

A PUBLICATION OF THE NEBRASKA COUNCIL OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

OCTOBER, 2003

THE MIND, HEART, AND SOUL OF EDUCATION

by Scott Dodson, President, Nebraska Association of Elementary School Principals; Principal, Woodland Park Elementary School, Norfolk



Dodson

Pursuing standards and academic excellence is in the forefront of all administrators. NCLB, state standards, and school funding all have or will affect our schools as we continue to provide a quality education for the students in our communities. Looking at the culture of America, it appears that we have succeeded brilliantly in matters of science, technology, and in the world perspective, economics, but perhaps we have been less successful in matters of the heart and soul. As we pursue academic standards and excellence, which agreeably should be a goal of all school leaders, it is important that we...not turn wisdom into information, community into consumerism, politics into manipulation, and destiny into DNA, making it more difficult to find nourishment for the hungers of the heart.”

Students continue to bring their mind and soul to school everyday. These souls are entering our school buildings seeking a connection, a sense of belonging,

looking for a community in which they can be a part. The challenge for us as school leaders is providing a community that students can connect with as we establish standards and increase academic achievement. A study by the National Research Council found that the key to healthy early development and learning is maintaining nurturing and stable relationships. The report went on to say that the environment matters as much or more than the stress of test scores. Creating bonds and connecting to others is a key to academic and personal success, and students who feel a sense of belonging are caring, friendly, cooperative, and able to form healthy relationships. I challenge each of us to look at

our school culture. Are we providing an environment that is nurturing, relationship building, and allows our students to feel connected? What can be done to educate policymakers and the public as to how to provide an environment that will enhance the performance of our schools?

Research is clear on two areas that make a difference in student learning and the correlated trait of feeling connected. The first is that not all students learn at the same rate. This has become a cliché in education, but as a whole we still see a nine-month school calendar with the same number of hours for all students. In Nebraska, before and after

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TIME TO RETHINK THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

by Doug Christensen, Commissioner of Education

Our schools are essentially the same as they were 100 years ago. The same is true for our high schools. The last time significant changes were made in high school were the first few years immediately after “A Nation At Risk.” Prior to that, one would have to go back to the late 1950s when Sputnik created a massive rethinking of the math and science curriculum of the high school.

In spite of changes made during these time periods, the high school “experience” has remained essentially the same. Courses remain divided up by time periods. Courses remain distinct and discrete and not integrated across their disciplinary boundaries. Classrooms remain largely isolated and self-contained.

As a result, the high school experience has been a rather enduring one. We really never finished the agenda caused by Sputnik in terms of integrating our math and science curriculum and we never really finished the response to “A Nation At Risk” when more courses and more requirements were added to school offerings and to student loads.

One of the features that has changed, however, is that our high schools have become larger and larger. In an effort to provide comprehensive course offerings across the curriculum, larger numbers of students have been required to make the comprehensive curriculum a cost-effective strategy. Comprehensive high schools have benefited many students providing curriculum choices and

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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.



WHAT WILL WE LEAVE TO THE NEXT GENERATION?

by Kevin Riley, Superintendent Gretna Public Schools

“The purpose of education is to improve the quality of life.”

—Dale Hayes, Ph.D., Deceased
 Professor of Educational Administration
 University of Nebraska—Lincoln

Dr. Hayes made this statement many times in his school policy classes. Having been all over the world he felt he had a perspective that few educators shared. He reminded us that the United States leads the world in agriculture, medicine, science, finance, engineering, communications, air travel, space exploration, etc., etc... We are the last super power on earth. He also reminded us that public education has played a significant role in the success of our country. Our philosophy of a quality education for ALL children differentiates us from the other countries of the world. We don't limit edu-

cational opportunity by “benchmark” testing at a very early age. How many “late bloomers” do such systems miss? How many “late bloomers” have made significant contributions to “the quality of life” in America?

The standards movement is now a way of life in American schools. There is a universal belief that standards, high stakes testing, and enhanced competition among schools will improve education. Little did they know that our school systems were already fiercely competitive. We all want to have the best reading, math, science, writing, business, vocational, special education, gifted, health/physical education, and technology programs...to name a few. We thrived on instructional and curricular breakthroughs and shared them with each other. Our standards were in the form of

curriculum guides.

The raw competition of the market place is not always beneficial. The privatization of the health care industry has not improved patient care. Hospitals and doctors offices are understaffed and doctors make their money on “patient volume.” The break-up of Ma Bell has been a disaster.

As in business, the competition of schools has many pitfalls. High stakes testing and comparing schools has caused numerous problems. It has become a standard process in some states to hold students back until they are old enough to drop out so that those students are not included in the high school results. The school district of Houston has admitted that they have a much higher dropout rate than reported. Some schools that are under tremendous pressure to raise their scores have been caught giving the tests to teachers and students prior to the test date. Some districts improve their composite scores by “hiding” lower achieving students. The list is long.

However, the most significant problem occurs in the classroom. In many states the curriculum has become so regimented that teachers have prescribed lessons and packaged assessments for every day of the school year. That might be acceptable for a very poor teacher, but just think of the mind-numbing effect it has on the master teacher. A teacher that relocated from another state to Nebraska said, “I was so used to having all of my lessons prepared for me, that when I came to Nebraska, it took me six months to remember how to teach.”

