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An Evaluation of Issues in Rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts

Jason L. Buckner

May, 2009

A dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Jason L. Buckner

Signature: Jason L. Buckner Date: July 21st, 2009

AN EVALUATION OF ISSUES IN RURAL MISSOURI
K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Jason L. Buckner

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
at Lindenwood University by the School of Education.

Dr. Terry Reed, Dissertation Chair — July 27, 2009 Date

Dr. Sherry DeVore, Committee Member — July 27, 2009 Date

Dr. Howard Neeley, Committee Member — July 27 - 2009 Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this endeavor to my family. My family is everything in life to me and everyday is a reflection of my love for them. My children, Ty and Kaylon, have given me the inspiration to overcome this challenge. It is my wish that they will inherit their parent’s determination in an effort to set and reach their goals in life. In their childhood they have given up many nights and weekends for dad’s college work, and the rest of their childhood I will spend making it up to them. Hopefully, the example that I have set will benefit them as they begin their life direction. My wife and best friend, Tammi, has been a true supporter throughout the years. Her patience is unbelievable. Without her, nothing I have ever accomplished would be possible. It is my wish to provide her happiness. With this obstacle behind us, we will spend more time doing the things that she wants to do. Thank you for helping me and standing beside me in life’s journey. Thank you to my parents for supporting me each time I wanted to try to reach a new goal, and standing by me during youth. It is my desire that all of you prosper in life. I sincerely thank you and will always be there for you.

ABSTRACT

This evaluation discusses the commonalities in the issues among rural school districts in Missouri. A survey was sent to 270 school districts in the state of Missouri with 1,000 student enrollment or fewer. Fifty percent of the districts responded. The survey consisted of a questionnaire targeting thirteen different issues and requested that superintendents target the top five issues in their school district. The main issues selected were district funding (84%), student achievement (73%), governmental mandates (61%), socio-economic factors (48%), and technology (47%). Results of this evaluation are tabulated in Chapter 4, based on the following research questions: 1)What are the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts? 2)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts according to student enrollment? 3)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts based on the years of experience of the superintendent? 4)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts in relation to the demographic region? 5)In rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are the main issues the same?

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

During the years between the Revolutionary War and signing of the Declaration of Independence several leading American people insisted that a system of public schooling was critical for a democracy to survive. There was controversy from various individuals (McKluskey, 2007). However, criticism and skepticism did not stop public education from being on the way to success in the United States. It wasn't without controversy. For instance, Thomas Jefferson's proposed legislation to establish free public schooling in Virginia for grades one through three, failed (McKluskey, 2007). A similar plan, the Land and Northwest Ordinances, was passed by the Continental Congress, but the money from renting the land, which was supposed to be saved for education, typically ended up either stolen or wasted (McKluskey, 2007). Actually, between the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the 1830s, American education remained much as it had been in prior years. Education was decentralized, entrepreneurial, and supported by the efforts of individual parents and local communities, not school districts or states (McKluskey, 2007).

According to Thattai, "Until the 1840s the education system was highly localized and available only to wealthy

people” (Thattai, 2001, p.1). Prominent public school reformers, such as Horace Mann, an attorney and Massachusetts legislator, and Henry Barnard, an attorney and Connecticut legislator, wanted all children to gain the benefits of education, therefore opposing the idea of public schooling for the wealthy only (Public Broadcasting System, 2001). Mann started the publication of the *Common School Journal*, which communicated to the public about educational issues. The reformers argued for required public schooling on the belief that it could create good citizens, unite society, and prevent crime and poverty. Massachusetts passed the first required school attendance laws in 1852, followed by New York in 1853 Thattai, 2001). As a result of their efforts, free public education at the elementary level was available for all American children by the late 1800s. Thattai states:

> By 1918 all states had passed laws requiring children to attend at least elementary school. The Catholics were, however, opposed to common schooling and created their own private schools. Their decision was supported by the 1925 Supreme Court rule in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* that states could not compel children to attend public schools, and that children could attend private schools instead. (p. 2)

