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**THE PERCEIVED ATTITUDES OF REGISTERED VOTERS OF
SMALL NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS
TOWARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

by

Dennis C. Shipp

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Larry L. Dlugosh

Lincoln, Nebraska

December, 1996

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The Perceived Attitudes of Registered Voters of Small Nebraska Public

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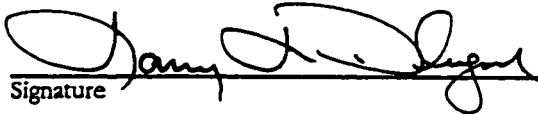
BY

Dennis C. Shipp

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

APPROVED

DATE



Signature

12-2-96

Larry L. Dlugosh

Typed Name



Signature

12-2-96

Marilyn L. Grady

Typed Name



Signature

12-2-96

Thomas Petrie

Typed Name



Signature

12-2-96

Stan Vasa

Typed Name

Signature

Typed Name

Signature

Typed Name

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SMALL NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS
TOWARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Dennis C. Shipp, Ed.D.

University of Nebraska, 1996

Advisor: Larry L. Dlugosh

In this study, the attitudes held by registered voters living in small Nebraska school districts were compared with the findings from the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Concerning the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools.

Ten small school districts were randomly selected from size appropriate public schools listed in Membership Data 1994-1995 (Nebraska State Department of Education, 1995). A telephone survey, using questions from the 26th annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, was conducted with registered voters from the selected school districts.

The results of the study revealed 14 survey items in which there was a difference between the national sample and the small school sample. The differences were grouped into three general categories.

1. The first category related to state or national mandates, initiatives, and programs. Differences were found between the two samples on items concerning school choice, school improvement programs, charter schools, contracting of public schools by private companies, and violence in public education. The small school sample participants were more apt to reject the idea of mandates and federal initiatives than the Gallup survey participants.

2. The second category, which included personal/character items, revealed differences in the responses of the two samples on items such as character education. The small school sample participants were more likely to support issues concerning teaching about character education in the public schools than the Gallup survey participants.

3. The third category, where a difference was found, included the respondents' personal perceptions toward public schools and involvement of the community in public school activities. Respondents to the small school survey were more apt to support their local public schools by attending various school activities than were the Gallup survey participants.

Although there were differences in the perceptions of the small school participants and national participants, none of the 14 items that met the criteria of the study showed significant differences between the responses of the small school sample by levels of age and by parent/non-parent status.

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Lastly, to my dad and mom, this is for you. Your high expectations during those early years taught me to expect excellence of myself. Without your caring guidance, my life would have been much different. I owe you everything. Thank you.

D.C.S.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

The importance of education, especially as it serves to create an informed citizenry, has been a topic of discussion since America's inception. Tyler (1994) cited Thomas Jefferson's view of education:

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves; and if we think they are not enlightened enough to exercise their control with wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education. (p. vii)

The founding fathers held expectations and attitudes about future citizens and the importance education would play in society. They appeared to view dissemination of information as a basic component of education. Education was viewed by America's founders as a means to ensure that all citizens were well-informed and able to make intelligent decisions for themselves and the welfare of the nation. In the past two centuries, the nation has changed.

Today, Americans have fragmented into subgroups, and they formulate and express their opinions in many different ways, such as their beliefs about sex and AIDS education, civil rights education, and, in some instances, abortion rights education. Could the nation's founders have dreamed that American citizens would have such differing attitudes toward education? Are differing attitudes due to the interaction of diverse

cultures? Education officials must find answers to these questions if free, public education is to successfully survive into the next century.

Understanding the attitudes of citizens toward public education and how those attitudes relate to demographic characteristics merits study. The success or failure of school-related projects depends, in part, on school personnel with access to, and an understanding of, the perceptions of citizens about public schools. If there is to be financial and emotional support for education from diverse community groups, school officials must become familiar with and document citizen attitudes toward public education.

Most parents would agree that an academic background, in areas such as reading, writing, and mathematics, is important to their children's future; however, they also want their children to be taught a myriad of other skills. Those skills may or may not be academic in nature. Roper (1950) found that when adults were asked what their children should gain from a K-12 education, academic background ranked behind discipline and vocational training.

Stayn (1992) investigated community perceptions of the goals of education and attitudes of people toward public education. He noted that social problems from past decades had a negative impact on education. Events such as the assassination of national leaders, campus unrest, social reform, and proliferation of drug use among students and citizens created a feeling of public unrest toward the public schools. The citizens who were surveyed in Stayn's study lived in urban areas with large public school systems.

Roper (1950) and Stayn (1992) and other related literature have focused on the perceptions of citizens in larger school districts. Few authors have surveyed the attitudes of citizens toward public schools in small school districts.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived attitudes of registered voters toward public education in small Nebraska public school districts.

Rationale and Importance of the Study

In much of the related literature, there was a lack of information about the attitudes of citizens in smaller school districts toward public education. Small school districts comprise 27.9 percent of the total number of school districts in America (Glass, 1992) and 45.7 percent of the total number of K-12 public school districts in Nebraska (Nebraska State Department of Education, 1995). Because of the large percentage of small school districts and the lack of information about the perceptions of their citizens, new data that could be useful to other researchers in the future will be provided by this study.

Significance of the Study

This study provides new information about the attitudes of registered voters about public education in small school districts in Nebraska. The

results of this study may assist school administrators and boards of education in small school districts by increasing their understanding of the perceptions of their patrons. These perceptions will provide useful insight for building school-community committees that will effectively work together to improve education at the local level.

Research Questions

An objective of this study was to answer the following research questions:

1. Were there differences between the responses of a national sample and a sample of Nebraska voters in small school districts to the questions asked in the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Concerning the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools?
2. Were there differences among responses of the Nebraska voters in small school districts by age and parent/non-parent status on selected questions asked in the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Concerning the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools?

Procedures for the Study

A review of literature was undertaken by accessing the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Dissertation Abstracts Corporation, Innovative Research Information System (IRIS), and the rural education database. Telephone calls were made to selected experts in the field of rural and small school research for the purpose of obtaining additional

related literature. Few researchers had addressed citizens' attitudes toward public schools in small school districts. The majority of the research about attitudes toward public schools had been compiled by researchers who studied larger school systems and their citizens.

A telephone survey, using questions from the twenty-sixth annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, was conducted with voters of selected, small Nebraska school districts. The offices of the Gallup organization in Lincoln, Nebraska and Princeton, New Jersey were contacted to obtain permission to use the questions of the twenty-sixth poll. Verbal permission and a signed, written document granting the permission were provided by an official in the Gallup organization (see Appendix A).

Ten small school districts in Nebraska that met the criteria of Glass's (1992) definition of a small school district were randomly selected from size appropriate public schools listed in the Nebraska Elementary and Secondary Education Membership Data for 1995 (Nebraska Department of Education, 1995). The county seat for each of the school districts was identified, and the county clerks were contacted to obtain the names of registered voters. For coding purposes, each registered voter was assigned a number by the researcher. Eight registered voters were randomly selected from each district. The telephone numbers for each of the participants was obtained, and the telephone survey was administered.

After completion of the data collection, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Research Center (NEAR) assisted in analysis of the data. Comparisons of respondent percentages between the Gallup Poll and the Nebraska small school district study group were analyzed. The non-

parametric tests that were used were the chi-square, the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney, and Kruskal-Wallis tests. The non-parametric tests were applied to items with a fifteen percentage point difference between the national group and the small school study group or when the question was deemed to be important to the researcher because of specific, local concerns.

Definition of Terms

Attitudes. A state of mind or a feeling; disposition.

Class III Nebraska public school district. A school district with a population of more than one thousand and less than one hundred thousand inhabitants, in which both elementary and high school grades are maintained under the direction of a single board of education.

Class II Nebraska public school district. A school district with a population of one thousand inhabitants or less, in which both elementary and high school grades are maintained under the direction of a single school board.

Nebraska public school. A school listed as a Nebraska public school by the Nebraska Department of Education.

Perception. A direct or intuitive recognition, intelligent discernment, or a capacity for comprehension.

Phi Delta Kappa. An international professional, fraternal organization for education. The Annual Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Education is sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa.

Public. The citizens of a jurisdiction (in the case of this study, small Nebraska school districts).

Registered voter. Those individuals who have legally registered to vote and are on file with the country clerk in the proper jurisdiction.

Small school. The number of students in grades 9-12 in a given school district as defined by Glass (1992). In this study, 300 or fewer students in grades 9-12 was used to define a small school district.

Twenty-sixth Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. A public poll conducted for Phi Delta Kappa by the Gallup Organization in 1994 to assess the public's attitudes toward public education.

Limitations

Certain limitations may have influenced the results of this study.

1. The information was self-reported.
2. Voters from only ten public school districts participated.
3. The conclusions of the study are applicable only to the participating ten small Nebraska public school districts and may not be generalizable to other school districts.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made for this study.

1. The perceived attitudes toward public schools of the registered voters taking part in this study were accurate.

2. The Twenty-sixth Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools was an appropriate instrument to measure registered voters' attitudes.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature is presented in three sections. Attempts by researchers to define the parameters of a small school district are discussed in the first section. Attempts by researchers to identify and present the attitudes of the public toward public education in the United States are examined in the second section. Viewpoints from researchers about the public's perceived attitudes toward social-curricular and academic-curricular expectations of public education are included in the third section.

Although personnel of small school districts have benefited from past research concerning the public's attitudes toward public education, the information has not been specifically aimed at small districts. In the last several decades it has been the responsibility of local school districts and their communities to work together to plan for the future of the schools. This important process, in most instances, has been led by school administrators and community members. Administrators and community members from small school districts have had little research to aid in the process of successful implementation of plans for the future of their students. Small school administrators, board of education members, and other members of the community lack information to plan for their school districts' future; this is addressed in the second section of this chapter.

Defining the Parameters of a Small School District

Several researchers have defined the parameters of a small, public school district. Glass (1992) has conducted research for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) over several decades. Over a period of years, the designation of school size by Glass for the AASA has served as a consistent measure of the school superintendency by school district size. His research has helped to increase school administrators' awareness about the differences among superintendencies according to school district size. Glass used the school district student population of 300 or less to define the smallest category of school district in his studies. Researchers have defined small and/or rural schools using a wide variety of descriptions. Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) defined small districts as "having fewer than 3,000 students" (p. 2). By the Schmucks' definition, approximately 75 percent of American school districts would be included in the small district category. Several researchers used the words rural and small to define school district size. McCracken (1995) found:

A rural public high school was defined as one located outside a standard metropolitan statistical area, in a county with a total population of less than 40,000 people, offering a course in vocational agriculture, and having an enrollment of 500 or fewer students. (p. 13)

The United States Census Bureau defined rural areas as "communities with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants or fewer than 1,000 inhabitants per square mile" (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 14). Seal and Harmon (1995) noted that the majority of school districts in many states in the country are rural. For example, in West Virginia, 64 percent of the

population reside in rural areas. According to Howley and Howley (1995), "In the 1990-91 school year, following decades of successful consolidation of rural schools, nearly half (46.4 percent) of regular operating schools were located in rural areas or small towns" (p. 128). If consolidation had not occurred in West Virginia, this percentage would have been considerably higher.