Regardless of where you stand on our state's approach to standards, we are fortunate. We had a legislature that had the intelligence to place the responsibility of standards and assessments on our department of education. We have a commissioner that has had the courage to stand for a system of multiple assessments that places the responsibility of teaching and learning where it belongs...in the classroom. We all know that he has been criticized by the single test propo-

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

by Jerry Sellentin, Ph.D., Executive Director



Sellentin

SAFE HARBOR

The September 2003 issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan* highlights the 35th Annual Phi

Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools. The following general conclusions were listed:

1) The public has a high regard for public schools, wants needed improvement to come through those schools, and has little interest in seeking alternatives.

2) The public sees itself as uninformed on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, with 69 percent saying they lack the information needed to say whether their impression of the act is favorable or unfavorable.

3) Responses to questions related to strategies associated with NCLB suggest that greater familiarity with the law is unlikely to lead to greater public support.

4) The public is concerned about getting and keeping good teachers, teacher salaries are too low, and are willing to see higher salaries paid to teachers teaching in more challenging situations.

5) The public continues to believe that closing the achievement gap between white students and black and Hispanic students is important but blames the gap on factors unrelated to the quality of schooling.

6) The public is not convinced that narrowing the achievement gap requires spending more money on low-achieving students.

7) A majority of respondents are opposed to vouchers and would oppose having their state adopt them, despite the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court decision stating that voucher plans do not violate the U. S. Constitution.

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Responses to major problems public schools must deal with:

	2003	2002	2001
Lack of financial support/funding/money	25%	23%	15%
Lack of discipline, more control	16%	17%	15%
Overcrowded schools	14%	17%	10%
Use of drugs/dope	9%	13%	9%
Difficulty getting good teachers/quality teachers	5%	8%	6%
Standards/quality/basics	4%	*	*
Fighting/violence/gangs	4%	9%	10%
Low pay for teachers	4%	*	*

*Less than one-half of 1%

My good friend, Miles Turner, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators reminds me of an old saying that ships are safe in the harbor but that's not what ships are built for. The battering high seas that administrators will be sailing in over the next few months/years are the challenges that come with the position. Maintaining a focus on children and what's best for Nebraska's schools is the compass that will help leaders stay on course. From my personal observation Nebraska continues to be on the right course. We have an outstanding Department of Education which is on the cutting edge of school improvement. We also have administrators, teachers, staff, and school boards who are also committed to high standards and school improvement for all students.

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2004 Administrators' Days: Plan to attend the 2004 Administrators' Days Aug 4-6 in Kearney.

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Wisdom from Senior Citizens: 1.The first rule of holes if you are in one, stop digging. 2. Nostalgia isn't what it used to be. 3. I wish the buck stopped here—I could use a few. 4. It's hard to make a comeback when you haven't been anywhere. 5. The only time the world beats a path to your door is if you're in the bathroom. 6. The only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth.



NSDLAF+ NOTES #12

www.nsdlaf.org is the location of the newly designed web page for the Nebraska School District Liquid Asset Fund. This individualized site is an excellent source for specific information describing the services available to participants. A market update, for example, provides information and charts related to various investment vehicles and prevailing indices of interest. If your district is not currently a member of NSDLAF, all of the necessary forms for becoming a participant

are now available on line. In addition, by using www.ambac-cadre.com and then "Compass" you may access a demo of the actual use of Compass as a financial management and accounting assistant.

For information on the benefits to your school district, educational service unit or community college from participation in NSDLAF, contact Cliff Dale, Vice President, Ambac Securities, Inc., 402-483-1678, or cdale@neb.rr.com.



NEBRASKA SUPERINTENDENT TENURE INCREASING

by James E. Ossian, University of Nebraska at Kearney

The Columbia World of Quotations (<http://www.bartleby.com/66/11/38411.html>) credits Denise McCluggage, a U.S. journalist and race car devotee, for the saying "Change is the only constant, hanging on is the only sin." For Nebraska superintendents, the pace of change has slowed, and fewer are committing "the only sin."

In only two years, the median tenure in position for Nebraska superintendents, in districts with high schools, has increased from 3.35 years to 3.86 years, and average tenure has gone from 4.93 years to 6.16 years. School superintendent tenure nationally ranges from three to seven years, depending upon which study is read. There were 31 changes in the superintendent ranks a year ago and 33 for this fall. In contrast, there were 52 and 48 changes respectively in the two preceding years.

The people involved in the past year's changes included 20 retirees, seven who moved to a new superintendency, three who accepted another administrative post, and two who passed away. There will be 250 individuals, four less than last year, serving as superintendents in 263 Nebraska school districts at the opening of the 2003-04 school year. Sixteen administrators are embarking upon their first superintendency.

The Veterans

The number of superintendents serving 20-or-more years in the same school district averaged 23 from 1987 to 1996, with a high of 28 in 1991. This elite group of veterans now stands at eight, including: Russ Hoppner, Hampton (33); Benje Hookstra, Spalding (26); Randall Anderson, Crofton and Glen Beran, Chase County at Imperial (25); Leroy Cundall, Bayard (24); Keith Fagot, Loomis (23); Mike Cuning, Sutherland (21); and Dale DeRiese, Holdrege (20).

