continued from page 1)

around him actively engaged in purposeful learning activities and to feel important and respected in the process.

During his tenure at Kearney, he has been instrumental in the implementation of the ELL program for the district, district-wide safety procedures, the Performing Arts Center, and many business-school partnerships.

Roger has held leadership positions on the local and state levels within his professional organizations, having served as President (2001-02) of NAESP, and Vice Chair of NCSA (2002-03). His contributions to the children of this state have come through his active involvement in the following professional organizations: National Association of Elementary School Principals, Phi Delta Kappa, and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. He is actively involved in the community at large through his leadership and membership in the Kearney Area Arts Council.

Mr. Nyffeler's official recognition was January 28th during a presentation ceremony at Central Elementary. He will also represent Nebraska principals in Washington, D.C. in the fall. 

WANTED...

KEARNEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS - HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Kearney Public Schools is taking applications for the position of HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL. 1400 Student Enrollment. 225 Day Contract. Competitive Salary. Send a letter of Application and Resume to: Dellene Bosard, Administrative Assistant Human Resources, Kearney Public Schools, 310 West 24th Street, Kearney, NE 68845-5345. Email inquiries to ellene.bosard@kearneypublic.org

OGALLALA PUBLIC SCHOOLS - SUPERINTENDENT VACANCY

OGALLALA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, a Class B school serving 1,100 students, is seeking a qualified Superintendent, who has strong leadership skills, is knowledgeable in school finance, and is able to work and communicate effectively with students, staff and community members. Ogallala is located in Southwest Nebraska on I-80 near Lake McConaughy. To receive an application packet, please send a letter of application, resume and credentials to: Ogallala Superintendent Search, C/O Kerri Anderson, Board President, 126 South Hillcrest, Ogallala, NE 69153. Deadline for all application materials is February 11, 2005. For information about the Ogallala Public Schools, visit www.opsd.org. EOE.

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL - COLUMBUS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Progressive mid-west district of 3480 students and six elementary schools seek highly motivated instructional leader. Student achievement must be highest priority. Should possess strong interpersonal and communication skills, and concern for the welfare and interests of students. MA Degree, elementary administration certification, two years classroom experience required. Administration experience desirable. Competitive salary with excellent benefits. Screening begins February 15 continuing until position filled. Submit letter of application and resume to: Human Resources - Columbus Public Schools - PO Box 947 - Columbus, NE 68602-0947 - AA/EOE (402)563-0947 - E-mail kleich@esu7.org - www.columbuspublicschools.org



22 YEARS AND COUNTING...

(continued from page 2)

at risk.

Where are the commissions of educators speaking out against the public to private cash flow, the massive transfer of public funds to private coffers resulting in the co-opting of public schools by private sector America?

Where are the voices to challenge the globalization of the economy, resulting in the exporting of America and runaway trade deficits eroding the funding base for public schools?

Where are the demands to apply the favorite words of NCLB—"transparency" and "accountability"—to corporations?

Where are the public school advocates to speak out against too much federal interference, not enough federal support, and unequal funding methods that provide far more money to school districts in wealthy communities than those in poorer communities and not enough in any community?

Where are the debates to determine if resources should be allocated for another "modern bomber" or "a brick school in more than 30 communities"—the cost is the same?³

At some point, each of us must ask by what paradoxical rule did we embark upon to fragment our communities, resulting in each school district becoming an island unto itself, narrowing perspectives and undermining substantive efforts to work together for systemic change. We talk a good game about public education being vital for the future of our society. However, if the past twenty-two years are any indication, our nation remains "at risk."

As we ring in the New Year, we typically reflect on the past and anticipate the future. In 2005, we do so against the backdrop of a divided nation. Divided, not on the basis of red states and blue states, but rather, divided by the following dichotomies: (1) a desire for local control but frustration with rising property taxes; (2) divided by a broad commitment to the notion that all children should receive equal educational opportunities, but resistant to efforts to develop a financing system to provide those opportunities; (3) the wish to make our country a better place for our children by

adequately funding education, but all the while funneling millions of dollars from the Treasury to subsidize offshore, outsourced corporate entitlements.