History of Attitudes Toward the Public Schools

Many of the recent research initiatives about the attitudes toward public schools have come from federal and state agencies. Several articles about the America 2000 initiative have been written for the Phi Delta Kappan. Sewall (1991), editor of the Social Studies Review and director of the American Textbook Council, said:

The proposals in American 2000 reify the Bush Administration's novel and important premise that the national government has a major responsibility to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education. This kind of intervention constitutes a new federal role in education, one set in motion during the 1980s. (p. 204)

Howe (1991), a former United States Commissioner of Education, was concerned about America 2000 and the new federal influence over schooling.

As Congress considered legislation to move various aspects of this document from conception to action, our law makers would be well-advised to keep this major power shift clearly in mind. In addition, friends of education must remember that the President has immense powers that the Congress cannot control--powers that can boost the stock of innovations, whether they are working or not; powers that can attract

private funding to support his model of school reform; powers to sway public opinion at the state and local levels; and powers to direct research on education by controlling who receives federal funds. My main concern about this new growth in federal influence in education stems in part from the vigor and prominence of statements in the document averring that no such thing is intended. (p. 193)

Doyle (1991) also wrote about his concerns with regard to the America 2000 initiative. "The central role of the federal government in protecting the civil rights of all Americans in all settings has produced a particularly vigorous federal presence in the nation's schools" (p. 188).

There has been ambiguity concerning the perceived attitudes the public has toward public schools for many generations. The Seven Cardinal Principles of Education were an early attempt by the Educational Policies Commission (1918) to define the proper function of the public school. Some of the expectations the public seemed to have toward schools included: (1) to teach about good health; (2) command of fundamental processes; (3) worthy home memberships; (4) vocational efficiency; (5) civic efficiency; (6) worthy use of leisure; and (7) ethical character. According to the Educational Policies Commission, the Seven Cardinal Principles were important to students, and school officials should seek to promote them as part of their mission.

Kirkendall (1948) researched public perceptions toward public education for the American Federation of Teachers. His conclusions included the following:

1. School officials should help close the gap between scientific advance and social retardation.

2. Individuals must be prepared in the schools to create and lead effectively in a cooperative and independent society.
3. The interest and concern of people in international cooperation and the maintenance of a just and durable peace must be extended through the schools.
4. School officials must help to secure acceptance of the idea of democracy in social, economic, and political arrangements.
5. Values must be developed in the schools that serve to guide the individuals toward high standards of moral conduct and ethical living.
6. The development of creative abilities and avenues of expression in constructive activities must be advanced in the schools.
7. School officials must ensure the mastery of the common integrating knowledge and skills necessary to effective daily living.

The above conclusions included many social expectations that opened a venue for critics to explore. The general public, at this juncture in time, seemed to view public schools as a positive part of building students' lives. There were few critical attitudes held by the public toward public schools during the 1900s through the 1940s.

During the 1950s, individuals actively voiced their opinions concerning what they believed to be the function of public education. Arthur Bestor (cited in Nutz, 1980) was a critic of public education. According to him, public education at every level was meant to provide training in the fundamental subjects--literature, art, language, and other disciplines. Bestor thought that public education should limit educational

expectations to intellectual development, while having other institutions deal with the social issues.

In the 1960s, a growing need to prioritize educational expectations and attitudes appeared. Many thought the local school and community should have a major role in that process. That need was expressed in the White House Conference Report on Education (1956).

The development of intellectual powers of young people, each to the limit of his capacity, is the first responsibility of the schools. Beyond this task, all kinds of instruction are not equally important for all children, and their importance varies from community to community. A primary responsibility of any local school authority is to establish priorities of significance among basic general education, specialized education of all kinds, and extra-curricular activities. (p. 11)

Nutz (1980) viewed the 1960s as a decade best represented by a feeling of unrest. Developments, such as the assassination of national leaders, conflicts over desegregation, campus unrest, a proliferation of drug use among students and citizens, more violence, continuous debate over the Vietnam War, and corruption in government, were viewed as social turmoil that led to public educational unrest.

With the social unrest of the 1960s, reports came from the Gallup Poll of student unrest in the public schools. The area of greatest concern to the American public from 1969-1973, as reported in the Gallup Poll (Elam, 1973), was the lack of student discipline. As the Gallup organization reported in the following years, this national perception prevailed for another 15 years. In later studies, concern with the lack of student discipline was overshadowed by the drug use of students (Elam, 1988). In these later studies, lack of discipline and lack of finances were a

distant second and third. One hypothesis at that time was that drug use constituted one part of the general lack of discipline by the students.

To some, the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966) dealt a major blow to public education. In his statement on public education, Coleman concluded that societal factors had more to do with students' success in school than did formal schooling. He reported that general societal factors, such as where a student lived, racial heritage, gender, economic background, and environmental conditions, were more important to success in school than formal public schooling. Some positive remarks concerning public schools were made by Coleman in his report to the public; however, they were overshadowed by his final conclusion, in which he stated that society, not school, influences student behavior.

. . . schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context; . . . that very lack of independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their home, neighborhood, and peer environment are carried along to become inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity, the schools must employ a strong effect that is independent of the child's immediate social environment, and that strong independent effect is not present in American schools. (p. 325)

In their research study, Jencks and a group of Harvard colleagues (Jencks, et al., 1972) found virtually the same results as the writers of the Coleman Report. They concluded, "We cannot blame economic inequality on differences between schools, since differences between schools seem to have very little effect on any measurable attributes of those who attend them" (p. 8).

Other researchers attempted to disprove the remarks made by Coleman in his report, such as, a caste system was in place in American schools and only social issues will determine if a student will be successful in public schools. In addition an attempt was made by the researchers to locate and identify the "effective" public schools. Studies by Brookover (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte (1979) were among the most cited of the effective school research studies. Brookover and Lezotte reported findings from research on public schools to support the following criteria for "effective" public schools:

1. Strong leadership by the principal or other staff
2. High expectations by staff for student achievement
3. A clear set of goals and an emphasis for the school
4. An effective, school-wide staff training program
5. A system for monitoring student progress
6. A safe and orderly climate

The effective schools research gave rise to other studies about public school structure, effectiveness, and leadership at a time when confidence in American public education was on the decline. Wayson, Lintz, and Achilles (1989) reported about high-confidence schools--schools with some of the same characteristics as the effective schools discussed above, but with some of the following additions:

1. High-confidence schools have clear purposes and objectives worked out between, and communicated widely within, schools and the community;
2. Schools with high levels of confidence are safe and orderly;

3. Most high-confidence schools employ some regular needs sensing, frequently conducting an annual survey;
4. Schools with confidence exhibit "openness," warmth and honesty, two-way communication patterns;
5. Schools with confidence use newsletters;
6. Schools with confidence have much parental and community involvement;
7. High-confidence schools encourage older adults to visit on all sorts of occasions;
8. High-confidence schools have performances of all kinds;
9. High-confidence schools emphasize the parents' role in educating their children;
10. Schools with confidence have strong orientation programs for new students and parents;
11. High-confidence schools focus on good news; and
12. Schools with confidence have instructional and extra-curricular "extras." (pp. 19-22)

There were several parallels between effective schools and public confidence in schools. Some of those parallels were a safe and orderly system for students and evaluation of the current program to assess effectiveness of the schools' programs.

Johnson and Immerwahr (1994) concluded, "Americans still respect the teaching profession and value its significance. In fact, Americans think that 'good teachers' are the single most important ingredient in sound education and good schools" (p. 37). Rather, they found emerging doubts among Americans about the capabilities of teachers for their jobs. If the

majority of the citizens of a school district feel the above is true, a serious confidence problem will exist in that school district.

The research studies about effective schools and school confidence have enabled many public school administrators, boards of education, and communities to contemplate their own educational goals and objectives by using the information to guide their planning efforts.

A report of a study conducted in the late 1980s (America 2000, 1991) about public attitudes toward their public schools was released on April 18, 1991. Following the release, at a White House meeting with the nation's governors, President Bush unveiled the America 2000 plan for the nation's schools.

By 2000, we've got to, first, ensure that every child starts school ready to learn; second, raise the high school graduation rate to 90 percent; third, ensure that each American student leaving the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades can demonstrate the competence in core subjects; fourth, make our students first in the world in math and science achievements; fifth, ensure that every American adult is literate and has the skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercises the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and sixth, liberate every American school from drugs and violence so that schools encourage learning. (p. 2)

On a national level, many public school administrators and citizens agreed with President Bush's assessment and plan for the public schools. In reports of the Gallup Poll, researchers noted that the public viewed drugs and alcohol as the greatest problem in the public schools in 1990, 1991, and 1992. In 1994 (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994), fighting/gangs and lack of discipline had replaced drugs and alcohol as the greatest problem that public schools must deal with on a daily basis. In 1994, there

was still a high percentage of the citizens who viewed drug use as a problem that was leading to other serious problems in the public schools. In 1994, at least seventy percent of those polled believed that the reason why violence/gangs were on the increase was due to the easy availability of drugs and alcohol.

According to Johnson and Immerwahr (1994), "For most Americans, three images sum up their sense that the public schools are failing: metal detectors in high schools, students outside schools smoking during school hours, and supermarket checkout clerks who can't make change" (p. 11). Johnson and Immerwahr reported that 76 percent of the public would support a proposal to permanently ban students from school for one year if they were caught on school grounds with weapons or drugs. Eighty-four percent of those parents who currently had a student in school would support the same proposal. In the same study, 76 percent of the parents questioned agreed that persistent troublemakers should be taken out of class, which was three percent more than the public as a whole. From these findings, it would appear that parents of students enrolled in K-12 schools were more worried about the well-being of their children and the public schools than the general citizens.

Summary

Documented attempts to define the attitudes and roles of public schools go as far back as 1918. There have been many research studies conducted about public schools. The studies have included research such as the Seven Cardinal Principles to the first formal public attitude measurement toward public schools by the Gallup organization.