There are 42 superintendents in the 10- to 19-year tenure range, eight of whom hold positions in districts with an enrollment of 1,000 or over.

Women Superintendents

In 1950-51, there were 14 Nebraska female superintendents in districts with high schools, the highest number during the second half of the 20th Century. This fall 15 of Nebraska's 250 (6 percent) superintendents are women, three more than a year ago. The six percent figure is still only half of the estimated 12 percent national average, but the trend has to be encouraging for Nebraska women aspiring to become school superintendents.

Women superintendents at the start of the 2003-04 school year include: Virginia Moon, 6 years at Ralston; Joyce Huffman, 5 years at Sumner-Eddyville-Miller; Jane Hornung, Paxton, Alberta Moore, Wausa, and Caroline Winchester, Elba, 4 years; France Blanchard, McPherson County, Gayla Fredrickson, Elgin, Katherine Meink, Keya Paha, 3 years; Cindy Wendell, 3 years at Arapahoe and year 1 at Cambridge; Renee Jacobson, Plattsmouth, and Amy Malander, Cedar Rapids, 2 years; Vicki Caldwell, Newcastle, Cindy Huff, Hitchcock Unified, Joan Reznicek, Red Cloud, and Marlene Uhing, Seward, 1 year.

Trends

Quantitative data do not always lead to easy interpretation, even when viewed over time. Anecdotal observations make for better conversation. So, in a conversational sense, the following observations are offered.

- To state the obvious, most small rural schools are in a precarious position. Dwindling resources, declining enrollments, and the potential aftermath of the Unicameral's LR 180 all combine to foretoken fewer Nebraska small schools.

- The remaining "larger" schools, if funded at an adequate – let alone essential – level, will require increased state-aid appropriations.

- LR 180 study findings, if widely disseminated, should at least dispel the perception that there are 500-plus Nebraska school superintendents with in excess of \$100 thousand salaries.

- School superintendent searches are attracting a larger pool of candidates, though still not at the level noted a decade or so ago.

- School board members appear to be younger and, though every bit as capable as those they replaced, in need of continuous boardsmanship in-service.

- There are few practicing school administrators who remember when school budgets were program driven rather than levy driven.

- The NCLB Act is hopelessly flawed. Will Washington policy makers heed the concerns of state and local officials regarding this legislation?

- A growing number of students, parents, and educators are growing weary of the nation's obsession with testing; however, they do not as yet constitute a critical mass.

- It will eventually rain in Nebraska, and the Cornhuskers will return to the Top 10 in college football.

A chart comparing Nebraska superintendent turnover data for fall of 1993 and fall of 2003 is presented below. 

Nebraska Public School Districts with High Schools: Superintendent Turnover Data, Fall 1993 vs. Fall 2003

Item	Fall 1993	Fall 2003
School Districts	290	263
Number Superintendents	287	250
Median Tenure in Posit.	4.41 yrs.	3.86 yrs.
Avg. Tenure in Posit.	7.42 yrs.	6.16 yrs.
Supts. W/ 1-Year Tenure	40	31
% Turnover	13.7	12.2
Supts. W/ 20+ Yrs. Tenure	24	8
Women Superintendents	3	15



THE ACT OF COMMUNICATION: PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS RESPOND

by Frank D. Adams, WSC; & Dan DePasquale, Norfolk Public Schools

The ability to gather information, digest that information and to respond to information is at the very heart of the public school administrator's job. Effective communication requires input and the cooperation of everyone. An effective administrator needs other administrators to provide and to respond to information. Acts of poor communication result in disharmony for all.

While we live in the world of hyper-text, emergent technologies and expanding digital applications, the success of principals and superintendents is significantly influenced by how effectively and efficiently they use this technology to communicate with one another. Often a level of communication is taken-for-granted only to have issues arise that cause significant problems. These problems may become so severe that one's job may be in jeopardy. There is no substitute for clear, effective communications. In any school system regardless of its size, there is no single greater threat to the successful day-to-day operations of that organization than the inability of the superintendent and principal to communicate effectively with each other.

Much has been written about effective communications, little has been written about the level of communications between principal and superintendent. The researchers of this study examined the frequency and quality of communications existing between/among the building principal and the school district superintendent. A survey of 40 randomly selected superintendents and principals in eastern Nebraska was conducted in the summer of 2003. Superintendents and principals were asked to rate communication items using a Likert Scale as to which is "most like you" and "least like you." Additionally, three open-ended questions were asked to pinpoint communication areas and possible "miscommunications."

The researchers examined areas that both superintendent and principals could address to ensure that mis-com-

munication did not occur. The following items presents some of the data gathered for this article; the percentage indicates a general trend from an examination of the survey results.

