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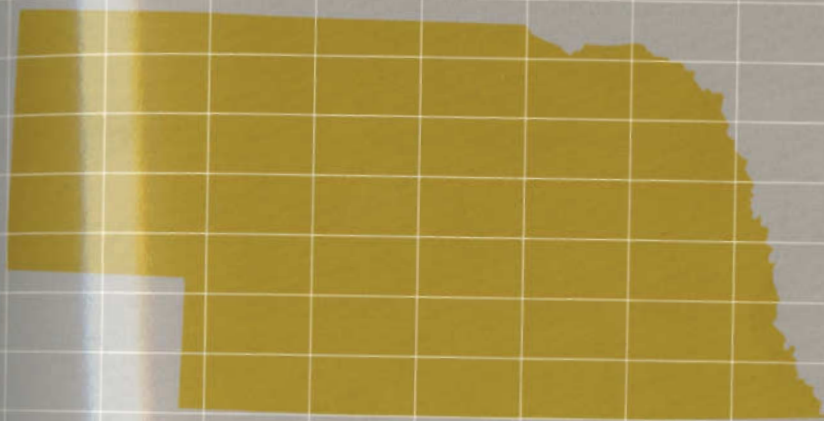
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Nebraska

POLICY CHOICES



Miles T. Bryant, Patricia O'Connell, and
Christine M. Reed, Editors

Center for Public Affairs Research
College of Public Affairs and Community Service
University of Nebraska at Omaha



EDUCATION

Center for Public Affairs Research

Russell L. Smith, Director

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**NEBRASKA
POLICY CHOICES:
EDUCATION**

NEBRASKA POLICY CHOICES: EDUCATION

1989

Miles T. Bryant, Patricia O'Connell,
and Christine M. Reed, *Editors*

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James Dick
Robert L. Egbert
Deana Finkler
Michael Gillespie
John W. Hill
Mary McManus Kluender
James Marlin
Helen A. Moore
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Center for Public Affairs Research
College of Public Affairs and Community Service
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Nebraska Policy Choices: Education

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The views and opinions expressed in *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education* are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent those of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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FOREWORD

On behalf of the College of Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha; and Teachers College, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, we are pleased to welcome you to *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education*. This volume is designed to help the reader consider education in Nebraska—its current status, strengths and weaknesses, and alternative choices for consideration by decision makers. The publication's ultimate goal is to serve as a catalyst for creation of an improved educational climate for the youth of Nebraska via presentation of issues and information.

Special thanks go to the Center for Public Affairs Research for conceiving the idea for this special edition on educational issues and for inviting us to collaborate on its production. We congratulate and commend the authors and editors for the fine thinking and writing reflected in *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education*.

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CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword	v
Preface	xi

1 Local Control of Education 1

Donald Uerling and Robert O'Reilly

The Philosophy and Definition of Local Control of Education	2
The Courts' Role	4
The Potential of Local Control	5
Social and Economic Influences on Local Control	6
Legal Context of Local Control	10
Federal Context	10
Nebraska Context	12
The Future of Local Control	16
Concluding Observations	17
General Recommendations	18

2 Education and Rural Revitalization: A Study of the Link Between Education and Economic Development 21

Miles T. Bryant

Attracting New Residents	24
Keeping Residents	29
A High School Case Study	30
Perceptions and Attitudes	32
Youth and Spending	34
Conclusion	35

3 School/Business Partnerships 39

James Dick and James Marlin

- Business Involvement in the Schools 40
- General Strategies for School/Business Partnerships 42
 - System Support 42
 - Incremental Improvement 48
 - Structural Reform 51
- Nebraska Partnerships 52
- The Nature of Current Business Involvement
 - in the Schools 53
 - Partnerships in Small Communities and Rural Areas 56
 - Compatibility with the Curriculum 58
 - Some Policy Recommendations 59

4 Images, Art and Education 63

Michael Gillespie

- Nebraska’s Model 64
- Images at Large 65
- Personal World Images 65
- Art Education 67
 - The Uses of Schooling 67
- Discipline-Based Art Education 69
 - The Nebraska Project 69
 - Challenges for Prairie Visions 71
- Reproduction of Images 74