Public Attitudes Toward the Public Schools' Social Curriculum

The question concerning community and citizens' attitudes toward their public schools has been asked in various ways over the past several decades. Public schools have been social institutions with a wide range of expectations since their inception centuries ago. Commenting about the social purpose of public schools, Goodlad and Tyler (1994) stated:

Armies are created in anticipation of threats of war, police forces because crime is getting out of hand, banks when the direct bartering of goods becomes cumbersome, postal systems when face-to-face communication no longer is adequate, schools when the education needed is more than parents are able to provide. As new needs arise, existing institutions are called upon to do new things or new institutions are created. In the process, some institutions change so much that very little of what they once did remains. Some institutions change very little, even in the face of new demands and continue for many more years before disappearing or being forced to change. Some institutions take on things that society never specifically nor officially asked them to do and things that they rarely include in citing their own functions. (p. 15)

Goodlad and Tyler (1994), in the same publication, went on to comment that public schools, since their establishment, have been used to achieve social purposes. They stated, "Schools should take on only those social purposes that are most readily converted to educational goals" (p. 22).

Stayn (1992) noted that part of the school's mission is to promote the social development of children as individuals who are capable of functioning in a changing world. According to the results of Stayn's survey, citizens perceived the school was doing "enough" to promote social

growth in its students. Roper (1950) and his colleagues found that approximately 90 percent of the public perceived part of the schools' task was to train the whole child, including the domains of honesty, fair play, considering others, and teaching a sense of right and wrong. Many of those surveyed in the rural south thought religion should be taught in the public schools.

Elam (1973) reported that people have different reasons for wanting their children to obtain an education. Forty-three percent of the people taking part in the survey cited a need for the schools to help children get along better with people at all levels of society. When participants of a similar survey (Elam, 1994) were asked if the public schools should include courses on character education to help students develop personal values and ethical behavior, 49 percent of the general public favored such a proposal. Fifty-seven percent of the participants who had a student in school favored the proposal. In the same study, Elam (1994) found that when citizens were asked if certain character traits, such as respect for others, industry or hard work, persistence or the ability to follow through, fairness in dealing with others, compassion for others, civility, self-esteem, high expectations for oneself, and thrift, should be taught in public schools the results were quite favorable. Every character trait had at least a 90 percent "yes" rating for teaching those traits in public schools, with the exception of high expectations for oneself (87% "yes") and thrift (74% "yes").

Differences of opinion undoubtedly will continue to occur about the topic of "character education" and what part public school officials should

be expected to play in its development. Woodring (1983) summed up the topic of character education in public schools:

It seems probable that a school's best contribution to character development is made, not by special courses or specific acts, but as an indirect result of all that we do and of our own character as it is perceived by our students. Clear rules of behavior, fairly enforced, may help; but I doubt that character is greatly influenced by school prayer, ritualized pledges of allegiance, or the close-order drill of which military schools think so highly. Character is a by-product--a very important by-product--of a good school and good teachers, whether the school is public, private, or parochial. (p. 57)

Sex education is another area where the public has seemed to be unsure about their expectations for the schools. Johnson and Immerwahr (1994) found that 95 percent of the participants in their study perceived that it was the schools' role to teach the biology of sex and pregnancy. Ninety-seven percent of the participants said the schools should teach students about sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS. The above statistics indicate the participants expected the schools to teach about sex education in general; however, with these statistics, the consensus stopped and disagreement began. For example, Johnson and Immerwahr noted that "31 percent of the participants want the schools to teach that sex before marriage is always wrong Twenty-two percent say this is not at all appropriate" (p. 27). In the same study, two differing comments were made by the participants:

I'm sorry, but if you think that abstinence is the only thing you can do before marriage, you're burying your head in the sand. (p. 28)

My wife and I have talked a lot about this [sex education], and we've decided we're going to handle this at home. We don't feel it's the schools' job to teach our [children] birth control. (p. 28)

Although there would seem to be some positive consensus among the American public about the public schools' role in teaching sex education, problems arise when the "what" and "how" of teaching about sex education are addressed. Woodring (1983) stated:

. . . it is impossible to discuss the subject without proposing, or at least implying, some sense of values. If a teacher avoids all value judgments, students are likely to conclude that one choice is as good as another. (pp. 51-52)

For many decades, there have been proponents of teaching social skills in the public schools; however, there has been little consensus as to which social skills are the most important. Slagle (cited by Nutz, 1980) found that the sub-group of laborers gave a high priority to the development of social skills. Araki (1969) found, in his study of Hawaiian citizens, that the social domain was given highest priority. Ethnic diversity was cited by Araki as the chief reason for the high priority. Branlinger (1985) reported that low-income parents were concerned about class discrimination. Parents in his study believed there was not equal opportunity for all students, and they were powerless to change the fact. The above findings would support those of the Coleman (1966) and Jenck's (1972) studies cited earlier.

School officials have been asked to deal with an increasingly greater share of America's social concerns. Although the social issues rarely start at the school level, public school teachers and staff are expected to educate

their students in areas that may not necessarily be a part of their district's goals and objectives. When loss of control concerning a particular social problem occurs at the public level, the focal point to remedy the social problem by educating the students seems to take place at the public school level. Elam (1988) noted that parents have the most confidence in the ability of the public schools to deal with the problems of drug abuse and alcohol abuse. There is a great deal of public faith in the schools to solve increasing problems in society; public school officials are expected to solve social problems as if they were part of each public school district's original mission.

Public Attitudes Toward the Public School's Academic Curriculum

According to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1983), "The world has changed irrevocably, and quality education in the 1980s and beyond means preparing all students for the transformed world the coming generation will inherit" (p. 6). Burstyn (1983) noted that technology was changing at a rapid pace and the curriculum in the schools must be prepared for this phenomenon. In the 1990 Gallup Poll, Elam found that in most cases people felt that not enough attention was given to the "basic" subjects. Woodring (1983) said:

In the twentieth century it seems obvious that teaching children to read is the most basic responsibility of the schools because literacy is essential both to good living and to further education. (p. 21)

However, in the 1990 Gallup Poll, 79 percent of those surveyed reported they also wanted more emphasis on computer training, which has not been

listed as one of the basics in educational programs. It would seem the public perceived the educational basis should be taught in the American schools from different perspectives.

Johnson and Immerwahr (1994) found that 60 percent of the Americans who participated in their research perceived that "not enough emphasis on the basics such as reading, writing, and math is a serious problem in their schools--a finding, again, that is particularly revealing because people generally rate local schools more highly" (p. 12). One Minneapolis father responded to the need for more teaching of the basics in school.

It seems to me that when I went to school, we started with the basics, with the basic building blocks. You didn't start writing compositions until you had all the grammar down. . . . Now, it's more like they get plopped down right in the middle and are told, "Write a story and if the spelling isn't right, we'll take care of that later." . . . It's backward. It's like telling an auto mechanic, "You don't have to worry about how the engine works and how the transmission works. We want you to fix these brakes on this car. If you mess up, that OK, we'll take it back and work on it some more." (p. 13)

Johnson and Immerwahr (1994) commented, "People express a sense of frustration and even bewilderment at the inability of the public schools to make mastery of basic skills commonplace among the nation's children" (p. 14). The basic skills included subjects such as reading, writing, and mathematics.

In the 1994 Gallup Poll of public attitudes toward the public schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994), participants perceived more emphasis should be placed on mathematics (82%), English (79%), science (75%), history/U.S. government (62%), geography (61%), foreign language

(52%), music (31%), and art (29%). When comparing the 1994 Gallup Poll results with the 1990 Gallup Poll results on the same issues, several areas of emphasis rose dramatically. Participants believed more emphasis was needed on foreign language (an increase of 15%). Also, 1994 participants believed more emphasis should be placed on the areas of music and art (18% and 17%, respectively). Elam, Rose, and Gallup (1994) found that 89 percent of the respondents believed most public school students had the capacity to learn more in science than they generally did.

Many lists have been formulated to represent the public's attitude in reference to what the school officials are expected to do or what tasks they should perform. In their list, Goodlad and Tyler (1994) put basic skills first:

1. Mastery of basic skills or fundamental processes;
 - 1.1 Develop the ability to acquire ideas through reading and listening;
 - 1.2 Develop the ability to communicate ideas through writing and speaking;
 - 1.3 Develop the ability to understand and utilize mathematical concepts;
 - 1.4 Develop the ability to utilize available sources of information; and
 - 1.5 Develop the ability to read, write, and handle basic arithmetical operations. (p. 46)

Goodlad and Tyler stated, "In our technological civilization, an individual's ability to participate in the activities of society depends on mastery of these fundamental processes" (p. 46). Other goals extended by the authors that

fell under the heading of academic curriculum included career/vocational education and intellectual development.

Vocational training was also felt to be important by the public. Elam (1990) found that 65 percent of those surveyed said more emphasis should be placed on vocational training. Roper (1950) reported that when adults were asked what their children should get from education, academic background ranked third behind discipline and vocational training. Roper said that adults in his study viewed the school as more than just an academic institution with the sole objective to prepare students for college; rather, they saw school as a place to prepare students for what they would encounter during the rest of their lives. In fact, in research dating back to the 1940s, the Harvard Committee (1946) found that education's aim should be to prepare an individual for a particular vocation.

Public Attitudes Toward the Public School Board of Education

There was little information relating to the attitudes that the public had toward the board of education in the literature. Local board of education members in any school district have the power to influence the public's attitudes toward its schools.

Styan (1992) found that attitudes toward the school board are broad and different in all communities. How the school board members respond to their tasks depends on how they view their governance role. In a recent study of school boards, members of the Institute for Education Leadership (cited in Styan, 1992) emphasized, ". . . the role of the local board is pivotal to the success of school improvement efforts. Constructive changes

will be implemented only if they are acceptable to locally perceived values and education needs" (p. 15).

Nunnery and Kimbrough (1971) found that involvement in civic and community activities was central in improving schools. Political involvement was seen as ongoing to the effective board of education. The researchers found that the local board of education was instrumental in setting the tone for the school district, either positive or negative.

Summary

The literature was reviewed to identify public attitudes toward public education in the United States and to enhance the understanding of the history and delineate a timeline of the progression of opinions and/or attitudes the public had toward the American educational system. Defining the perceived attitudes of the public toward public education has been an issue since public education was initiated decades ago and continues to be an issue.

The literature was reviewed to find relevant information to support the public's distinct perceived attitudes about various areas of public education. The areas that were examined and the public's attitudes toward them included social curriculum, academic curriculum, and the school board of education.

Through the review of literature, a framework was presented for the researcher's questions about the attitudes of registered voters of small Nebraska public schools toward the nation's public schools and their local

public schools. Relevant information on this issue was sparse in the review of literature.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The attitudes of registered voters of small Nebraska public school districts about schools were investigated in this study. The focus of the study centered on small public schools, due to the lack of relevant research found in that area. In this study, the attitudes of registered voters living in small Nebraska school districts were compared with the findings of a larger, national poll conducted for similar reasons.

Data Collection Procedures

A list of Nebraska public school districts with corresponding student populations, found in Membership Data 1994-95 (Nebraska State Department of Education, 1995) was obtained. Public school districts with a K-12 student enrollment of 300 or less were identified from this publication. The student enrollment number of 300 or less was determined by using Glass' (1992) definition for "small school districts."