1. I communicate in some form with my superintendent/principal daily
50 % [like me] / 18 % [unlike me]
2. I ask the superintendent/principal if they are following my explanation
48 % [like me] / 28 % [unlike me]
3. I manage to explain my ideas clearly
48 % [like me] / 18 % [unlike me]
4. I find it easy to see things from the superintendent/principal point
68 % [like me] / 18 % [unlike me]
5. It's OK to interrupt what someone else is saying
33 % [like me] / 40 % [unlike me]
6. I can detect mood of superintendent/principal while chatting
58 % [like me] / 8 % [unlike me]
7. I have difficulty explaining exactly what is being expected
28 % [like me] / 60 % [unlike me]
8. Informal chats are easy to conduct
63 % [most like me] / 25 % [unlike me]
9. I am aware of my abilities to express ideas clearly to others
55 % [most like me] / 20 % [unlike me]
10. Communication is my primary goal
[like me] / 35 % [unlike me]

A selected and quick review of the data indicated that potential communication problems exist between the superintendent and principal on two levels. The first level involves direct communications; the second level concerns effective communication strategies.

An examination of selected questions from the first level reveals that almost

one in five (18%) principals/superintendents recognize that they have difficulty in explaining their ideas clearly. When asked, however, to what degree is their "difficulty explaining exactly what is being expected," sixty percent (60%) of the respondents indicated this as a problem. Clearly, the ability to explain ideas and know what is expected is essential if communication between the superintendent/principal is to be successful.

The second level, effective communication strategies, demonstrates the need to give more emphasis to basic communication strategies versus taking for granted that the other person understands the message. The data indicates that 48 percent of the speakers do not ask if explanations are understood. When this is coupled with 60 percent indicating difficulty explaining what is being expected the potential for serious problems arising increases greatly. It is interesting to note that 40 percent of the respondents thought it was OK to interrupt someone else "if I have something relevant to add."

If we get the message, superintendent/principal communications can improve, what strategies could be helpful? Adams (2003) suggests the following:

1. Speak **TO** the individual not **AT** the individual — From both a formal and/or an informal setting, the most frequently mentioned irritating action is speaking "at the individual." Speaking at the individual infers that the speaker speaks to no one in particular, and you just happen to be the nearest ear receiving the speaker's words. No one enjoys being spoken at rather than being addressed directly—not even the speaker. A suggestion is: make eye contact with the other person.

2. Leave ego at home — An ego is important to the uniqueness of the individual; however, an ego out of control is painful for everyone including the speaker. One should speak with caution, listen intently, and reserve comments intended to be self-aggrandizing. It is a difficult

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CONGRATULATIONS TO...

☞ **Doug Christensen**, Commissioner of Education: The Nebraska English Language Arts Council has named Doug its 2003 NCTE/SLATE Affiliate Intellectual Freedom Award Winner

☞ **Dave Ludwig**, Wisner-Pilger Elementary Principal, who has been appointed to the National Association of Elementary School Principals 2004 Nominating Committee

☞ **Tim Shafer**, Superintendent of Broken Bow Public Schools who has been elected Chair of the Professional

Practices Commission and appointed by the Governor to the Governor's Rural Economic Commission

☞ **Carmel Sheppard**, Principal, Lincoln Dawes Middle School who is being recognized by the Lincoln YWCA for her achievements in education

☞ **Nancy Oberst**, Principal, OPS, Liberty Elementary School, the recipient of the 2003 Norbert & Charlette Schuerman Outstanding Principal Award

☞ **Be Rudloff**, Principal at Creighton

Elementary School, whose school was named 2003 No Child Left Behind - Blue Ribbon School

SYMPATHY:

☞ To the family of **Roger Maxwell**, retired principal Norfolk Senior High School. (Mr. Maxwell was a quality teacher when I was a student at Norfolk Senior High - JLS)

☞ To the family of **Kenneth Scheer**, retired principal of Pierce & Ainsworth Public Schools

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS ARE THE FOCUS OF THE 4TH ANNUAL GOVERNOR'S SUMMIT ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The 4th Annual Governor's Summit on Workforce Development will take place October 7-8 at the Embassy Suites in Lincoln. This year's theme is "Partnerships United for a Competitive Workforce."

The Summit will feature keynote speakers known worldwide for their efforts in the area of workforce development. Confirmed speakers for the Summit are Dr. Will Daggett, Robert Jones, and Dr. Mary Pipher.

Will Daggett is founder and president of the International Center for Leadership in Education. He is known worldwide for his efforts to move the education system toward more rigorous and relevant skills and knowledge for all

students. His presentation provides vivid examples of what students will need to know to succeed in this changing world.

Robert Jones is president and CEO of the National Alliance of Business. He is a nationally recognized expert in the workforce development field. Jones is a lifelong advocate for investing in people.

Mary Pipher is a Lincoln resident and author of a number of books, including "Reviving Ophelia" which was a New York Times best-seller for 154 weeks. Her work combines her training in both the fields of psychology and anthropology. She has a special interest in how American culture affects the mental health of its people.

Along with keynote speakers, the

Summit will also offer breakout sessions, many of which will showcase real examples of "best partnership practices" that are taking place in Nebraska.

The Governor's Summit will be a one and a half day event. In addition to scheduled keynotes and breakout session speakers, Congressman Tom Osborne has been invited to speak at the event.

For more information on the Governor's Summit or to register, visit the Nebraska Workforce Development website at www.NebraskaWorkforce.com and click on the Summit icon.