At a time when school budgets are being reduced, as more and more children are being born into poverty, as programs designed to support children are ravaged, educators are confronted by the reality of the favored contemporary solution to every public problem—"privatize it!" Twenty-two years after the last commission, perhaps it is time for defenders of public schools to come together to ask the larger question: "What about the common good the founders of tax-supported public schools so fervently sought?" Perhaps it is time to acknowledge that corporatism has steadily been overwhelming democracy and that any public school failure might actually be the result of a civic breakdown. A civic disintegration that has multinational corporations making decisions and issuing orders that compromise our environment, infiltrate and manipulate our cultural institutions, and abuse workforces (including children in Third-World factories). At the same time, these forces have been degrading our nation's public schools—public schools that were designed to build citizens, cultivate the moral and social development of individual students, and develop character and wisdom while binding diverse groups into one nation.

Looking ahead, we see a growing reluctance to pay for the education of other people's children. We feel the ideals of public education being compromised, and we know that public education is in the crosshairs—on its way to becoming just another consumer commodity. (As educators, we understand there is incredible profit potential in public schools, e.g., the testing industry has more than doubled in size over the last year: Hundreds of millions of dollars are being funneled away from such legitimate reforms as reducing class size, increasing teacher training, and instituting all-day kindergarten and early childhood education in addition to more local and effective methods of helping children learn. Instead, the testing industry is much richer today as a result of the redistribution of tax dollars, with no legitimate help to children's learning.)

In May 1831, a Frenchman named Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in America; he concluded his book *Democracy in America*, with the final observation:

"The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives. Each of them, living apart, is as a stranger to the fate of all the rest—his children and his private friends constitute to him the whole of mankind; as for the rest of his fellow citizens, he is close to them, but sees them not; he touches them but he feels them not; he exists, but in himself and for himself alone; and if his kindred still remain to him, he may be said at any rate to have lost his country."⁴

Once our nation's public schools are tax credited, vouchered, chartered, privatized, and sold to the highest bidder, universal free public education will be a distant dream, plutocracies will arise, Alexis de Tocqueville will be affirmed, and our nation/our democracy will be subverted.

To reverse, or at least arrest, a national decline in understanding and appreciation of the role of public education, our nation needs now to engage in a national discussion. Our nation needs to turn the lens of our past and our present and bring to light the stereotypes that continue to shape the attitudes and behaviors of people. The real issues placing our nation at risk have their roots in remedial poverty, racism, and sexism, now augmented by self-interested corporations, think tanks, and special interest groups. Each and every public school educator has a role and responsibility in reclaiming a vision of a better life for future generations—for reclaiming the vision of justice and equality for all. 

¹Don Orlich, *A Nation At Risk Parody*, Teachers College Record, On-line.

²Beatrice and Ronald Gross, *The Great School Debate: Which Way for American Education?*

A Nation At Risk, 1985.

³Dwight. Eisenhower, *Farewell Speech*, 1953.

⁴Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840.

UPCOMING EVENTS...

Educational Opportunities...

(continued from page 6)

ties.

Perhaps it is time for the political leadership of the state to call for an "Educational Summit" during which the wide range of issues facing Pre K-16 education can be debated, priorities determined, and an implementation timetable agreed upon. It is from such debate that the political will to do "the right thing" can emerge and start us on the road to education renewal that will be necessary for our continued commitment to student achievement. During this era of education reform many states are renewing their commitment to quality education and Nebraska will have to do so as well if we wish to maintain our position of educational excellence. Preparing our children with the critical thinking skills necessary for lifelong learning in the 21st Century is a complex and difficult task. Our success in this endeavor will require dedication, planning, and the commitment of significant state resources. To do otherwise will prove to be far costlier to our statewide economic development.

Let the discussion continue:

- How do we best maintain strong local control over school policy decisions and insure equitable educational opportunities for all students?
- How do we attract and retain highly qualified teachers for every child?
- What needs to be done to insure that our schools remain safe places for our students to grow and learn?
- Should the State of Nebraska require any statewide graduation requirements?
- What is the meaning and value of a graduation diploma from a Nebraska high school?
- What instructional practices will best assist educators in continuing to close the "achievement gap" which currently exists in our schools?
- How do we best prioritize our state resources to insure continued educational excellence within our schools?
- Do we have a statewide commitment to see that all schools have the resources necessary to provide equal educational opportunities for their students as we prepare them for success in the 21st Century?