An analysis of the information found in Membership Data 1994-95 (State Department of Education, 1995) yielded 123 Nebraska public school districts with a student enrollment of 300 or less. These schools, which are classified as Class II and III school districts in Nebraska, were considered for participation in this research. Class I, IV, V, and VI public school districts were not used in the research. Nebraska Class I districts included

only elementary grades, Class IV and V districts were too large, and Class VI districts included only high school grades.

A stratified random sample was used to reduce the 123 public schools to the smaller number of ten, which was the number of Nebraska school districts identified for participation in the study.

To ensure proper geographical representation, the 123 public school districts were located on a map of Nebraska. The map was divided into ten geographic regions, each containing 10-13 Class II and Class III public school districts. The school districts in each geographic area were numbered, and a computer generated random numbers list was used to obtain the public school district to represent each geographic area.

The county clerk from each county in which the ten public school districts were located was contacted. The county clerks were asked to provide a numbered list of registered voters in the identified school districts. A computer generated random numbers list was used to obtain eight names from each school district. The county clerk from each school district was asked to provide three additional numbers to be used in the study to account for the registered voters who could not be contacted or declined to be interviewed.

The superintendent or secondary principal from each selected school district was contacted to inform them of their districts' selection for participation in the study. They were provided details about the nature of the study. Each administrator was requested to provide telephone numbers of the eight selected registered voters provided by the county clerk.

After the telephone numbers of the randomly selected individuals were documented, a postcard (see Appendix B) was mailed to each of the 90 potential participants to inform them of the research and the possibility of telephone contact from the researcher. A brief overview of the research and the importance of participation by each individual were included on the postcard. A minimum of one week was allowed for mail delivery before telephone calls were made. Initial calls were made between 5:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. In the event an individual could not respond to the survey during the initial call, an appropriate survey time was scheduled, and a second contact was made.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of the survey data included three non-parametric tests and descriptive statistical measures. Descriptive statistical analysis was used in order to compare the current study with the results of the national Gallup survey, in which the cumulative responses of those polled were reported in percentage form. The rationale for using non-parametric statistical tests was based on the fact that much of the data were measured using a Likert-type scale, which is considered to be an ordinal (ordered category) measurement.

When two-group statistical comparisons were made for the small school group (parent and non-parent groups), the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was employed. The Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test was chosen because it is one of the most powerful of the non-parametric tests when used for small numbers of participants. The test has a power efficiency of

approximately 95 percent when used appropriately. In comparison to the parametric alternative t-test, the Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test has a power level that is almost identical to the t-test when no violations of assumptions have occurred.

The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance by ranks was employed to analyze the comparison between the three age categories for the small school group. The Kruskal-Wallis test is a useful test to determine if independent samples are from different populations. When the Kruskal-Wallis test is compared with the most powerful parametric test, the F test, under conditions where the assumptions associated with the statistical model of the parametric analysis of variance are met, the Kruskal-Wallis test has asymptotic efficiency of 95.5 percent. The Kruskal-Wallis test is appropriate with a small population and was therefore suited to this study.

Items in which the participant was required to choose between only two responses were analyzed by using the chi-square test. In simple chi-square tests, the information is organized into two categories, such as yes and no, high and low, for and against. Since yes and no or oppose and favor responses were required for many of the items in the survey, the chi-square was the appropriate test.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument used for this research was the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1995) (see Appendix C). This telephone

survey has been conducted for many years by the Gallup organization for Phi Delta Kappa. Permission to use the instrument was granted by the Gallup organization (see Appendix A).

Questions on the survey have been refined by constant research of Gallup poll statisticians to ensure item appropriateness. The Gallup survey consists of 78 items, administered in a 15 to 20-minute time period. To ensure that the researcher adequately replicated the Gallup organization's telephone survey procedure, materials were obtained from the Gallup organization in Omaha, Nebraska (see Appendix D). These materials included employee rules and regulations, survey administration procedures, and protocol to follow when certain situations arise during the survey.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

Registered voters of small Nebraska school districts were surveyed concerning their attitudes toward public schools. The questions were identical to those on the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. The respondents were provided several scales in order to report their personal attitudes.

The results generated by the small school group were compared with the results of the 26th Annual Gallup Poll. The analysis included a comparison of responses supplied for each item by the national respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll and by the local respondents in the small school group. When there was a minimum differential of 15 percentage points between the responses of the small school group and the 26th Annual Gallup Poll group, or when an item was found to be applicable only to small schools, further analyses were performed on the responses of the small school group. Fourteen such items were found. These items were analyzed further to ascertain if there were significant differences in responses when comparing parent and non-parent groups and the three age categories. Registered voters who participated in the small school group (and those participating in the 26th annual Gallup poll) responded to the following questions.

Findings

Question 1. *As you probably know, there has been an increase in violence in the nation's public schools over the last decade. How important do you consider each of the following as a cause for this increased violence?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 1.

There were 13 possible causes listed for violence in the public schools. The differences between the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on two of the causes. The two causes were (1) the inability of school staff to resolve conflicts between students and (2) cutbacks in many school support programs. On issue one, 85 percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll responded that it was very important or quite important. However, only 36 percent of the small school participants responded that this item was very important or quite important as a cause of school violence. The second issue where the criteria were met dealt with cutbacks in many school support programs. Seventy-two percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll responded very important or quite important. However, only 50 percent of the participants in the small schools responded that this item was very important or quite important.

Further analyses, using the Kruskal-Wallis and the Mann-Whitney tests were conducted on the items that met the research criteria. No significant difference was found between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there any significant differences among the three age categories.

Table 1
Violence in the Public Schools

Cause	<u>Very Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Quite Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not Very Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not At All Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Don't Know</u> Gallup/Study %
1. Increased use of drugs and alcohol among school-age youth	78	17	3	2	0
2. Growth of youth gangs	72	19	4	3	2
3. Easy availability of weapons (guns, knives)	72	15	6	6	1
4. A breakdown in the American family (e.g., an increase in one-parent and dysfunctional families)	70	20	7	2	1
5. Schools do not have the authority to discipline that they once had	65	22	9	3	1
6. Increased/portrayal of violence in the media (especially in movies and on TV)	60	20	14	5	1
7. Inability of school staff to resolve conflicts between students*	59	26	11	3	1
8. Shortages in school personnel	52	26	15	5	2
9. Trying to deal with troubled emotionally disturbed students in the regular classroom instead of in special classes or schools	51	27	16	4	2

Table 1 (continued)

Cause	Very Important Gallup/Study %	Quite Important Gallup/Study %	Not Very Important Gallup/Study %	Not At All Important Gallup/Study %	Don't Know Gallup/Study %
10. A school curriculum that is out of touch with the needs of today's students	48	28	17	4	3
11. Cutbacks in many school support programs**	45	27	18	6	4
12. Increased poverty among parents	44	29	20	6	1
13. Increased cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity among the public school student population	43	26	22	7	2

*Results of statistical analysis of question one, item seven, by parent/non parent group (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon level of significance = .2015); by age group (Kruskal Wallis one-way ANOVA level of significance = .8264).

**Results of statistical analysis of question one, item eleven, by parent/non-parent groups (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon level of significance = .1098); by age group (Kruskal Wallis one-way ANOVA level of significance = .3666).

Question 2. *How effective do you think each of the following measures would be in reducing violence in the public schools?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 2.

Eight measures were listed for reducing violence in the public schools. The differences between the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis of only one measure. The measure was: "Education designed to reduce racial and ethnic tensions." Eighty-four percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived the measure to be very effective or somewhat effective. Only 58 percent of the small school respondents, however, perceived the measure to be very effective or somewhat effective.

Further analysis of the small school group, using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests, were conducted on the item: Education designed to reduce racial and ethnic tensions. According to these analyses, there was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there any significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 3. *Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 3.

The differences in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on one item: Grade A or B. Forty-four percent of the

Table 2

Reducing Violence in the Public School

Measure	<u>Very Effective</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Somewhat Effective</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not Very Effective</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not At All Effective</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Don't Know</u> Gallup/Study %
1. Stronger penalties for possession of weapons by students	86	8	3	2	1
2. Training school staffs in how to deal with student violence	72	30	20	60	0
3. More vocational or job training courses in public schools	67	18	25	42	0
4. Drug and alcohol abuse programs for students	66	18	23	56	0
5. Values and ethics education for students	60	42	27	56	0
6. Education designed to reduce racial and ethnic tensions*	57	8	27	50	0
7. Courses offered by the public schools in how to be a good parent	51	24	28	58	0
8. Conflict education for students	45	10	35	62	0

*Results of statistical analysis of question two, item six, by parent/non-parent group (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon level of significance = .3203); by age group (Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA level of significance = .6297).

Table 3

Grading Local Public Schools*

Grade	1994 Gallup %	1995 Study %	1993 Gallup %	1992 Gallup %	1991 Gallup %	1990 Gallup %	1989 Gallup %	1988 Gallup %	1987 Gallup %	1986 Gallup %	1985 Gallup %	1984 Gallup %
A & B	44	82	47	40	42	41	43	40	43	41	43	42
A	9	22	10	9	10	8	8	9	12	11	9	10
B	35	60	37	31	32	33	35	31	31	30	34	32
C	30	14	31	33	33	34	33	34	30	28	30	35
D	14	2	11	12	10	12	11	10	9	11	10	11
Fail	7	2	4	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	4
Don't know	5	0	7	10	10	8	9	12	14	15	13	8

*Results of statistical analysis of question four by parent/non-parent group (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon level of significance = .6723) by age group (Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA level of significance = .1409).

respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll rated their local schools with the grade of A or B. Eighty-two percent of the small school respondents, however, rated their local schools with the grade of A or B.

Further analysis of the small school group, using the Kruskal-Wallis and the Mann-Whitney tests, were conducted on this item. According to the analyses, there was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there any significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 4. *How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 4.

The differences in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on one item: Grade C. Forty-nine percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll rated the nation's public schools with a grade of C; however, 68 percent of the small school respondents rated the nation's public schools with a grade of C.

Further analysis of the small school group, using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests, was conducted on the item: Grade C. According to the analyses, no significant difference was found between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there any significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 5. *Using the A, B, C D, or Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends.* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 5.

Table 4

Grading the Nation's Public Schools*

Grade	1994 Gallup %	1995 Study %	1993 Gallup %	1992 Gallup %	1991 Gallup %	1990 Gallup %	1989 Gallup %	1988 Gallup %	1987 Gallup %	1986 Gallup %	1985 Gallup %	1984 Gallup %
A & B	22	12	19	18	21	21	22	23	26	28	27	25
A	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	3	4	3	3	2
B	20	8	17	16	19	19	20	20	22	25	24	23
C	49	68	48	48	47	49	47	48	44	41	43	49
D	17	14	17	18	13	16	15	13	11	10	12	11
Fail	6	6	4	4	4	5	4	3	2	5	3	4
Don't know	6	0	12	12	14	10	12	13	17	16	15	11

*Results of statistical analysis of question four by parent/non-parent group (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon level of significance = .4706) by age group (Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA level of significance = .9778).