"SHOW ME AND I UNDERSTAND"

Presented by: Dr. Jan Norris, LSU

Tell me and I know; show me and I understand. Success is possible for children with language disorders, dyslexia, ADHD, or auditory processing deficits who struggle in the classroom with oral and written language. This workshop will show, tell, model, and explain useful programs, picture tools, and therapy techniques that visualize and make difficult abstract concepts concrete and comprehensible. Explorations will include phonemic awareness, print awareness, phonics, vocabulary, sight words, syntax, spelling, punctuation, math, and much more!

Friday, October 10, 2003 • 8:00 am - 4:00 pm

Kearney Ramada Inn • \$50 (includes lunch and material)

Visit: nslha.org For Registration Information



CODY-KILGORE UNIFIED SCHOOL VOTERS APPROVE EXPENDITURE INCREASE IN PRECEDENT-SETTING ELECTION

by Dale Meritt, Superintendent of Cody-Kilgore Unified Schools

In an election held August 28th, Cody-Kilgore voters approved by a two-to-one majority, 150 to 79, to allow the administration to budget an additional \$139,250 for the 2003-2004 school year.

I think this may be the first election in which a Nebraska school district was requesting an expenditure override only. Frequently, in other types of lid elections, it is for an increase in taxing authority and in expenditure authority. Cody-Kilgore had the money, but not the authority to spend it.

This election demonstrates the support of the patron of this district. The election was conducted by a mail-in ballot, as the Cody-Kilgore Board took into account the time and distance restrictions of an election this time of year. Two town hall meetings were held with members of the Board and administration to answer patron questions and concerns.

Once they understood that the vote would not effect taxes, they were very supportive.

Cody-Kilgore has been very fortunate to receive needed State aid, as the current formulas take into account the sparseness of the 553-square-mile district as well as the economic factors. Currently, Cody-Kilgore students are nearly 60% eligible for free or reduced meals, the statistic used to determine poverty in a district. After amending, the Cody-Kilgore proposed budget will be \$1,987,364 with State aid contributing \$954,300.

The majority of the cost, obviously, goes to personnel. We need a full staff to offer the best educational opportunities for our students, as well as to comply with accreditation requirements. Cody-Kilgore still needs a secondary science teacher. Blue-Cross Blue Shield insurance increased nine percent, which

translates to \$13,500. The gas costs for our transportation vehicles increased considerably, which will cost about \$6,000. These are two of the reasons why an election was necessary.

The staff is pleased with the expenditure increase because the secondary level is in dire need of updated Math and Science textbooks. These have been ordered.

The success of this election was due to the understanding of the voters, the strong support from the Board and staff. Special thanks to Tom Elliott, Cherry County Clerk, for his special assistance in this new type of election and for his guidance. Special thanks also to our attorney, John Recknor, for his guidance with all the legal matters. Cody-Kilgore is and will continue to be a leader in providing our students with the best educational opportunities feasible within the constraints of our location, etc. 

Statistics For PUBLIC Nebraska Schools 2002-2003

Source: Nebraska Department of Education

- Number of public schools - 1221
- Number of school districts - 517
- Percentage of schools with more than 1,500 students - 1.23% or (15 of 1220)
- Percentage of schools with fewer than 100 students - 37.38% or (456 of 1220)
- Public enrollment - 283,930
- Number of students in elementary schools - 143,051
- Number of students in middle school and junior high - 43,600
- Number of students in high schools - 97,279
- Number of public school teachers - 20,840.11 FTE
- Average student-teacher ratio in Class 1 districts - Elementary/ 10.0
- Average student-teacher ratio in Class 2-5 districts - Elementary/ 13.9 - Secondary/ 14.0
- Average student-teacher ratio in Class 6 districts - Secondary/ 11.1
- Percent of students who are minorities - 24.21% or (54,985 of 283,930)
- Percentage of students in special education programs - 15.9%
- Number of students eligible in the free or reduced price lunch program - 32.4%
- Estimated amount raised by local, state, and federal governments to fund public education in our numbers show:
1998-1999 = \$1,807,304,753.50 - 2001-2002 = \$2,056,371,002.39
- Number of students enrolled in private schools - 41,758
- Estimated number of home-schooled children - 5,086



WHAT WILL WE LEAVE...

(continued from page 2)

nents. As things have unfolded over the past few years, our commissioner and system of standards and assessments have received national attention. Before this is all over, some believe that the Nebraska system may well become the national model for standards and assessments.

Our system is not without flaws. This started with an act of the legislature and the commissioner and his staff were given very little time to prepare. As we identified the flaws, the commissioner and his staff listened and responded. The process improves. NCLB is now in the picture. It's federal law. None of us like it. We now will have additional requirements for testing and reporting. It's not the commissioner's fault. NDE is currently trying to incorporate NCLB into our system with as few modifications as possible.

Assessment has long been the Achilles' heel of our profession. From preschool through Doctoral programs, we are not very good at it. It's very, very hard work. Quality assessment drives instruction. One year during my time as a high school principal, I asked all of my teachers as part of the teacher evaluation process, "why do you give tests?". The answers varied. Some said, "so that I can give grades." Some said, "to prepare students for college." The master teachers all said the exact same thing, "to find out whether my students have learned the material. If they have, we move on. If they haven't, I reteach the material." The research is clear on assessment and the master teachers are correct. Over the years, it has been our master teachers who have played such a significant role in the quality of life in this country. Assessment that does not drive instruction is of little value.