In the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, American classrooms were lightly decorated and furnished. School design was simple. This expressed the frugality of a largely rural, agricultural economy (Public Broadcasting System, 2001). During the late 1800s and early 1900s rural communities had few resources to spend on education, and there was a lack of available products for schools. Often the school would be open only for a few months of the year and when children were not needed to work at home or on the farm they would attend school. In the one room schoolhouse students were of all ages and academic abilities. In fact, it was not uncommon for some of the students to be older than the teacher. There was only one teacher, who was usually an unmarried woman, which lived with a local family. The teachers would rotate from household to household, living with various families throughout their tenure. Using basic resources, such as, slate, chalk, and a few books, teaching and learning consisted mainly of reading, writing, arithmetic, and good manners. Memorization, skill and drill, and oral quizzes were the standard in classrooms across America. Farmers supplied the wood for the stove to keep the room warm in the winter. Parents built school desks and took turns cleaning and stocking the stable that housed the horses the children

used to get to and from school each day. Many students walked to and from school for several miles. Older students would help with many tasks throughout the school day (Public Broadcasting System, 2001).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the American school is a much different place. The Federal and State governments have implemented much legislation in an effort to improve schools, and therefore, the quality of American education. Teachers must have a college degree and often specialized training. Students are separated by grades and not gender, race, or academic ability. Classrooms are filled with a variety of books, maps, and electronic equipment that was unimaginable to American forefathers. Telecommunications and marvelous technological advancements empower students to obtain information from around the world directly in their classrooms. Students can participate in classes led by teachers in other states and have discussions with students across the ocean. In some communities, children attend school all year, including summer. Schools are larger, with expanded extracurricular opportunities. Schools often offer two meals per day and sometimes after school care and a snack are provided. Most rural schools today provide for community functions and activities (Public Broadcasting System, 2001).

Public Education has rural roots mixed with urban ideas. This unique blend is what is found in today's rural public schools. The public school system is one of the most successful organizations in history (Public Broadcasting System, 2001). According to PBS (2001), "Public education today is a product of more than two centuries of reform and revision. In each era, visionary individuals have taken the lead and transformed the system to meet their ideals" (p.1).

However, often advancement can bring negativity and problems. In the early 21st century most rural Missouri school districts are experiencing extremely difficult times. There are many issues of concern that linger throughout these rural institutions, and these issues have caused rural education to stagnate. It is important to target and emphasize what are the main issues in an effort to move forward in a positive manner for the future of American education.

Statement of the Problem

Rural school districts are experiencing difficult decisions. Due to various issues it is becoming necessary for rural schools to consolidate educational opportunities that effect children. It appears as if rural public schools are being forced to go back to education as it was in the

past. There are extreme numbers of requirements, laws, and mandates that rural districts are struggling to uphold. Many districts spend large amounts of time attempting to stay ahead of ever-changing policies, with a lack of sufficient revenue to do so. The education of children is overshadowed with high-stakes testing, demanding paper-work, and bureaucracy (American Association, 2008). The priority of student education is being lost in requirements placed upon the public school district.

Many different barriers disrupt rural school acceleration. Unfortunately, school districts are encountering barriers that can limit or even prevent successful student achievement. Most of these barriers are outside of staff control. It is the goal of this evaluation to determine the changes necessary in an effort to accelerate education in rural public schools. It is important to obtain information about the primary issues in public schools from individuals at the grass roots level.

Research is plentiful about topics in rural public schools. However, there is not a sufficient amount of research obtained from school district superintendents concerning the issues faced on a daily basis. It is critical for all stakeholders to target the issues and

collaborate to find conclusions, in an effort to progress the education of children in rural Missouri.

Research Questions

1. What are the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts?
2. Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts according to student enrollment?
3. Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts based on the years of experience of the superintendent?
4. Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts in relation to the demographic region?
5. In rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are the main issues the same?

Rationale for Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the main issues being dealt with in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts. Issues are increasing in magnitude in these rural institutions. There are many issues today that put schools under unreasonable, excessive pressure. More collective research is needed to identify the main issues that need attention in rural school districts. This

particular study has the potential to assist school districts, legislators, and community stakeholders in gaining a perspective of the critical issues. It is the hope of the researcher that all public school constituents become aware of the barriers that prohibit the advancement of rural districts. The researcher will discuss the five main issues identified in Chapter 2 of this study. It is difficult for rural school districts to focus on the top priority of educating students with unnecessary obstacles at the forefront.