Table 5

Grading the Local Public School Where the Oldest Child Attended

Grade	1994 Gallup %	1995 Study %	1993 Gallup %	1992 Gallup %	1991 Gallup %	1990 Gallup %	1989 Gallup %	1988 Gallup %	1987 Gallup %	1986 Gallup %
A & B	70	88	72	64	73	72	71	70	69	65
A	28	27	27	22	29	27	25	22	28	28
B	42	61	45	42	44	45	46	48	41	37
C	22	8	18	24	21	19	19	22	20	26
D	6	4	5	6	2	5	5	3	5	4
Fail	1	0	2	4	4	2	1	2	2	2
Don't know	1	0	3	2	0	2	4	3	4	3

The differences in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on one item: Grade A or B. Seventy percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll rated the school their oldest child attended with a grade of A or B; 88 percent of the small school respondents rated the school their oldest child attended with a grade of A or B.

Further analyses of the respondents of the small school group were not performed for this item due to its close similarity to the item examined for question three (grading of local public schools).

Question 6. *How about the public schools attended by children from your neighborhood? What grade would you give them?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 6.

The differences in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on the item: Grade A or B. Fifty percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll rated the public school attended by neighborhood children with a grade of A or B; 82 percent of the small school respondents rated the public school attended by neighborhood children with a grade of A or B.

Further analyses of the small school group were not performed due to the item's close similarity to the item examined for question three (grading the local public schools).

Question 7. *Just your own impression, would you say that the public schools in your community have improved from, say, five years ago, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 7.

Table 6

Grading the Local Public School Where the Neighborhood Children Attended

Grade	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
A & B	50	82
A	12	24
B	38	58
C	30	14
D	9	2
Fail	6	2
Don't know	5	0

Table 7

Local Public School Improvement

	<u>1994</u> <u>Gallup</u> %	<u>1995</u> <u>Study</u> %	<u>1990</u> <u>Gallup</u> %	<u>1988</u> <u>Gallup</u> %
Local public school had improved in the last five years*	26	60	22	29
Local public school had gotten worse in the last five years	37	24	30	19
Local public school had stayed the same in the last five years	33	16	36	37
Don't know	4	0	12	15

*Results of statistical analysis of question seven by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .8823); by age group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .8229).

The differences in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on the item concerning the improvement of the local public school in the past five years. Twenty-six percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll stated their local public school had improved during the past five years; 60 percent of the small school respondents stated their local public school had improved during the past five years.

Further analyses of the small school respondents, using the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests, were performed on the item concerning the improvement of the local public school in the past five years. According to these analyses, there was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 8. *Would you say the public school your oldest child attends has improved from five years ago, gotten worse, or stayed about the same?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 8.

The difference in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for further analysis on the item concerning the improvement of the public school attended by the oldest child. Thirty-six percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived that the local public school where their oldest child attended had improved during the past five years; 63 percent of the participants of the small school group responded that the local public school where their oldest child attended had improved during the past five years.

Table 8

Local Public School Improvement Where the Oldest Child Attended

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Public school where their oldest child attended had improved during the last five years	36	63
Public school where their oldest child attended had gotten worse during the last five years	15	25
Public school where their oldest child attended had stayed the same during the past five years	41	11
Don't know	8	0

Further analyses of the small school group were not performed due to this item's similarity to the item examined for question seven (local public school improvement).

Question 9. *Here are some education programs currently being advanced by the federal government. As I read off each program, would you tell me whether you favor or oppose it?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Federal Education Programs

Program	Favor Gallup/Study		Oppose Gallup/Study		Don't Know Gallup/Study	
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Assistance with high school students' college expenses in return for performing some kind of public service	81	82	17	18	2	0
Greater emphasis on, including additional money, for work-study vocational programs for high school students who do not plan to go to college	79	70	20	30	1	0
A large increase in funds for early childhood education in those public schools with the highest percentage of children living in poverty.	74	78	22	22	4	0
More effort to reach agreement on academic achievement goals for children at various stages of school, without specifying how the schools should reach these goals	63	52	32	48	5	0

The differences between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria for the study. Eighty-one percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll said they were in favor of assisting with high school students' college expenses in return for performing some kind of public service; 82 percent of the participants in the small school group responded in favor of assisting with students' college expenses in return for public service.

Further analyses of the small school group were not employed for the items concerning federal education programs. The four federal education program items failed to meet the criteria for further analysis.

Question 10. *How important do you think each of the following is as a way to improve the nation's schools?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 10.

Two federal public school improvement programs were listed as ways to improve the nation's schools. The differences in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for the study for one of the federal public school improvement programs: establishing standardized national examinations, based on a national curriculum, that students must pass for grade promotion and for high school graduation. Seventy-three percent of the participants in the 26th Annual Gallup Poll responded that the program was very important or quite important; 46 percent of the small school participants responded that the program was very important or quite important.

Further analyses of the small school group, using the Kruskal-Wallis and the Mann-Whitney tests, were conducted on the item that met the criteria (establishing standardized national tests). There was no

Table 10

Federal School Improvement Programs

Cause	<u>Very Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Quite Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not Very Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not At All Important</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Don't Know</u> Gallup/Study %					
Establishing a basic curriculum of subject matter or programs of courses for all subjects	49	20	34	58	12	22	4	0	1	0
Establishing standardized national examinations, based on a national curriculum, that students must pass for grade promotion and for high school graduation*	46	16	27	30	18	30	7	24	2	0

*Results of statistical analysis of question ten, item two, by parent/non-parent group (Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon level of significance = .2160); by age group (Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA level of significance = .5242).

significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 11. *A proposal has been made that would allow parents to send their school age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing non-public schools, the government would pay for all or part of the tuition. Would you favor or oppose this proposal in your state?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 11.

The difference in the responses between the two groups met the criteria for the study. Fifty-four percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll opposed the school choice proposal while 70 percent of the respondents of the small school group opposed the school choice proposal.

Further analyses of the small school group, using the chi-square test, were conducted on this item. There was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there any significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 12. *It has been proposed that the public schools include courses on character education to help students develop personal values and ethical behavior. Do you think that courses on values and ethical behavior should be taught in public schools, or do you think that this should be left to the students' parents and/or churches?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 12.

The differences in the responses between the two groups met the criteria for the study. Forty-nine percent of the respondents to the 26th

Table 11

School Choice*

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small Study Group</u> %
Parents who favored the idea of being able to send their children to any public, private, or church-related school and the government paying all or part of the tuition.	45	30
Parents who opposed the idea of being able to send their children to any public, private, or church related school and the government paying all or part of the tuition	54	70
Don't know	1	0

*Results of statistical analysis of question eleven by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .70913); by age group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .3858).

Table 12

Character Education*

	<u>1994</u> <u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>1995</u> <u>Small School Study</u> %	<u>1987</u> <u>Gallup Poll</u> %
Favored character education courses being taught in the public schools	49	76	43
Opposed character education courses being taught in the public schools	39	24	36
Both (volunteered)	12	0	13
Don't know	0	0	8

*Results of statistical analysis of question twelve by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .6310); by age group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .0177).

Note: Significance was rejected due to lower than the accepted participant responses in cells.

Annual Gallup Poll were in favor of offering character education courses in the public schools; 76 percent of the small school group favored offering character education courses in the public schools.

Further analyses of the respondents in the small school group, using the chi-square test, were conducted for the character education item that met the criteria for the study. There was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 13. *Now here is a list of personal traits or virtues that might be taught in the public schools in your community. As I read off each item, would you tell me whether you think it should be taught or should not be taught in the local public schools?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 13.

There were nine possible traits listed as character virtues. The differences between the responses of the two groups met the criteria for the study for one virtue--thrift. Seventy-four percent of the participants to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll responded that the character virtue, thrift, should be taught in the public school; 96 percent of the small school participants responded that the character virtue, thrift, should be taught in the public school.

Further analyses of the small school group participants were not conducted. The respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll and the small school group indicated a high level of positive agreement for all nine virtues listed in the poll. Because of the positive responses by both

Table 13

Character Virtues

Virtue	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
1. Respect for others should be taught	94	100
2. Industry or hard work should be taught	93	100
3. Persistence or the ability to follow through should be taught	93	98
4. Fairness in dealing with others should be taught	92	100
5. Compassion for others should be taught	91	98
6. Civility, politeness should be taught	91	100
7. Self-esteem should be taught	90	100
8. High-expectations for oneself should be taught	87	94
9. Thrift should be taught	74	96

groups, the researcher believed there was insufficient difference between the two groups to warrant further analyses.

Question 14. *The public schools in America are constitutionally prohibited from teaching any particular religion. Would you favor or oppose nondevotional instruction about various world religions in the public schools in your community?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 14.

There was an insufficient difference between the two groups to meet the criteria for the study. Sixty-six percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll responded in favor of nondevotional religious instruction in the public schools; 68 percent of the small school respondents were in favor of religious instruction in the public schools.

Further analyses of the small school participants were not performed. There was insufficient difference between the two group responses to meet the criteria for further analyses.

Question 15. *Do you favor or oppose an idea being tested in a few cities in which private, profit-making corporations contract to operate schools within certain jurisdictions?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 15.

The difference between the responses of the two groups met the criteria for the study. Forty-seven percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll opposed allowing private, profit-making corporations to contract to operate public schools; 72 percent of the small school participants opposed the charter school proposal.

Table 14
Religious Instruction in the Public Schools

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Favored nondevotional religious instruction in the public schools	66	68
Opposed nondevotional religious instruction in the public schools	33	32
Don't know	1	0

Table 15
Contracting Public Schools*

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small Study Group</u> %
Favored private, profit-making corporations contracting to operate schools	45	28
Opposed private, profit-making corporations contracting to operate schools	47	72
Don't know	8	0

*Results of statistical analysis of question fifteen by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .4617); by age group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .9283).

Further analyses of the responses of the small school group, using the chi-square test, were performed. These analyses revealed there was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there any differences among the three age categories.

Question 16. *Do you believe that most public school students have the capacity to learn more math and science than they generally do today?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 16.

The difference between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria for the study. Eighty-nine percent of the participants of the 26th Annual Gallup Poll believed students had the capacity to learn more math than they did at the time of the poll, and 88 percent indicated students had the capacity to learn more science. Ninety-four percent of the small school respondents believed students had the capacity to learn more math and science than they generally did at the time of the poll.

Further analyses of the small school participants were not completed because the difference between the responses of two groups was insufficient to meet the criteria for the study.