Our profession is at a crossroads. We have an opportunity to truly improve teaching and learning for all children in the state of Nebraska. I believe that the development of multiple, high quality assessments throughout our state gives us the best opportunity to improve our craft and continue to contribute to "improving the quality of life" for the children and citizenry of our country. The responsibility is ours. 

THE ACT OF COMMUNICATION: PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS RESPOND

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task to keep one's ego in check; self-respect, self-control, and self-awareness are all critical elements for the socially aware individual.

3. Practice 'Listening skills' — Listening is a difficult task. When one is willing to cease talking, perhaps stop thinking random thoughts, and begin to listen to others, listening to a speaker could become quite productive. Listening effectively to others can be the most fundamental and powerful tool for everyone.

4. Don't interrupt the speaker — It is maddening, insulting, irritating, and downright rude to interrupt a person speaking. If you have something to say that is of merit to others, say it; otherwise, remain silent and let others present their ideas. By listening, one might discover some new insight.

5. Clarify the message with the speaker — After having experienced a difficult conversation, select the best method for leaving the speaker with a "positive feeling" about their decision. Let the focus of your comments be directed at "thinking positive" about the discussion. It is much more difficult to express positive comments after having heard something with which you vigorously disagree than to express all of the negative things you heard.

6. Restate the message heard — DePasquale holds that, "To ensure the verbal message is received it should become common practice for the superintendent/principal to re-state the message they have heard. This takes practice and a little more additional time;

however, it is time well spent to ensure the verbal message was heard correctly."

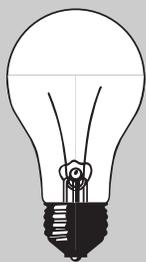
Summary and Conclusion

There is a problematic area in administration; but effective methods for a resolution exist. Adams (2003) stated, "there is no substitute for clear, effective communications by all members of that organization. . . . if administrators wish to have positive daily communications among staff, they should model the anticipated behavior." To be the most influential as a communicator, the leader must identify those behaviors / interactions that have the greatest influence (Reeves); these behaviors / interactions provide the greatest opportunity to make a significant difference in the success of both the principal and the superintendent. Miscommunication will decrease, understanding will increase and expectations for each administrator will be more clearly defined; ultimately, this leads to more confidence within the administrative team and more satisfaction for each member of that team.

References

Adams, F. (2003). Adjusting administrative behavior: Learning to get along with LOTS of distractions. *The Education World BEACON*, 4 (3), pp. 9-13.

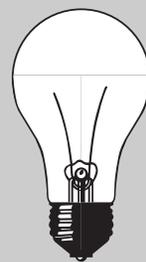
Reeves, D. B. (2002). *The daily disciplines of leadership: How to improve student achievement, staff motivation, and personal organization*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 



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TIME TO RETHINK THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

(continued from page 1)

chances to pursue personal interests.

While the basic character of high schools has remained relatively unchanged and as they have grown increasingly larger, high schools are beginning to clearly show the effect that they work for some students and they clearly do not work for others. A call to rethink our high schools does not arise from a criticism of the high school experience, just the recognition of its shortcomings. The call to rethink the high school experience also arises from the need to ensure that our high schools work for all of our students.

What kinds of things do we need to think about if we are going to rethink the high school experience so that we have a better chance of making high school work for all of our students? In an effort to leave no child behind, we have to ensure that the high school experience denies no student the opportunity to learn and to receive a quality education. Clearly, many of the features of our current comprehensive high schools do not meet these two tests.

Eight critical features are needed to frame the "rethinking agenda" for reconsidering the high school experience and rethinking what we might do to change our high schools to help them be more effective.

The high school experience needs to be an academic experience. While there is no doubt that the high school experience is a social and cultural experience, we need to refocus high school as an academic experience. We need to find ways to have the adults—administrators, teachers, parents, community leaders, etc.—understand that the focus must be on academic preparation. No one would diminish the importance of the social experiences of the high school or the high school as a means of transmitting our culture to the next generation of citizens. The focus of the high school experience must be on the academic curriculum that each student experiences.

The high school experience must be based upon a clear and focused curriculum. Most of the research would indicate the benefit of a clear and focused common curriculum for all high school stu-

dents. The common curriculum would be a four-year program centered around the basic skills of math, science, reading and writing and social studies/history. Students should have a four-year sequence of courses that form the core of the high school learning experience. While these courses may be differentiated for individual learning abilities and interests, each student's four-year program should be based upon a common academic core of basic skills.

In addition, the common core of academic skills should provide opportunities for the study of in-depth and challenging materials, particularly at the junior and senior levels. The junior and senior levels of coursework need to be re-emphasized and re-energized as "capstone" experiences. During the junior and senior years, students should have the opportunity for learning experiences that integrate the core curriculum they learned in the preceding years. They should have the opportunities to apply their knowledge, to integrate across curriculum disciplines, and to demonstrate that they have mastered the knowledge, skills and dispositions expected.