Hypotheses

1. There are no significant differences between the main issues in targeted rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts.
2. There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, according to student enrollment.
3. There are no significant differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, based on the years of experience of the superintendent.

4. There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, in relation to the demographic region.

Limitations of Study

1. The validity of the questionnaire used for this evaluation was not verified.
2. All two hundred and seventy K-12 rural school district superintendents did not complete the survey.
3. This evaluation utilizes self-reporting data. Findings of the study are based on perception data of superintendents and the assumption that superintendents will respond thoroughly and interpret the instrument as intended.
4. The evaluation also suggests that each superintendent has the knowledge, experience, practicality, and education to identify top issues in their school district.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) - this is the term the No Child Left Behind Act uses to explain that a child's school has met Missouri's state reading and math goals (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Annual Performance Report (APR) – this is the District's report card that details progress concerning student standardized testing, attendance, drop-out, career education, and college data (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

Authentic Assessment - a form of assessment that presents tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful to students and that reflect the kinds of mastery demonstrated by experts (eMINTS, 2007).

Certified Staff – determined by the researcher as public school district teachers and administrators.

Collaborative Learning - an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal (eMINTS, 2007).

Cooperative Learning - cooperative learning is defined by a set of processes which help people interact together in order to accomplish a specific goal or develop an end product which is usually content specific (eMINTS, 2007).

Curriculum – determined by the researcher as the academic topics, ideas and rigor that are taught in the classroom.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) - the administrative arm of the State Board of Education. The Department strives to assure that all

citizens have access to high-quality public education (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

District Funding – determined by the researcher as the local, county, state, and federal money that is paid to the public school district in an effort to provide students with an adequate education.

Education Governmental Mandates – determined by the researcher as state and federal statutes referencing public school district requirements.

Enhancing Missouri's Instructional Networking Teaching Strategies (eMINTS) – Missouri's model of technology education instruction integration into the classroom; this model has expanded to other states and Australia in recent years (eMINTS, 2007).

Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage (FRL) – the number of students who receive a Federal free or reduced price school breakfast and lunch divided by the total student enrollment. All schools participating in the Federally assisted National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs muct make available free and reduced-price lunches and breakfasts (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) – this is the term No Child Left Behind uses for a teacher who proves that he or

she knows the subjects he or she is teaching, has a college degree, and is state-certified. No Child Left Behind requires that the child be taught by a Highly Qualified Teacher in core academic subjects (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)- Public Law 94-142 passed by Congress in an effort to educate all handicap children (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

Inquiry-Based Learning - is a pedagogy that engages students in finding solutions to important and meaningful questions through investigations and collaboration with others (eMINTS, 2007).

K-12 Rural Public School District – the researcher has determined for the purposes of this evaluation that this is a school district that contains kindergarten through twelfth grade and has 1,000 or fewer students. This district will also use funds from the Missouri Legislature as a revenue source.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) – the standardized student assessment exam process used in the State of Missouri (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) - this rule implements a program of comprehensive assessments of school

districts' educational resources, instructional processes and educational outcomes designed to stimulate and encourage improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of instruction, and provides information which will enable the State Board of Education to accredit and classify the districts as required by state law (http:// www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) – Legislation enacted in 2001 under the President George W. Bush Administration (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Public School District Board of Education – determined by the researcher as the local governing body of each individual public school district in the State of Missouri.

Public School Funding Formula – determined by the researcher as the calculation formula determining how each school district is funded with state aid.

Qualitative Data – otherwise known as categorical data which represent qualities or characteristics such as a person's gender, eye color, or opinion on some issue which in turn is summarized by reporting the percentage of individuals falling into each category (Rumsey, 2003).

Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) – each Missouri public school district is located in an RPDC region. There are 9 regions dividing the state by location.

The centers are available for educators to obtain knowledge, expertise, or growth on particular educational topics of interest (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

School in Need of Improvement – this is the term No Child Left Behind uses to refer to schools receiving Title I funds that have not met state reading and math goals (AYP) for at least two years. If a child's school is labeled a "school in need of improvement," it receives extra help to improve and a child has the option to transfer to another public school, including a public charter school. Also, a child may be eligible to receive free tutoring and extra help with schoolwork (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Senate Bill 287 – stated by the researcher as a bill passed and enacted in 2005 representing the most recent funding formula for public school districts in Missouri.