Question 17. *A company has been loaning TV sets and satellite dishes to public schools that agree to show their students daily 10 minute news and feature broadcasts from this company. Each broadcast includes two and one-half minutes of commercial advertising directed to the students. The company makes money by selling this television time to advertisers. Do you happen to know whether any of the public schools in your community have entered into an arrangement of this kind, or not?* The responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 17.

Table 16

Capacity to Learn More Math and Science

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small Study Group</u> %
Believed students had the capacity to learn more math than they did	89	94
Believed students had the capacity to learn more science than they did	88	94

Table 17

News Broadcasts in Public Schools

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Were aware of the involvement of their local public school in having news broadcasts delivered to students	11	8
Were not aware of the involvement of their local public school in having news broadcasts delivered to students	48	92
Don't know	41	0

The difference between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria of this study. Eleven percent of the respondents to the 26th annual Gallup poll were aware of the involvement of their local public school in delivering news broadcasts to their students; eight percent of the small school participants were aware of news broadcasts in their public schools. Forty-one percent of the respondents to the Gallup poll indicated they did not know if news broadcasts were delivered to their public school students. In the original question, "do not know" was not given as a choice, but instead was volunteered by the participants in the Gallup poll. When respondents to the small school group volunteered the response "do not know," it was not accepted as a response. For this research, the assumption was made that respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll who answered "do not know" were part of the group that was not aware of news broadcasts shown to their public school students.

Further analyses of the responses of the small school group were not completed for this question. There was insufficient difference between the responses of the two groups to meet the criteria for the study.

Question 18. *Are you in favor of this arrangement in the local public school district?* This question was asked of those participants who had indicated an awareness of the arrangement. Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 18.

The difference between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria for the study. Sixty-six percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll were in favor of showing students news broadcasts in

the public schools, and 75 percent of the small school group were in favor of showing students news broadcasts in the public schools.

Table 18

Participants in Favor of News Broadcasts in the Public Schools
Who Indicated Awareness of the Arrangement

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small Group Study</u> %
Favored showing students the news broadcasts	66	75
Opposed to showing students the news broadcasts	30	25
Don't know	4	0

*This question was asked of respondents who were aware of news broadcasts in the public school.

Further analyses were not employed for this question. There was an insufficient difference between the responses of the two groups to meet the criteria for the study.

Question 19. *Would you be in favor of your local schools' entering into this type of arrangement?* This question was asked of those respondents who were not aware of any local arrangement. Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 19.

Table 19

Participants Who Favored News Broadcasts in the Public Schools*

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Opposed to showing news broadcasts	38	39
Favored showing news broadcasts	57	61
Don't know	5	0

*This question was asked of respondents who were unaware of news broadcasts in their public school.

The difference between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria for the study. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll were in favor of news broadcasts being shown to students in the public schools. Thirty-nine percent of the small school participants were in favor of news broadcasts being shown to students in their public schools.

Further analyses were not performed for this question. Respondents who had indicated they were unaware of a news broadcast arrangement in their local public schools were asked this question, and there was insufficient difference in the responses of the two groups to meet the criteria for the study.

Question 20. *Many high school students are not motivated to do well academically. To indicate why you think this is the case, would you rate each of the following reasons?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 20.

Three reasons were listed for the lack of motivation of students in the public schools. Differences in the responses between the two groups met the criteria for the study for two of the reasons. One of the reasons concerned employers of high school graduates who did not give importance to high school records. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived this reason to be very important or quite important; 46 percent of the small school respondents perceived this reason to be very important or quite important. The second reason meeting the criteria for this study concerned colleges admitting students with a high school diploma, regardless of their high school record. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived this reason to be very important or quite important; 48 percent of the small school respondents perceived this reason to be very important or quite important.

Table 20

Reasons for Lack of Motivation by Students in the Public Schools

Cause	Very Important Gallup/Study %	Quite Important Gallup/Study %	Not Very Important Gallup/Study %	Not At All Important Gallup/Study %	Don't Know Gallup/Study %					
1. The negative attitudes of fellow students about academic performance	63	44	25	48	7	6	3	0	2	0
2. The fact that employees of high school graduates seldom seem to care about high school records	49	12	29	34	15	50	5	4	2	0
3. The fact that many colleges will admit any student with a high school diploma, regardless of his or her high school record	49	16	28	32	15	50	6	2	2	0

Further analyses of the small school group was not performed on the above items that met the criteria for the study. The researcher determined these items were not an important part of the study.

Question 21. *In your opinion, which should the public schools in your community promote--one common, predominant cultural tradition only, or both a common cultural tradition and the diverse cultural traditions of the different population groups in America?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 21.

The difference between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria for the study. Seventy-five percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived that one common cultural tradition and diverse traditions of different population groups should be promoted by their local public schools; 78 percent of the small school respondents perceived this combination should be promoted.

Further analyses of the small group respondents were not performed for this question. The difference between the responses of the two groups did not meet the criteria for this study.

Question 22. *In your opinion, is the existing system of funding public education in this country fair?* Responses on the two groups are displayed in Table 22.

The difference in the responses of the two groups met the criteria for this study. Forty-three percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll indicated the current system of funding public education was fair; 60 percent of the small school respondents indicated the current system of funding public education was fair.

Table 21
Promotion of Cultural Traditions in the Public Schools

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Promote one common cultural tradition only	18	22
Promote both one common cultural tradition and diverse traditions of different populations	75	78
Don't know	7	0

Table 22
Funding Public Education

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Current system of funding public education was fair	43	60
Current system of funding public education was not fair	54	40
Don't know	3	0

*Results of statistical analysis of question twenty-two by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .0627); by age group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .2865).

Further analyses of the small school respondents, using the chi-square test, were conducted for this question. There was no significant difference between the responses of the parent and non-parent groups, nor were there significant differences among the three age categories.

Question 23. A large number of states have passed, or are considering, legislation that frees some public schools from certain state regulations and permits them to function independently. Some people say that these charter schools would be a good thing because, with fewer regulations, they would be able to try out new ideas for improving education. Others say charter schools would be a bad thing because regulations are necessary to guard against inferior or poor educational practices. Which position do you agree with more--that charter schools are a good thing for education, or that they are a bad thing for education.

Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 23.

The difference between the responses of the two groups met the criteria for the study. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll said charter schools were bad for public education; 62 percent of the small school respondents opposed charter schools.

Further analyses of the small school group, using the chi-square test, were employed on the above question. No significant difference was found between the parent and non-parent groups. A significant difference among the three age categories was detected and rejected due to a violation of expected frequency in cells.

Table 23

Appropriateness of Charter Schools*

	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
Charter schools were good for public education	54	38
Charter schools were bad for public education	39	62
Don't know	7	0

*Results of statistical analysis of question twenty-three by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .8326); by age group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .0088).

Question 24. *Since last September, which of the following, if any have you yourself done?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 24.

Eight possible activities were listed for participation by the public in the schools. Differences between the responses of the two groups met the criteria for the study for two activities: Attending a school play or concert and attending a local school athletic event. Fifty-four percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll had attended a public school play or concert; 82 percent of the small school respondents had attended a school play or concert. Fifty-three percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll had attended a public athletic

Table 24
Public Participation in School Activities

Activity	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
1. Attended a school play or concert in any local public school*	54	82
2. Attended a local public school athletic event*	53	86
3. Met with any teachers or administration in the local public schools about your own child	31	38
4. Attended any meeting dealing with the local public school education	28	24
5. Attended a PTA meeting	21	6
6. Attended a meeting to discuss any of the school reforms being proposed	20	14
7. Attended a school board meeting	16	22
8. Been a member of any public school-related committee	15	10

*Results of statistical analysis of question twenty-four, item one, by parent/non-parent group (Pearson chi square level of significance = .0281); by age group (Pearson chi-square level of significance = .1183) and item two by parent/non-parent group = .0876 and by age group = .0022.

event; 86 percent of the small school respondents had attended a public athletic event.

Further analyses of the small school respondents, using the chi-square test, was performed on the two above items. There was no significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups for item two, nor were there significant differences among the three age categories for item one. However, there was a significant difference between the parent and non-parent groups for item one. A significant difference was detected among the three age groups for item two. Significance was rejected for both items due to the lack of acceptable frequency of participant responses.

Question 25. *Here is a list of different types of reports that the public schools use to inform parents of their children's progress in school. As I read off a description of each type, would you tell me if you consider it not useful at all, not very useful, quite useful, or very useful for informing you about the progress of your child?* Responses of the two groups are shown in Table 25.

Four reports were listed that informed parents of their students' progress. Differences between the responses of the two groups concerning the types of reports did not meet the criteria for this study. The largest difference was found between the two groups for the type of report in which A to F or numeric grades were used. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived that the report was very useful or quite useful; 98 percent of the small school respondents perceived that the report was very useful or quite useful.

Table 25

Type of Reports Used to Inform Parents of Student Progress

Cause	<u>Very Useful</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Quite Useful</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not Very Useful</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Not At All Useful</u> Gallup/Study %	<u>Don't Know</u> Gallup/Study %
1. A written description of the student's progress in a number of areas	74	20	5	0	1
2. A checklist that indicates what the student knows and is able to do in each subject	70	22	6	1	1
3. A to F or numeric grades in each subject to denote excellent to failing achievement	58	26	8	1	2
4. A to F or numeric grades to describe the student's effort in each subject	56	28	9	1	2

Further analyses of the small school respondents were not conducted because the four items did not meet the criteria.

Question 26. *What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools of this community must deal?* Responses of the two groups are displayed in Table 26.

Twenty items were listed as problems that must be dealt with in the public schools. The items were self-reported and responses given by the respondents were in the form of short answers. The percentages for both groups totaled more than one hundred, because some participants gave multiple responses. There were five problems where the differences between the responses of the two groups warranted discussion. The first response listed as a problem for public schools was fighting, violence, and gangs. Eighteen percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived fighting, violence, and gangs to be problems in the public schools of their communities; no respondents in the small school group reported this to be a problem. The second response was lack of financial support. Thirteen percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll indicated that lack of financial support was a problem; 26 percent of the participants in the small school group perceived this to be a problem.