5 Improving Life Chances for Children in Nebraska 79

Mary McManus Kluender and Robert L. Egbert

- Life Chances and Determining Factors 80
 - Socioeconomic Status 80
 - Early Childhood Education 81
- National and State Initiatives 84
 - History of Federal Involvement 84
 - Non-Federal Policy Initiatives 84
 - Head Start 88
 - Child Day Care 88

Task Force and Coordinating Councils 89
 Strategies for Improving Life Chances 90
 Recommended Strategies 91
 Conclusion 96

**6 Early Childhood Special Education
 in the Next Decade: The Impact
 of Public Law 99-457 in Nebraska 99**

Deana Finkler and Cordelia Robinson
 A Legislative History of P.L. 99-457 100
 The Nebraska Context 101
 Elements of a Statewide System 102
 Defining the Target Population 105
 Funding P.L. 99-457 (Part H) 113
 Recommendations 116

7 Nebraskans and Educational Pluralism . . . 119

Helen A. Moore
 Educational Pluralism 121
 Measurement of Equity and Integration 122
 Racism and School Policy 123
 Inequity in Nebraska School Enrollment and Staffing . . 125
 Sexism and Schooling 127
 Community Attitudes and Public Policy 129
 Support for Educational Pluralism 130
 Quality, Pluralism, and Race/Ethnicity 133
 Diverse Goals: Pluralism and Excellence 133
 Communities, Public Opinion, and Policy Implications . 134

8 At-Risk Youth in Suburban Nebraska 139

John W. Hill
 Nebraska Students At Risk 140
 Achievement and Cognitive Skills of
 Nebraska At-Risk Students 142
 Policy Strategies for At-Risk Students 145

Contributors 149

Brainstorming Committee Members 153

Reviewers 155

PREFACE

The eight chapters in *Nebraska Policy Choices: Education* represent the work of University of Nebraska faculty from both the Lincoln and Omaha campuses, as well as the University of Nebraska Medical Center. These authors participated in a unique effort jointly sponsored by the University of Nebraska Central Administration, College of Education (University of Nebraska at Omaha), Teachers College (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), and Center for Public Affairs Research (University of Nebraska at Omaha). Unlike earlier volumes of *Nebraska Policy Choices*, the focus of this volume is on one critically important area: education policy.

As with previous volumes, our primary goal is to focus on emerging issues—not necessarily those currently on the policy agenda, such as school finance and reorganization. The process of identifying those emerging issues began with a brainstorming session in May of 1988, attended by 30 individuals from around the state who represented a variety of perspectives and who came from different geographical areas.

Shortly after the brainstorming session, faculty from UNL's Teachers College and UNO's College of Education gathered at a forum to discuss the recommendations of the brainstorming group and to offer their own suggestions for chapter topics. As a result of these two sessions and further proposals from interested faculty, several strategic education policy issues were identified, and prospective author-experts were commissioned to write chapters for the volume.

The eight chapters included in this volume reflect the priority strategic issues identified by the brainstorming group and faculty—the increasing debate over who should control schools, the expanding role of schools as the educational system is asked to redress certain consequences of larger societal trends, and the appropriate purposes of the school system in Nebraska.

The volume begins with Robert O'Reilly and Donald Uerling's analysis of local education control. This chapter charts the tension between state and local authority over what happens in schools, and it discusses some of the problems that emerge from this tension. Among its

recommendations is that state responsibility requires continued school district consolidation.

The role of business and economics in setting the education policy agenda in Nebraska is a critical component of the issue of control. Miles T. Bryant lays out the relationship between education and rural economic revitalization and suggests that if rural development is a strong state goal, the educational strategy of consolidation needs to be coordinated with regional and community development realities.

James Dick and James Marlin review the history and scope of school/business partnerships around the country and in Nebraska. Unlike some of the more celebrated examples in larger, urbanized states, there are no examples in Nebraska of systematic use of business resources for education reform. These authors urge the business community to invest its knowledge and skill in community schools and, ultimately, in small community development.