Senate Bill 380 – stated by the researcher as the bill passed and enacted in 1993 also referred to as the Outstanding Schools Act.

Socio-economic – the level of financial well-being that a student experiences and the ideas and beliefs that come with each level (Wong, 2001).

State Assessments – this refers to the tests developed by states that students will take every year in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school. Using these tests, the state will be able to compare schools to each other and know which ones need extra help to improve. Parents should contact the local school district concerning details about state exams (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

State Board of Education - the supervision of instruction in the public schools shall be vested in a state board of education, according to the Missouri Constitution Article IX, Section 2a. This provision gives the State Board of Education general authority for public education, within limits set by the General Assembly (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

Student Achievement – determined by the researcher for the purposes of this study as results of federal and state standardized test scores which public school districts are required to give students.

Student-Centered Classroom - a classroom where planning, teaching, and assessment are based around the needs and abilities of students (eMINTS, 2007).

Sunshine Law – it is the public policy of Missouri that meetings, records, votes, actions, and deliberations

of public governmental bodies be open to the public, unless the information is otherwise provided by law (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008).

Supplemental Educational Services (SES) – this is the term No Child Left Behind uses to refer to the tutoring and extra help with schoolwork in subjects such as reading and math that children from low income families may be eligible to receive. This help is provided free of charge and generally takes place outside the regular school day, such as after school or during the summer (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Support Staff – determined by the researcher as employees of the public school district who are not certificated to teach.

Teacher-Centered Classroom - a classroom where a majority of the instruction is presented by and under the control of the teacher (eMINTS, 2007).

Technology – determined by the researcher as the manner of accomplishing a task, especially using technical processes, methods, or knowledge and the software, hardware, and training related to educational technological requirements, updates, and trends.

Title I - this is the part of No Child Left Behind that supports programs in schools and school districts to

improve the learning of children from low-income families. The U.S. Department of Education provides Title I funds to states to give to school districts, based on the number of children from low-income families in each district (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Transportation – student transportation in public school districts, that is primarily composed of school buses, by the statutes set forth by the State of Missouri and regulations by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Educations.

Summary

This study is significant to various groups of stakeholders interested in public education. In Chapter 1 it is stated that the purpose of this evaluation was to identify and examine the top issues rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are experiencing. Throughout the research for this project a number of references stated that too much emphasis is placed on meeting mandates and overcoming obstacles that are created by outside sources. Eight questions were used to construct the survey which guided the participants to provide the data necessary for this evaluation. Five research questions and four null hypotheses were formulated by the researcher. Limitations included several possibilities to obtain results that may

question validity of the study. Key terms were provided to assist the reader in understanding the issues that are most emphasized in rural schools and throughout the evaluation.

Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature that provides the basis for this investigation and a perspective for the intensity of issues in rural school districts in Missouri. The main areas of research identified in the review of literature are: (a)district funding – the revenue process in which school districts are funded in the state of Missouri is described in detail in an effort to provide the reader with the basic knowledge to understand the issues that rural districts are experiencing, (b)student achievement – a thorough explanation of how student achievement and progress are required to be measured in publics schools and the obstacles that are present for students to achieve to the best of their ability, (c)governmental mandates – major time and money-consuming mandates are investigated in an effort to enable the reader to understand the complexity of the public school system and the governments interferences. The No Child Left Behind Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, and Federal Title I Program will be described in this section of Chapter 2, (d)socio-economic factors – the financial stability and generational levels of economic status of

communities and families will be reported in an effort to assist the reader in understanding what obstacles stand in the way of educating children in poverty, (e)technology – the educational needs, requirements, and maintenance required to incorporate appropriate technology in the educational process are reported in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 presents the research designs and methods of investigation and focuses on addressing the research questions. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data collected. Tables are used to disaggregate data in an effort to provide appropriate and understandable conclusions. Chapter 5 contains the summary of research findings and conclusions that are formulated from the data and their analysis.

CHAPTER II - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter contains a review of related literature that provides the basis for this investigation and a perspective for issues in rural school districts in Missouri. Relevant literature that supports the framework and conceptual underpinnings of this study is reviewed. The main areas of research identified are district funding and governmental mandates, student achievement and socio-economic factors, and technology.