In successful high schools, the common core curriculum is also a connected curriculum. The curriculum of the high school must be connected on the back end and the front end. In other words, the high school experience is based upon what has happened to the students in their education experiences K-8 and is connected to the next level of experiences post high school. Students need to be prepared to enter formal learning post high school. Students must be prepared to enter the world of work and become engaged in a career path. Students must be prepared to participate in our democratic society.

Connections are foundations of success. The research also indicates that students who are connected to their school through the curriculum, activities programs and networks of caring adults, are students who tend to succeed and take full advantage of the curriculum opportunities that are offered. Multiple research studies have indicated that the

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THE MIND, HEART AND SOUL OF EDUCATION

(continued from page 1)

school programs, as well as summer school, are an exception rather than the norm. Struggling students who need more time cannot feel connected to a school community that will not give them the time they need. Thomas Moore states, (the) "Soul cannot thrive in a fast-paced life because being affected, taking things in and chewing on them, requires time."²

The second factor is the various learning styles of students. In her book *The Soul of Education*, Rachel Kessler noted that strength and leadership in the classroom were usually associated with verbal skills, and the kinesthetic stars often do not have a chance to shine. There are a number of things a school can do to engage the many talents that exist in the school community – hands-on field trips, extra-curricular activities, art, music, etc. Keeping these in place as we pursue academic excellence is a must to engage the mind, heart, and soul of our students.

NCSA is our professional organization that provides a voice for our students' mind, heart, and soul. Our organization creates a group of educators that leads the charge for positive change in the education of our children. I encourage all of you to become actively involved in NCSA and your affiliate organization during this time of rapid change. It is imperative that we provide true community, wisdom, and expression of creativity for the students of Nebraska as we engage in the pursuit of academic excellence. Ultimately, is not the connection among souls what lured us into education, and is that not what education is all about?

Have a great year as we strive to engage the mind, heart, and soul of each student in our state. 

¹Rachel Kessler, *The Soul of Education*, ©2000

² Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul*, ©1992



UPCOMING EVENTS...

OCTOBER 6

Paraeducators' Conference
8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Holiday Inn – Kearney, NE

OCTOBER 7-8

Governor's Summit on Workforce
Development
Embassy Suites – Lincoln, NE

OCTOBER 16

NARSA Fall Event
James Arthur Vineyards - Raymond, NE
4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
For more information call Angie at
800-793-6272

OCTOBER 22-25

National Rural Education Association
Conference
Holiday Inn - Kearney, NE
For more information, visit
www.nrea.net

OCTOBER 26-28

All Principals Conference
Golf Tournament – October 26th
Cornhusker Hotel – Lincoln, NE

NOVEMBER 10

Assistant Principals Conference
Cornhusker Hotel - Lincoln, NE

NOVEMBER 13-14

NASES/NDE Joint Meeting

NOVEMBER 17-19

Gates Training for Administrators Other
Than Superintendents or Principals
ESU #7 - Columbus, NE

NOVEMBER 19

New Superintendents Meeting
Holiday Inn Central - Omaha, NE

NOVEMBER 19-21

NASA/NASB State Convention
Holiday Inn Central - Omaha, NE
For more information visit
www.nebr-schoolboards.org

**For information and to
register online for any of the above
events, please visit
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TIME TO RETHINK THE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

(continued from page 9)

extent to which students feel connected to their school, feel connected to their families, and feel connected to their communities, is the extent to which their achievement is predicted to be successful. Schools that have implemented broad activity programs that give students opportunities to connect to school in ways outside the curriculum tend to be successful schools. Schools that develop smaller learning communities where students are part of “families” within the school feel deeper connections to the school experience. Schools-within-schools are a successful strategy for developing ways to provide students opportunities to feel more engaged, worthy and connected.

The high school experience needs to be personalized. Personalizing the high school is very difficult when students move throughout the building from course to course, from scheduled time to scheduled time, and basically have their “place” in the school in a metal locker located in the hallway. As a result, many students do not feel personally connected to the school in intimate and meaningful ways. Schools that have implemented advisory programs for high school students have found them to be effective ways of developing personal relationships between adults and students in the school. Advisors staying with students three to four years is also an effective strategy. Schools that have implemented sequences of courses where teachers stay with groups of students for more than a single semester or academic year have found that student achievement gains are significant.

Successful high schools are results oriented. Successful high schools create teams of teachers, administrators, and other adults who constantly work on improving the high school experience for groups as well as individual students. Successful high schools are schools where the adults in the school spend a great deal of time using data to figure out what it is they are doing, who is successful, who is not successful and discussing strategies for maintaining successes in those areas of strength and in developing strategies to resolve the areas where they are not strong.

Successful schools have an orientation toward data and use of data to determine the success of the strategies that are implemented. School improvement is a pervasive element of the conversations of departments, faculty teams, whole faculties and schools in successful high schools.

Successful high schools are professional places for educators. In successful high schools, teachers feel like professionals. Successful schools are schools where teachers are treated as professionals, where teachers work in teams, and where professional development in the implementation of successful strategies is a common part of the experience of the professional educator.

Successful schools are flexible in the use of time. Successful schools find ways to be flexible about time, giving students the opportunity for an academic experience that is in-depth and challenging. In addition, successful schools find ways to utilize time as a resource to support students who may be struggling and who may need extra time. In successful schools, the curriculum does not march on until the students are ready to move forward and time is a variable, not a constant.