The difference between the two groups for the problem of lack of parent support also warranted discussion. Three percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll perceived lack of parent support to be a problem; 16 percent of the participants in the small school group reported this to be a problem. No respondents in the 26th Annual Gallup Poll

Table 26

Public Perceptions of School Problems

Problem	<u>Gallup Poll</u> %	<u>Small School Study</u> %
1. Fighting, violence, gangs	18	0
2. Student lack of discipline	18	26
3. Lack of financial support	13	26
4. Drug abuse by students	11	0
5. Quality of education	8	0
6. Overcrowded schools	7	2
7. Problems with student's home life	5	4
8. Crime/vandalism	4	0
9. Lack of interest by students/ truancy/poor attitudes	3	4
10. Parent lack of support/interest	3	16
11. Difficulty in getting good teachers	3	2
12. Poor curriculum/low curriculum standards	3	10
13. Lack of respect by students	3	2
14. Integration/segregation or racial discrimination	3	0
15. Facility update/needs	0	8
16. Option enrollment	0	6
17. Handicap accessibility	0	4
18. Declining student enrollment	0	6
19. Athletic overemphasis	0	14
20. No problems	1	14

reported an over-emphasis with athletics to be a problem; 14 percent of the participants in the small group perceived this to be a problem. One percent of the respondents to the 26th Annual Gallup Poll reported there were no problems in their local public school; 14 percent of the participants in the small school group perceived there to be problems in their local public school.

Further analyses of the small school group respondents were not performed on the question dealing with school problems. The data were gathered in a short-answer format that made the results unacceptable for further analyses.

Summary

The first research question of the study was formulated to identify and compare the attitudes of registered voters in small, Nebraska schools districts with attitudes of a national sample.

Research question 1. Were there differences between the responses of a national sample and a small school sample of registered voters to the questions asked in the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools?

Twenty-seven questions were addressed in the Gallup Poll; participants were asked to respond to 78 items in the 27 questions. In twelve of the 27 questions, or approximately 44 percent, there was a difference of 15 percentage points between the responses of the small school group and the national sample. Fourteen of the 78 items, or 17.9 percent, were found to differ by 15 percent between the two groups.

The second research question of the study was formulated to determine if there were significant differences among responses of the small school sample by age categories and parent and non-parent status.

2. Were there differences among responses of the small school sample when analyzed by age categories and parent and non-parent status on selected items asked in the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools?

The 14 items, in which the difference between the national survey and the small school group was a minimum of 15 percent, were further analyzed to determine if there were significant differences among responses to the small school group by age categories and parent and non-parent status. No acceptable significant differences were found when the 14 items were analyzed.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In 1973, the Gallup Organization and Phi Delta Kappa began an annual survey of citizens about their attitudes toward public education in the United States. Since its inception, the survey has been recognized nationally by educators as an important study of the public's perceived attitudes toward education. Two research questions were formulated.

1. Were there differences between the responses of the national sample and the small school sample of registered voters to the questions asked in the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools?

2. Were there differences among responses of the small school sample by levels of age and by parent/non-parent status on selected items asked in the 26th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools?

Summary

The following summary resulted from the analysis of the data.

Research Question 1: Differences Between National and Small School Samples

According to the results of the study, there were several items with major percentage point gaps between the responses of the national sample and the small school sample. For purposes of this study, a gap of 15 percentage points between the results of the two samples was considered a major difference. There were 14 survey items where a 15 point gap occurred, and these survey items were grouped into three categories.

The first category included survey items related to state or national mandates, initiatives, and programs. Differences were found between the two samples in survey items concerning school choice, school improvement programs, charter schools, contracting of public schools by private companies, and violence in public education. When considering the cause of increasing violence in the public schools, 85 percent of the national sample and only 36 percent of the small school sample indicated they perceived there to be an inability by school staff to resolve student conflicts. Eighty-four percent of the national sample participants believed violence in the public schools could be reduced by education aimed at reducing racial violence, while only 58 percent of the small school sample participants believed the same. Respondents from the small school sample were more likely to indicate less positive responses for state and national initiatives than respondents of the national survey. Seventy-three percent of the national sample participants and 46 percent of the small school sample participants indicated there should be a mandated national, standardized curriculum in place in the public school. When indicating their perceptions about a mandated national curriculum, 28 percent of the

small school respondents said the government should not interfere with their concerns and let them take care of their own schools.

The second category in which there was a major difference between the responses of the national sample and the small school sample included personal and character items. For example, there were differences between the two samples on survey items about character education. Respondents from both groups indicated character education should be taught in the public schools; however, almost 100 percent of the respondents in the small school study were in favor of character education virtues being taught in the public schools. Only 43 percent of those responding to the national survey indicated support of teaching character education in the public schools. Eighty-four percent of the small school participants perceived that character virtues should be taught at home, but that in today's society the public school must help. One respondent said, "Character education should be taught in the home, but since that is 'pie in the sky' it is more important now than ever before that the school pick up the slack." Other small school participants perceived that if more time were spent on character curricular issues the students would be more responsible citizens. The perception that public schools should help students mature to be better citizens could raise questions concerning the public schools' mission.

The third category, in which major percentage differences were found between the responses of the national survey and the small school group, included the respondents' personal perceptions about the effectiveness of the public schools. When asked to assign a grade to their

local public school, the small Nebraska school respondents assigned a grade of A or B 82 percent of the time, while the national survey participants assigned a grade of A or B only 44 percent of the time. A predominant theme that emerged from the interviews with the small school respondents was loyalty toward their local school. Sixty-two percent of the small school participants indicated they had graduated from their local public school. They further perceived that the nation's public schools were in worse condition than did the national survey participants. Sixty-eight percent of the small school respondents perceived a deterioration in the public schools on the national level and assigned a grade of C to the nation's schools, while only 49 percent of the national survey respondents assigned the grade of C.

Another item that showed a major difference between the two samples concerned the fairness of the current methods used to fund public education. Forty-three percent of the national survey respondents indicated that the current funding method was fair, while 60 percent of the small school respondents perceived the same. Two items dealing with community involvement in public school activities also showed a major percentage difference between the two samples. Approximately 50 percent of the national sample respondents indicated they had recently attended a school play or athletic event, while more than eight out of ten small school respondents indicated their attendance. Many of the small school survey interviewees indicated they had relatives or students who were close friends of theirs or their families who participated in the activity they attended.

Research Question 2: Differences Between Age Categories and Parent/Non-Parent Status

Additional analyses were conducted on the 14 items that met the criteria of the study. None of the 14 items showed a significant difference between the responses of the small school sample by levels of age and by parent/non-parent status.

Conclusions and Implications of the Study

When considering the data generated by the study, several differences of perceptions emerged between the Nebraska small school sample and the national sample. Information offered by the small school respondents during the telephone interviews helped further define the differences between the two groups. The themes that emerged were as follows:

1. To limit the scope of the study, only items that showed a 15 or greater percentage point difference between the two samples were further analyzed. The percentage gap naturally emerged as the results were initially analyzed and was not a pre-determined point of difference for further statistical analysis.

2. The respondents to the small school survey voiced overwhelming support of their local schools during the interviews. Further, they perceived the nation's public schools with skepticism and doubt. Almost 70 percent of the small school sample assigned a grade of C to the nation's public schools; however, approximately 50 percent of the national respondents assigned a grade of C. The small school respondents also

perceived their local schools were better than the nation's public schools. Eighty-two percent of the small school respondents perceived their local school had improved during the past five years, while only 26 percent of the national sample respondents perceived the same for their local public schools. Another perception that emerged related to how both samples viewed their local school and the nation's schools. The small school sample viewed their local schools more positively than did the national sample. This was reinforced by the grades each sample assigned to their local school. Eighty-four percent of the small school participants assigned a grade of A or B to their local schools, while only 44 percent of the national sample respondents assigned a grade of A or B to their local schools.

3. The small school respondents perceived their local schools to have very few problems in common with the national sample respondents. An example included the school problems of violence and drug abuse. Respondents from both samples were asked their perceptions concerning problems in their local public schools. None of the small school respondents perceived violence and drugs to be problems in their local schools. Several small school interviewees indicated they perceived their local school to be a safe place where learning took place. Further, the small school respondents viewed the larger city schools as drug- and gang-infested areas where students were not safe.

When further analyzing the 14 items that met the criteria of the study, there were no significant differences found. There are several possible explanations for the lack of significant differences as the results were analyzed.

1. The Gallup Poll sampled large and small public school districts for use in the survey and may have accurately represented the small school respondents' perceptions.

2. The small school districts sampled in this study were homogeneous in several ways. All of the districts' main economic source was agricultural; there was very little, if any, ethnic diversity; many of the respondents indicated they had lived in the same district their entire lives; and during the interviews a sense of pride, support, and loyalty for their local schools emerged. This sense of "community" possessed by the small school respondents seems to indicate they had a common vision concerning attitudes and expectations for their local public schools. When interviewing several 18-year-old recent graduates and many senior citizens, it became apparent that age was not a significant factor in the respondents' perceptions toward public education. The term "obligation to help future students" was used often when the respondents visited about problems they perceived in the local school. The main theme that seemed to emerge during the interview process was one of positive perceptions for their local school.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practitioners

The findings of this study provided the reader with an overview of the attitudes of registered voters in small Nebraska school districts toward public education. The findings also provided an insight into the differences of participant perceptions between the small school sample in Nebraska and

the national survey respondents. The following are recommendations to practicing board of education members, superintendents, principals, and teachers.

1. Before forming new educational committees, educational leaders in small school districts should acquire information about the perceptions held by community members toward their public schools. The acquired information may then be disseminated to the appropriate individuals.

2. Educational leaders and community members who are a part of an educational committee should spend an initial amount of time together reviewing and discussing recent research relevant to perceptions held by community members. The time spent together could be important to promote an understanding of group interaction as the educational committee begins working together.

Recommendations for Researchers

1. The scope of the study should be expanded to include small school districts in other states. This would aid in a comparison of the perceptions of the public toward public schools in differing geographic areas.

2. In a future study, the research should focus on larger public school districts. Such research would enable comparisons to be made among different sized school districts and increase the ability to make generalizations about the perceptions of the public toward public schools.

3. Other variables, such as gender, educational attainment, ethnicity, and wealth, could be included in future studies. The study of such variables would aid in the determination of community member composition for future educational committees.

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APPENDIX A

Written Permission by Gallup Organization

THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION, INC.
WORLD HEADQUARTERS

SARAH H. VAN ALLEN
Director of Corporate Communications

47 Hulfish Street
Princeton, New Jersey 08542
(609) 924-9600
Fax (609) 924-0228

VIA FAX: 402-683-2116

Mr. Dennis C. Shipp
Box 34
DeWitt, NE 68341

Dear Dennis:

The annual Gallup survey of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools was designed by Dr. George Gallup to create a baseline of national data. He hoped smaller communities would ask the same questions, thus lending more insight to both the national findings and the local findings.

In this spirit we are glad to grant you permission to use the same question wording. In fact, we feel that if you don't use the same question wording, the results cannot be compared.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sarah H. Van Allen

APPENDIX B
Request for Participation

Dear David,

My name is Dennis Shipp, Tri County Secondary Principal and UNL doctoral student. This postcard is being sent to you to request your voluntary participation in an upcoming telephone survey. This 15-20 minute survey will include questions concerning your opinions about public education. I hope you will take this time to visit with me. Thank you in advance for your help in this research project.