Theory/Research

The school districts identified in this evaluation enroll approximately ten percent of the students in the state of Missouri (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008). Rural school districts are experiencing difficult times. There are many obstacles that prevent staff from focusing on educating students. In this evaluation 270 school district superintendents were asked to identify the top issues in their district. When the data were tabulated there was a significant response in identifying the main issues. In this chapter facts and theories will be evaluated and interpreted.

District Funding and Governmental Mandates

LOCAL REVENUE

Funding at the local school district level is primarily based on property assessments and sales tax. An operating tax levy is set by the local Board of Education not to exceed the maximum authorized levy determined from collaboration with the Missouri State Auditor's Office. If it is determined by school district officials that a higher levy must be set then it takes a 50% vote of the patrons of the school district during an official state election to increase the levy. A debt service levy, if required, is set by school district voters to pay off outstanding debt on new or construction renovations. A debt service levy is initially required to go through the election process, as well. However, 4/7's and sometimes 2/3's majority, depending on the election month and year, is required for passage. The set levies are paid in the form of taxes by district taxpayers, per $100 of property assessed valuation (Podgursky & Springer, 2006).

Proposition C is the state's one-cent sales tax for education. It was approved by Missouri voters in 1982. Every school district receives a flat amount of Proposition C revenue for each student based on attendance. However, each district is required to reduce its property tax rate

by an amount equivalent to one-half of the revenue received from this sales tax. Through a waiver election, approximately 90% of the public schools in Missouri have reversed the aforementioned requirement. During declining economic times the rural public school's local funding is decreased. Districts lose funding from local property taxes and prop C sales tax revenue (Podgursky & Springer, 2006).

STATE REVENUE

> "It has long been recognized that the responsibility to provide for the educational needs of children is the state of Missouri. Article IX, Section 1(a) of the Missouri Constitution states: A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, the general assembly shall establish and maintain free public schools for the gratuitous instruction of all persons in this state within ages not in excess of twenty-one years as prescribed by law" (Podgursky & Springer, 2006).

The Missouri Constitution determines that the state must spend twenty-five percent of the state budget on public education. This mandate is currently being met. However, it is suggested by critics that the appropriations

are not fair to all school districts. The Missouri public school is funded from various sources (Arnold, 1998).

The state foundation formula is the backbone of funding for most rural school districts. On the average, about 50 percent of the money that funds rural public schools is appropriated by the Missouri General Assembly. In recent years, Senate Bill 287 (2005) replaced Senate Bill 380 (1993), as the new foundation formula legislation that is used to fund public school districts. SB 380, otherwise known as the Outstanding Schools Act, was enacted in response to a lawsuit initiated by numerous school districts collectively referred to as the Committee for Educational Equality. The lawsuit claimed that the formula for distributing funds to schools created an inequity in funding. SB 380 included a new funding formula which was suggested to be the solution to providing equitable funding. The SB 380 formula, referred to as the foundation formula at that time, distributed funds to school districts based on the number of pupils enrolled and then adjusted for the local wealth in the district. Under the SB 380 formula, funding for education continued to increase until the 2002-03 school year. However, as a result of a state recession, the elimination or reduction of certain state taxes, and increased competition for state funds, funding

for education actually decreased in 2003-04. In the middle of the 2002-2003 school year schools were notified of a state shortfall in school funding and many were forced to cut staff and/or programs in the middle of the school year. At the same time increased standards were being implemented through the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, further increasing the need for additional resources for schools (Podgursky, Smith, & Springer, 2008).

> “As a result, many school districts faced severe financial shortages. The Committee for Educational Equality was re-established in 2004 to challenge the equity and adequacy of state funding for schools. Over 250 school districts eventually joined the group which filed a lawsuit against the state of Missouri. The lawsuit again challenged the equitable distribution of funds, and in addition, stated that the level of funding provided to schools from the state was inadequate. The difference between the 1993 lawsuit and the 2004 lawsuit was the issue of adequacy. The 2004 lawsuit addressed the question of how much funding is needed per pupil to provide an adequate education” (Podgursky, Smith, & Springer, 2008).

