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## Nebraskans and Educational Pluralism

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## Nebraskans and Educational Pluralism

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# 7

*Helen A. Moore*

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

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

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

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

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

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*The author wishes to acknowledge the patient editorial advice provided by Professor Chris Reed.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Educational Pluralism**

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

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

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

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

### **Measurement of Equity and Integration**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Racism and School Policy**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Inequity in Nebraska School Enrollment and Staffing**

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

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

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

\* Data by sex not available.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Sexism and Schooling

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Support for Educational Pluralism*

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

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

Table 4 - Distribution of Responses to Educational Pluralism Questions

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

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

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

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

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

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

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

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

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

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

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

\*Significant beyond the .01 level

†Not statistically significant

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

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

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

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

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

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

† Significant beyond the .001 level.

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

### *Diverse Goals: Pluralism and Excellence*

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



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

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

Source: Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, 1985.

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

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

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

### Communities, Public Opinion, and Policy Implications

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Endnotes

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

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