We do need to rethink the high school experience in order to make sure that the high school experience is successful and inclusive of all our students. As diversity in our high schools grows, we will be tested on the degree to which we are serious about ensuring that all children have opportunities to learn and have access to the outcomes of a quality education.

Our society is absolutely dependent upon our students having a quality education throughout their K-12 years and most especially during the high school years. It is the high school years that form the connections for the next steps that students take when they leave our public schools. A successful high school experience ensures a successful transition to continued learning, entrance into the world of work, and becoming a contributing member to our society for all students. 



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NCSA

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Calendar of Events

OCTOBER

1	NSASSP Region IV, 1:00 p.m., ESU #10	Kearney
6	Paraeducators Conference, 8:00 a.m., Holiday Inn	Kearney
7-8	Gov's Summit on Workforce, 7:00 a.m., Embassy Suites	Lincoln
8	NASA Region III, 9:00 a.m., Wayne State College	Wayne
8	NASA Region V, 12:00 noon, Country Kitchen	Ogallala
9	NASA Region IV, 9:00 a.m., Holiday Inn	Kearney
16	NCSA Executive Board, 9:00 a.m., NCSA Offices	Lincoln
20	NAESP Region II, 5:30 p.m., UNO - Milo Bales Center	Omaha
22-25	NREA Conference, Holiday Inn	Kearney
24	NAESP Region I, 2:00 p.m., Hamlow Elementary	Waverly
26	All Principals Golf Tournament, 1:00 p.m. HiMark Golf Course	Lincoln
27-28	All Principals Conference, 9:00 a.m., Cornhusker Hotel	Lincoln
28	NAESP Executive Board, 11:00 a.m., Cornhusker Hotel	Lincoln
28	NSASSP Executive Board, 11:00 a.m., Cornhusker Hotel	Lincoln

NOVEMBER

5	NAESP Region III, 3:00 p.m., Lifelong Learning Center	Norfolk
7	NAESP Region I, 12:00 noon, Chances R	York
10	Assistant Principals Conference, 8:00 a.m., Cornhusker Hotel	Lincoln
11	NSASSP Region II, 5:30 p.m., German American Society	Omaha
12	NARSA Executive Board, 10:00 a.m., NCSA Offices	Lincoln
12	NSASSP Region I, 5:30 p.m., Seward Country Club	Lincoln
12	NSASSP Region III, 2:00 p.m., ESU #8	Neligh
12	NASA Region V, 12:00 noon, Country Club	Alliance
13-14	NASES/NDE Joint Mtg., 1:00 p.m., TBD	Lincoln
17-19	Other Gates Training, 8:30 a.m., ESU #7	Columbus
19	NAESP Region II, 5:30 p.m., Champions Club	Omaha
19	New Superintendents Mtg., 2:00 p.m., Holiday Inn Central	Omaha
19-21	NASA/NASB State Convention, 8:00 a.m., Holiday Inn Central	Omaha
19	NASA Executive Board, 12:00 noon, Holiday Inn Central	Omaha
21	NASA General Membership Mtg. 9:00 a.m. Holiday Inn Central	Omaha

NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

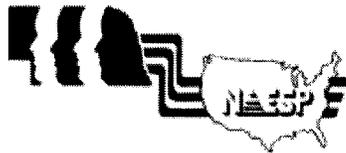
October 31-November 4 - ASBO National Convention - Charlotte, NC
February 27-March 1 - NASSP National Convention - Orlando

February 19-22 - NASA National Convention - San Francisco
April 16-20 - NAESP National Convention - San Francisco

The NAESP Link

Nebraska Association of Elementary School Principals' Newsletter

OCTOBER 2003



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Children First

~Troy Juracek, Principal, Hamlow Elementary, School District 145

Why do we do what we do--all the hours, the meetings and the paperwork? Is it because we are "children first?" Yes, I believe being "children first" is a large part of it but that expression has lost some of its impact because of its frequent use. There must be something more. It's because we have PASSION! Being an educator isn't so much a job, it is more a passion. Sure, we get paid for what we do, but for many of us, being an educator is our life's work—our passion. Sometimes the best "pay" we get for our job is not in our check. It is in the words that children use to express themselves, a smile on their face, and knowing that we made a difference that day for a child.

Challenges may come and go, but the passion residing within continues to fuel our energy to meet the many demands of our job and resolve many of the challenges facing children. A passion for teaching children allows us to create many wonderful opportunities for our staff and students. An unknown author stated that "Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath". What can we achieve as an educator, a region, and as NCSA that will take our breath away?

I hope your school year is off to an excellent start. I am sure your year will be filled with student achievements, many points of satisfaction that you will enjoy and opportunities to expand your professional friendships as part of NAESP.



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Receive the recognition you deserve for your school's positive contribution to your community. Three elementary schools will be granted \$10,000 each as recipients of the Boyer Best Practices Award 2004. This prize will be presented to schools in appreciation of a service-learning program that connects curriculum and community. The purpose of this honor is to promote the development and evaluation of these beneficial programs, and to encourage exemplary practices in elementary education.

For more information or application materials and criteria, go to www.boyercenter.org. Applications are due by December 1. —Dateline NAESP