February 7-8 - Labor Relations

1:00 p.m. - Preconference - 7th
8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. - 8th
Kearney - Holiday Inn

February 17-18

NASES/NDE Joint Meeting

Lincoln - Cornhusker Hotel

March 30-31

NASA Think Tank Gallup Institute

Omaha, NE

5:00 p.m.

April 6 - GRIT Conference

8:00 a.m.

Lincoln - Embassy Suites

April 13 - EOP Workshop

8:30 a.m.

Kearney - Holiday Inn

April 14 - NARSA Spring Event

3:30 p.m.

Brownville - Whiskey Run Creek

April 26-28 - NASBO Convention

April 26 - 1:00 p.m.- Golf

April 27-28 - Convention

Kearney - Ramada Inn

April 27-28 - NASES Spring Conference

Kearney - Ramada Inn

May 2 - Job Descriptions Workshop

8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

ESU #16 - Ogallala

May 2 - Job Descriptions Workshop

2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

ESU #11 - Holdrege

May 4 - Job Descriptions Workshop

9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

ESU #3 - Omaha

May 4 - Job Descriptions Workshop

2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

ESU #1 - Wakefield

For more information on any of these conferences or to register online please visit www.ncsa.org

Health Insurance...

(continued from page 1)

Cross Blue Shield to negotiate more discounts in the future. Plan member payments and copays are also considered savings to the plan.

Obviously, as more groups adopt plans with higher deductibles and higher copays for prescription drugs and office visits more costs for medical services are covered by plan members. Deductibles and copays will continue to be modified in the future in order to control costs and premiums. Claim payments including hospital inpatient, hospital outpatient, physician costs, and prescription drug costs are the other key elements driving plan costs and premiums.

It is important to understand that claim payments are influenced by both the costs per service as well as the number of services requested by our members. It is also important to understand that both the costs of service and the

number of services appear to be increasing each year, thus compounding claim payment costs each year.

Controlling these key elements will continue to be an extraordinary challenge in the future, but higher deductibles, higher copays, and higher premiums will certainly be a reality we'll all need to consider. Wellness activities, disease management programs, provider cost containment, and more effective plan administration also may offer promising results for cost control and will also be considered for implementation by the Board of Directors of the EHA. In fact, one or more of these ideas may prove to be a very significant strategy for cost control of health care.

Regardless, health insurance will never be just an added employee "benefit" again. The cost has become a major component of employee compensation and will continue to become even more so as long as premium rates outpace salary increases as they have done each year since the '80s.



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Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

3	NASES Region V	9:00 a.m.	Perkins	Sidney
7	NASA Executive Board	5:00 p.m.	Holiday Inn	Kearney
7-8	Labor Relations	1:00 p.m.	Holiday Inn	Kearney
9	Western NE Administrators	12:00 noon	WNCC	Scottsbluff
16	NAESP Region II	5:15 p.m.	Farmer Brown's	Waterloo
16	NSASSP Region III	2:00 p.m.	ESU #1	Wakefield
17-18	NASES/NDE Joint Meeting	1:00 p.m.	Cornhusker	Lincoln
25	NASES Region III	12:00 noon	Sports Denn	Norfolk

MARCH

9	NASA Region IV	10:00 a.m.	ESU #10	Kearney
9	NSASSP Region I	5:30 p.m.	Valentino's	Lincoln
16	NAESP Executive Board	9:30 a.m.	Holiday Inn	Grand Island
16	Western NE Administrators	12:00 noon	Gaslight	Gering
22	NAESP Region I	11:00 a.m.	Malcolm Elementary	Malcolm
30	NAESP Region V	9:30 a.m.	WNCC	Sidney
30	NSASSP Region V	10:00 a.m.	WNCC	Sidney
30	NARSA Executive Board	10:00 a.m.	NCSA	Lincoln
30	NASA Region III		Wayne State College	Wayne
30-31	NASA Think Tank	5:00 p.m.	Gallup University	Omaha

NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

February 10-12 - ASBO Leadership Conference - Boston, MA
February 17-20 - AASA National Convention - San Antonio, TX
February 25-28 - NASSP National Convention - San Francisco, CA
April 15-19 - NAESP National Convention - Baltimore, MD

The NAEESP Link

The State Association Newsletter for Elementary School Principals



REGION IV YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE – Jill Clevenger

Region IV, along with University of Nebraska – Kearney (UN-K) personnel and funding through ESU 10 Drug Free Grant, organizes and sponsors a Youth Leadership Conference each November. Over 225 students from fifth and sixth grades attended a day long conference this past Fall featuring Mary Kay Mueller as the guest speaker. She spoke to her students about “Being Me, No Matter What.” We asked the students what they gained from her keynote address. Here are some of their comments:

“Believe in yourself.”