Respectfully,

Dennis Shipp
402-683-2167
IRB #95-12-144 EX

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965.

APPENDIX C
Telephone Survey Format

TELEPHONE SURVEY FORMAT

Name of school district _____
 Participant _____
 Telephone number _____

Hello, may I speak to _____? My name is Dennis Shipp, and I am the secondary principal at Tri County Schools in Nebraska. I sent you a postcard over one week ago requesting your participation in my doctoral research. May I please take a few minutes of your time to ask your opinions concerning public education? I will try to be as efficient with your time as possible.

A. What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools of this community must deal?

a.

b.

As you probably know, there has been an increase in violence in the nation's public schools over the last decade. How important do you consider each of the following as a cause for this increased violence (1 = not at all important; 2 = not very important; 3 = quite important; 4 = very important)?

	NAAI	NVI	QI	VI
1. Increased use of drugs and alcohol among school-age youth	1	2	3	4
2. Growth of youth gangs	1	2	3	4
3. Easy availability of weapons (guns, knives)	1	2	3	4

	NAAI	NVE	QI	VI
4. A breakdown in the American family (e.g., an increase in one-parent and dysfunctional families)	1	2	3	4
5. Schools do not have the authority to discipline that they once had	1	2	3	4
6. Inability of school staff to resolve conflicts between students	1	2	3	4
7. Shortages in school personnel	1	2	3	4
8. Increased portrayal of violence in the media (especially in movies and on TV)	1	2	3	4
9. Trying to deal with troubled or emotionally disturbed students in the regular classroom instead of in special education classes or schools	1	2	3	4
10. A school curriculum that is out of touch with the needs of today's youth	1	2	3	4
11. Cutbacks in many school support programs	1	2	3	4
12. Increased poverty among parents	1	2	3	4
13. Increased cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity among the public school student population	1	2	3	4

How effective do you think each of the following measures would be in reducing violence in the public schools (1 = not at all effective; 2 = not very effective; 3 = quite effective; 4 = very effective)?

	NAAE	NVE	QE	VE
14. Stronger penalties for possession of weapons by students	1	2	3	4
15. Training school staffs in how to deal with student violence	1	2	3	4
16. More vocational or job-training courses in public schools	1	2	3	4
17. Drug and alcohol abuse programs for students	1	2	3	4
18. Values and ethics education for students	1	2	3	4
19. Education designed to reduce racial and ethnic tensions	1	2	3	4
20. Courses offered by the public schools in how to be a good parent	1	2	3	4
21. Conflict education for students	1	2	3	4

22. Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves, in this community, were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here? 1 = Fail, 2 = D, 3 = C, 4 = B, and 5 = A

23. How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally? 1 = Fail, 2 = D, 3 = C, 4 = B, and 5 = A

24. Using the A, B, C, D, or Fail scale again, what grade would you give the school your oldest child attends? 1 = Fail, 2 = D, 3 = C, 4 = B, and 5 = A

25. How about the public schools attended by children from your neighborhood? What grade would you give them? 1 = Fail, 2 = D, 3 = C, 4 = B, and 5 = A

26. Just your own impression, would you say that the public schools in your community have 3 = improved from, say, five years ago, 1 = gotten worse, or 2 = stayed about the same?

27. Would you say the public school your oldest child attends has 3 = improved from five years ago, 1 = gotten worse, or 2 = stayed about the same?

Here are some education programs currently being advanced by the federal government. As I read off each program, would you tell me whether you 2 = favor or 1 = oppose it?

- | | | | |
|-----|--|-------|--------|
| 28. | Assistance with high school students' college expenses in return for performing some kind of public service | Favor | Oppose |
| 29. | Greater emphasis on, including additional money for, work-study vocational programs for high school students who do not plan to attend college | Favor | Oppose |
| 30. | A large increase in funds for early childhood education in those public schools with the highest percentage of children living in poverty | Favor | Oppose |

31. More effort to reach agreement on academic achievement goals for children at various stages of school, without specifying how the schools should reach these goals
- Favor Oppose

How important do you think each of the following is as a way to improve the nation's schools? 1 = not at all important; 2 = not very important, 3 = quite important; 4 = very important

	NAAI	NVI	QI	VI
32. Establishing a basic curriculum of subject matter of programs or courses for all schools	1	2	3	4
33. Establishing standardized national examinations, based on a national curriculum, that students must pass for grade promotion and for high school graduation	1	2	3	4

34. A proposal has been made that would allow parents to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose. For those parents choosing non-public schools, the government would pay for all or part of the tuition. Would you 2 = favor or 1 = oppose this proposal in your state?

35. It has been proposed that the public schools include courses on character education to help students develop personal values and ethical behavior. Do you think that courses on values and ethical behavior should be taught in public schools, or do you think that this should be left to the students' parents and/or the churches? 1 = oppose; 2 = favor

Now here is a list of personal traits or virtues that might be taught in the public schools in your community. As I read off each item, would you tell me whether you think it 2 = should be taught or 1 = should not be taught in the local public school?

36.	Respect for others	No	Yes
37.	Industry or hard work	No	Yes
38.	Persistence or the ability to follow through	No	Yes
39.	Fairness in dealing with others	No	Yes
40.	Compassion for others	No	Yes
41.	Civility, politeness	No	Yes
42.	Self-esteem	No	Yes
43.	High expectations for oneself	No	Yes
44.	Thrift	No	Yes

45. The public schools in America are constitutionally prohibited from teaching any particular religion. Would you 2 = favor or 1 = oppose nondevotional instruction about various world religions in the public schools in your community?

46. Do you 2 = favor or 1 = oppose an idea being tested in a few cities in which private, profit-making corporations contract to operate schools within certain jurisdictions?

47. As I read off each high school subject, would you tell me if you think that subject should be given 2 = more emphasis, or 1 = the same emphasis it now receives in high school, regardless of whether or not you think it should be required?

47.	Mathematics	Same	More
48.	English	Same	More
49.	Science	Same	More
50.	History/U. S. government	Same	More

51.	Geography	Same	More
52.	Foreign language	Same	More
53.	Music	Same	More
54.	Art	Same	More

55. Do you believe that most public school students have the capacity to learn more math than they generally do today? 1 = no; 2 = yes

56. Do you believe that most public school students have the capacity to learn more science than they generally do today? 1 = no; 2 = yes

57. A company has been loaning TV sets and satellite dishes to public schools that agree to show their students daily ten-minute news and feature broadcasts from this company. Each broadcast includes two to two and one-half minutes of commercial advertising directed to the students. The company makes money by selling this television time to advertisers. Do you happen to know whether any of the public schools in your community have entered into an arrangement of this kind or not? 1 = no; 2 = yes

58. (Asked of those who indicated awareness of the arrangement). Are you in favor of this arrangement in the local public school district? 1 = no; 2 = yes

59. (Asked of those "not aware" of any local arrangement) Would you be 2 = in favor or your local public schools entering into this kind of arrangement or 1 = opposed to it?

NOTE: WE ARE ALMOST FINISHED WITH THE SURVEY AT THIS TIME AND I WOULD LIKE TO THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH. IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURE VISITING WITH YOU!!!! THANK YOU! NOW FOR THE LAST FEW QUESTIONS

Many high school students are not motivated to do well academically. To indicate why you think this is the case, would you rate each of the following reasons as 1 = not at all important; 2 = not very important, 3 = quite important, 4 = very important.

	NAAI	NVI	QI	VI
60. The negative attitudes of fellow students about high school academic performance	1	2	3	4
61. The fact that employers of high school graduates seldom seem to care about high school records	1	2	3	4
62. The fact that many colleges will admit any student with a high school diploma, regardless of his or her high school record	1	2	3	4

63. In your opinion, which should the public schools in your community promote: 1 = one common, predominant cultural tradition only, or 2 = both a common cultural tradition and the diverse cultural traditions of the different population groups in America?

64. Which one do you think should receive more emphasis: 1 = one common cultural tradition, or 2 = diverse cultural traditions, or 3 = both should receive the same emphasis?

65. A large number of states have passed, or are considering, legislation that frees some public schools from certain state regulations and permits them to function independently. Some people say that these charter schools would be a good thing because, with fewer regulations, they would be able to try out new ideas for improving education. Others say charter schools would be a bad thing because regulations are necessary to guard against inferior or poor educational practices. Which position do you agree with more: 2 = charter schools are a good thing for education, or 1 = they are a bad thing for education.

66. Since last September, which of the following, if any have you yourself done? 1 = no; 2 = yes

67. Attended a school play or concert in any local public school	No	Yes
--	----	-----

- | | | | |
|-----|--|----|-----|
| 68. | Attended a local public school athletic event | No | Yes |
| 69. | Met with any teachers or administration in the local public schools about your own child | No | Yes |
| 70. | Attended any meeting dealing with the local public school situation | No | Yes |
| 71. | Attended a PTA meeting | No | Yes |
| 72. | Attended a meeting to discuss any of the school reforms being proposed | No | Yes |
| 73. | Attended a school board meeting | No | Yes |
| 74. | Been a member of any public school-related committee | No | Yes |

Here is a list of different types of reports that the public schools use to inform parents of their children's progress in school. As I read off a description of each type, would you tell me if you consider it 1 = not useful at all, 2 = not very useful, 3 - quite useful, or 4 = very useful for informing you about the progress of your child?

- | | NUAA | NVU | QU | VU |
|-----|---|-----|----|----|
| 75. | A written description of the student's progress in a number of areas | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 76. | A checklist that indicates what the student knows and is able to do in each subject | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 77. | A to F or numeric grades in each subject to denote excellent to failing achievement | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

	NUAA	NVU	QU	VU
78. A to F numeric grades to describe the student's effort in each subject	1	2	3	4

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

A. Do you currently have a child in public school?

1 = no 2 = yes

B. Of the following age categories, where would your age fall?

1 = 18-29 2 = 30-49 3 = 50 and over

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE IN THIS RESEARCH. YOUR HELP HAS BEEN VALUABLE!

APPENDIX D

Recommendations for Conducting Telephone Interviews

**Recommendations from the Gallup Organization on How to Conduct
a Telephone Survey**

1. Show appreciation during the survey questions. Find a break one half to three fourths the way through the survey and let them know how much "I appreciate your time this evening," etc.
2. Know how to pronounce words and names before you start the survey.
3. Personalize the survey.
4. Be positive, courteous, and enthused.
5. Be professional.
6. Never bring up your own opinions in a survey. If a respondent asks how you feel, tell them, "It is your opinions we are interested in, and I cannot reveal how I personally feel as it may bias the study."
7. Don't make negative comments about the survey questions.
8. Never bring up other respondents' opinions in a survey.
9. Never disclose confidential information.
10. Never skip any questions.
11. Always probe vague and unspecific answers.
12. Keep yourself in focus and the respondent focused.