In the 2005 legislative session, the Missouri Legislature approved a new formula, Senate Bill 287, to

distribute funds to schools. This formula was described as being based on student needs in contrast to the old formula which was property tax rate driven. The SB 287 formula created an adequacy target based on schools that scored 100 on their Annual Performance Report (APR). It has been proven that it does not address fairness and adequacy among Missouri School District students. Currently, this formula is being debated in the court room (Podgursky, Smith, & Springer, 2008).

The state of Missouri, and more importantly, the nation, is undergoing another recession. It has been suggested that the next state budget will be as much as 340 million dollars in deficit, unless cut-backs are made in various public sectors. It is yet to be seen if school districts will be forced to cut positions and programs in upcoming school years.

FEDERAL REVENUE

The Federal government has committed to funding public school districts in various categories. The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), passed in 1975, and Federal Title Programs, specifically Title I, are the largest commitments made by the Federal Government. Other competitive and discretionary grants are offered, such as 21st Century Learning Grant, Reading First Grant, REAP

Grant, and various small grants available to very few school districts across the United States (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008). The focus in this study is the two larger appropriations of IDEA and Title I.

IDEA requires assistance for Education of all children with disabilities, infants and toddlers, and national activities to improve education of children with disabilities. A child is covered by IDEA if he or she has been evaluated under IDEA evaluation requirements and been determined to have one of the following disabilities: speech-language pathology audiology, physical therapy and occupational therapy, psychological service, early identification and assessment, therapeutic recreation, counseling services, orientation and mobility services, medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes only, transitional services, parent counseling and training, and other services which IDEA can acknowledge (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008). In 1975, Congress defined the federal contribution for special education as forty percent of the average per pupil expenditure (Kafer, 2002). This definition of funding has not been upheld and is steadily decreasing.

Title I is a federal program that is an effort to assist disadvantaged students and school districts. Funding

is distributed on a financial needs basis. The state poverty levels are used as a method of providing funds to the receiving states and, therefore, to the individual school districts. The purpose of this title program is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments (Hoff, 2008).

This purpose can be achieved by the following:

(1) Aligning high quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials with challenging State academic standards.

(2) Meeting Educational needs of low achieving children in the nation's highest poverty schools.

(3) Closing the achievement gap between high and low performing children.

(4) Accountability for schools, local educational agencies, and states for improving the academic achievement of all students.

(5) Distribution of resources sufficiently to local educational agencies and schools where needs are greatest.

(6) Improving and strengthening accountability, teaching, learning by using state assessment systems.

(7) Providing greater decision making authority and flexibility to schools and teachers, in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance.

(8) Providing children an enriched and accelerated educational program, including the use of school wide programs or additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time.

(9) Promoting school-wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content.

(10) Significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development.

(11) Coordinating services under all parts of this title program with each other, with other educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with other agencies providing services to youth, children, and families.

(12) Affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their

children (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

The Federal Government will allocate a portion of the national budget to this title program. Funds are distributed to states based on poverty census, therefore a steady decline in title I funding in the state of Missouri has occurred in the last five years. This in turn has provided many rural school districts a lesser amount, as well.

All sub-categories of funding for public schools is declining or, at the very least, remaining the same. However, mandates, requirements, and restrictions on public school districts continue to increase from all angles. With the state of the current economy, it appears as if schools are not on pace for an increase in revenue any time soon. If many unnecessary, unfunded, expensive requirements were reduced it would take a lot of financial stresses off of public school districts and help states to attempt to stay fiscally sound.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

“The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) -- the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school” (http://www.ed.gov/

index.jhtml, November 29, 2008). Proposed by President Bush shortly after his inauguration, NCLB was signed into law on January 8th, 2002. It is federal legislation stating that all students completing the eighth grade must be proficient in academic skills by 2014. This piece of legislation was supported by the 43rd president of the United States, George W. Bush. Many legislators claim that the law will progress and that extra funding for schools in low-income areas, basic skills education, frequent testing and assessment of student progress, enhanced teacher training, and tutoring are enabling all American children to receive a high-quality education (Williams, 2005). However, others believe that NCLB needs an overhaul and the President of the United States, Barack Obama, should and will support reauthorization and a focus on teachers in future legislation (Alter, 2008).