“If you say you can’t, you can’t. If you say you can, you can.”

“I learned to take a risk and ask a question.”

“Learn how to believe in your dreams.”

“To just do it and believe in yourself.”

“To dream about what you want to do, make goals, and fulfill your dream, no matter what.”

Students then got the opportunity to become acquainted with each other as they were separated into groups. Each group had a UN-K personnel and funding through ESU 10 Drug Free Grant, organizes and sponsors a Youth education student(s) to facilitate icebreaking activities which included “the human knot.” After lunch, students remained in their groups and UN-K personnel and funding through ESU 10 Drug Free Grant, organizes and sponsors a Youth ambassadors along with adult sponsors, took their groups to four of the campus stations – theatre; planetarium; smart board technology; ears, eyes, and you; graphic art; student leadership development; economics; education; airway science; and teambuilding. When the students were visiting the campus stations, the principals and sponsors listened to Mary Kay Mueller on “8 HIGH Ways to Get Where You Want to Go!” She spoke about getting the picture, risk taking, full responsibility, feel all your feelings, honest communication, forgiveness of the past, gratitude for the present, and hope for the future. The students returned to the Student Union on the UN-K Campus where they debriefed with their classmates and discussed what they saw, learned, and how it affected them as a leader. With their classmates, they then had the opportunity to apply for a “Leadership in the Community” mini-grant for \$100. All schools who applied received their mini-grants. At this time 18 schools have submitted applications for several purposes. Some of the mini grants were for the Tsunami Relief Funds, purchasing reading books for the younger students, field trip expenses, certificates and ribbons, and purchasing supplies for different activities used with teamworking skills. All in all, this year’s conference was a huge success. We look forward to next year’s conference being even better!!!

Region Notes

Region I

Region I hosted our Mid-Winter Conference in January at ESU 6 in Milford. There were two excellent speakers who shared information about working with children in crisis, and information about the early childhood study. Mike Dulaney was also there to share news from the capitol and remind all of us about the lunch on February 3rd. I hope to see a super turnout on the 3rd of February to represent Elementary Principals in Nebraska. Randy Page, Malcolm Elementary School

Region II

Region II Principals will meet Wednesday, February 16th at 5:00 pm at Farmer Brown's in Waterloo, NE for an Aspiring Principals Seminar. Principals are encouraged to bring educators that are working toward or thinking about a career in elementary administration. Dr. Larry Dlugosh from the Department of Educational Administration at UNL will present a program before the social and dinner hour. Aspiring principals will all receive a professional journal courtesy of Region II Principals. In April, the group will take a riverboat dinner cruise down the Missouri River and honor all administrative assistants. A May celebration and retirement recognition is planned. Beth Welke, Blair Community Schools

Region III

On February 2nd, Region III will be holding an Emerging Administrator Workshop at the Life Long Learning Center in Norfolk. Randy Nelson, superintendent of Norfolk Public Schools, will be opening up the workshop discussing what he looks for when hiring administrators. The workshop will give those in attendance a chance to learn more about the principalship and what it all entails. We are going to have Region III principals address specific topics for those who are looking at becoming principals. The topics that will be discussed include: building professional learning communities, aspects of assessment and accountability, and what first year principals need to know. We are excited about also exposing those in attendance to what Region III membership is all about and the support that it gives principals. My hope would be that we can have a workshop that is meaningful for those in attendance and a workshop that we could have every year. Cory Worrell, Principal-Region III

Region IV

Region IV held their winter meeting on the UN-K campus at the Student Union. Mike Dulaney was our guest speaker. He shared information with our members about the retirement issue on salary spiking and how it is affecting us and he also talked about the consolidation issue. A reminder was given about the upcoming first annual Legislative Luncheon which will be held on February 3rd. We encouraged our principals to attend and to bring a little memento from their school that our senators could take back to their offices. Roger Nyffeler was recognized as this year's Nebraska Distinguished Principal and members were encouraged to attend his ceremony at Central Elementary in Kearney on January

28th. Our next meeting will be held on April 27th at Drew Heady's house in Hastings. Jill Clevenger



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