Michael Gillespie's chapter develops a vision of education that contrasts with the views of schools as centers of economic development. While Dick and Marlin tout the economic development model and Bryant cautions against it, Gillespie points out the critical error that such approaches may make. In this chapter, Gillespie focuses on discipline-based art education and challenges all of us to question whether, in the pursuit of a competitive position in the global market, we have lost sight of the purpose of general education: enhancing people's capacity to make experience intelligible by the way they order and relate phenomena. Without a good general education, Gillespie argues, students are subject to manipulation by the media. Moreover, debates in the education policy arena may erupt without the participants being conscious of the different images or values driving their positions. This chapter's in-depth look at an innovative approach to art education in Nebraska suggests how to enhance the human capacity to interpret and critically evaluate life situations through the development of ways of thinking about images.

The next two chapters cover in detail the changing requirements and needs of the state's younger children.

Deana Finkler and Cordelia Robinson identify one group of children at risk: those experiencing biological or environmental difficulties that carry a significant risk of developmental delay. New federal legislation, P.L. 99-457, makes incentive funding available to states for early intervention services not only for handicapped infants and toddlers, but also

for children from birth through age two who are at risk for developmental delay. The State of Nebraska already serves this age group, but it must define what criteria it will use to designate children as *at risk* if it chooses to serve them. Finkler and Robinson lay out the new choices federal law will require state policy makers to make, including how to: 1) define the family unit; 2) foster inter-agency cooperation; 3) develop trained specialists who can work effectively in a cross-agency setting; and 4) solve funding problems.

Mary McManus Kluender and Robert L. Egbert highlight the factors that help or hinder opportunities for children to succeed in their personal, social and economic responsibilities as adults. Their research demonstrates that a strong relationship exists between what children experience during the early years of their lives, their academic and behavioral performance by the time they complete the primary grades, and the life circumstances they will experience as adults. They find that to be born poor is to drastically increase the likelihood of being at risk, and that early childhood education is the single most effective means for Nebraska to help children overcome the constraints of poverty.

Two particular areas promise to become more and more critical for education in the state. As the world grows smaller and as dominant cultures shrink, education will need to respond by producing a citizenry cognizant of the need to give all Nebraskans equal opportunities and rights. Helen A. Moore's chapter points out that, despite a public policy of equal education opportunity and a high overall secondary school graduation rate, racial minority and female students continue to experience subtle but pervasive discrimination. Moore's analysis of a statewide survey leads to the conclusion that, while citizens hold to a general belief in cultural pluralism, they resist specific curricular reforms needed to eliminate racism and sexism in the institution of elementary and secondary education. However, educators can be leaders in communicating to their communities the value of ethnic diversity and the contributions of women. Moore's chapter emphasizes the statewide nature of this issue, particularly as a result of projected changes in the cultural diversity of communities with an influx of immigrants, such as Norfolk, Hastings and Lexington.

John W. Hill's chapter on at-risk youth in a suburban Nebraska school district provides startling evidence that troubled youth exist in large numbers in school districts commonly thought to be immune from such difficulties. His study of junior and senior high school students suggests

that an alarming number of older youths at risk are capable of achieving at the national average; however, these teenagers are "failing" according to the norms of their college-bound peers. Hill argues that at least one-third of the teenagers in this suburban district are at risk for unproductive lives, and that their best hope is to stay in school, which will only happen if educators send the message that they are valued members of the school community.

We have many people to thank for the enormous effort that lies behind these pages. First, Katherine Kasten, formerly of UNO and now at The University of Northern Florida, provided essential guidance to the project in its early stages. Margaret McDonald Rasmussen undertook the difficult task of converting academic prose into a language more accessible to the lay community. The help of Russell L. Smith, Director of the Center for Public Affairs Research, was also instrumental. Finally, our faculty colleagues who gathered in early planning stages to brainstorm the content of this volume, and who subsequently wrote chapters, deserve our special thanks.

We hope that all who read this volume will find in it useful information about some part of the educational policy puzzle.

Miles T. Bryant, Christine M. Reed and Patrica O'Connell, *Editors*