"NCLB is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research" (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008). No Child Left Behind is based on stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more

choices for parents (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

Under No Child Left Behind, each state has developed and implemented measurements for determining whether its schools are making adequate yearly progress. AYP is an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of one hundred percent of students achieving to state academic standards in at least reading and math. It sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state and its school districts must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators. Parents whose children are attending Title I schools that do not make AYP over a period of years are given options to transfer their child to another school or obtain free tutoring. Schools that receive federal Title I funds that have not made state defined AYP for two consecutive school years must be identified as needing school improvement before the beginning of the next school year. Immediately after a school is found to be in need of improvement, school officials must receive help and technical assistance. These schools must develop a two-year plan to turn around the school. Every student in the school must be given the option to transfer to another school in the district with transportation provided. If the school does not make AYP

for three consecutive years, the school remains in school improvement, and the district must continue to offer public school choice to all students. In addition, students from low income families must be offered supplemental educational services such as free tutoring services or additional academic help for students provided outside of the regular school day. Parents can choose the services their child needs from a list of approved providers. Schools that remain in improvement for additional years are subject to corrective action and restructuring, including a takeover or complete reorganization of the school (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008).

President Bush claimed that in 2004 education funding reached an all time high at $53.1 billion. He also said there has been an increase in Title I and reading programs. The opinion of many government officials is the importance of pushing accountability through student testing to prove these improvements (Stover, 2007). They also think that education is failing a large number of students in the United States and that it is the public schools responsibility to improve this problem. President Bush says America must not tolerate excuses. Instead, we must insist on high standards and high achievement in America. He says the damage can last a life time when students pass through

grades without being able to read and write (Davidson, 2008). The core of NCLB is that every child must be tested on the basics because testing shows what children are learning and where they need help. Each state has a different plan approved by the Federal government that will help no child to fall behind and be forgotten (Williams, 2005).

Monty Neill expresses an opposite viewpoint concerning NCLB. Mr. Neill believes that high stakes testing is unnecessary. He says it causes teachers to exit the profession for numerous reasons. NCLB does not help students to learn because teachers are forced to teach to tests and teach kids how to excel at tests. Tests are only an estimate of a student's knowledge. Test formats and test scores can have errors that do not tell the true story about a student or a school district. Many sample sizes are too different or too small to detect or tell true results. Neill discusses how NCLB is unrealistic and how it is impossible for all kids to be proficient. He says that virtually no schools that that are serving a large majority of low-income children will make the goal. NCLB actually can have the complete opposite effect on schools and individual students. Student frustration levels can increase concerning academics. This can cause them not to

like school and more students may go uneducated than ever before. Most of these kids will come from minority or low income families (Williams, 2005).

The 110th Congress may soon consider the reauthorization of the NCLB Act. This will be the ninth reauthorization of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Congress should address, among other problems with the law, the massive administrative and bureaucratic costs the federal government imposes on state and local authorities (Lips & Feinberg, 2007).

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT AND NCLB

The U.S. Department of Education recently released final regulations under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in coordination with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This provides flexibility to states to more appropriately measure the achievement of students with disabilities. These regulations allow states to develop modified academic achievement standards that are challenging for eligible students that measure a student's mastery of grade level content, but are less difficult than grade level achievement standards. The new regulations are part of an ongoing effort to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, fully participate in a state's accountability system and are assessed in an

appropriate and accurate manner. Modified achievement standards are intended for a small group of students whose disability has prevented them from achieving grade level proficiency and who likely will not reach grade level achievement in the same timeframe as other students. Currently, these students must take either the grade level assessment, which is often too difficult, or an alternate assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, which is too easy. Neither of these options provides an accurate assessment of what these students know and can do (http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml, November 29, 2008). Alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards will provide a more appropriate measure of these students' achievement of grade level content, and give teachers and parents information that can be used to better inform instruction (Cronin, Kingsbury, McCall, & Branin, 2005). For this group of students, states may develop alternate assessments based on modified academic achievement standards. A student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team, which includes the student's parents, will determine whether the student will be assessed based on modified academic achievement standards. States must develop guidelines for IEP Teams to ensure that

they are appropriately identifying students to be assessed based on modified academic achievement standards.

Jonathan Kozol has protested the vicious damage being done to low income and minority children because of the No Child Left Behind law. He did a partial fasting for sixty seven days in an effort to show that the law is not good for children, particularly special education students. The law has forced obsessive testing in schools across the nation. Many of these schools are underfunded and overcrowded inner city schools. Kozol states (2007), “The real effect of No Child Left Behind is to drive away the tens of thousands of exciting and high-spirited, superbly educated teachers whom the urban districts struggle to attract. Currently, African American and Hispanic students are more segregated than at any time since 1968” (p.1). NCLB adds another factor of division between children of minorities and those in the mainstream of society. In good suburban classrooms, children are mastering essential skills inspired in them by their teachers. In inner-city schools many minority students are not being taught basic skills. American students are being trained to give scripted answers.

Kozol has tried to win support for an amendment to the law that will take advantage of loop holes in the recent

segregation ruling. In his opinion the Democrats have the opportunity to make the option of low performing school transfers work by allowing students to transfer across district lines and providing financial means to make it possible. However, no one is willing to improve the flaws in the law. In fact, when trying to get through to the chairman of the educational committee, Senator Ted Kennedy, Kozol was unable to speak to him. Kozol thinks that it is because of the fact that he co-sponsored the initial bill in a deal with the Republicans. Kozol also believes he is fighting a losing battle, as do many in the education arena. He continues to fight this battle because it is a tiny price to pay, compared to what so many of our children and their teachers have to go through every single day (Kozol, 2007).

Many are very concerned by the continued distress put on poor rural and inner city schools. Mr. Kozol, as well as many others, realizes what is actually going on. Is it fair to the American children? Who is going to listen and make changes? The United States is being led in a direction that is only beneficial to bureaucrats, politicians, and the wealthy. It is heart wrenching not to be able to get the point across in an effort to fight for low income, rural, and minority students. It is possible that a battle that

cannot be won is being fought. The point is heard and understood, but less important to politicians and lawmakers than other front line items. It is a fact that the public schools, especially rural, and primarily, the public school staff is being undermined so blame can be pointed at the schools and the staff when students don't succeed (Kozol, 2007).

No Child Left behind contains worthy goals. No one would oppose a federal pledge to help all children. All kids should receive a high quality education from a well prepared teacher, and schools should be held accountable for educating children are all common sense goals (Bracey, 2008). It seems that if one looks behind the bureaucracy, many reasons why NCLB is a fraud and the fact that it will leave very few rural schools standing is obvious. People around the country are responding to NCLB in a negative fashion. The following is a list of the negativities:

1) The massive increase in testing that NCLB will impose on schools will hurt their education performance, not improve it.
2) The funding for NCLB does not come anywhere near the levels that would be needed to reach even the narrow and dubious goal of producing 100% passing rates on state tests for all students by 2014.

3) The mandate that NCLB imposes on schools to eliminate inequality in test scores among all student groups within 12 years is a mandate that is placed on no other social institution, and reflects the hyposcrisy at the heart of the law.
4) The sanctions that NCLB imposes on schools that don't meet its test score targets will hurt poor schools and poor communities most.
5) The transfer and choice provisions of NCLB will create chaos and produce greater inequality within the public system without increasing the capacity of receiving schools to deliver better educational services.
6) These same transfer and choice provisions will not give low income parents any more control over school bureaucracies than food stamps give them over the supermarkets.
7) The provisions about using scientifically based instructional practices are neither scientifically valid nor educationally sound and will harmfully impact classrooms in what may be the single most important instructional area, the teaching of reading. "NCLB uses the phrase "scientifically based research" 111 times and demands such research from educational researchers, but no scientifically based research or

any research supports the law's mandates" (Bracey, 2004).

8) The supplemental tutorial provisions of NCLB will channel public funds to private companies for ideological and political reasons, not sound educational ones.

9) NCLB is part of a larger political and ideological effort to privatize social programs, reduce the public sector, and ultimately replace local control of institutions like schools with marketplace reforms that substitute commercial relations between customers for democratic relations between citizens (Ohanian, 2008).

10) NCLB moves control over curriculum and instructional issues away from teachers, classrooms, schools and local districts where it should be, and puts it in the hands of state and federal education bureaucracies and politicians. It represents the single biggest assault on local control of schools in the history of federal education policy (Bracey, 2008).

11) NCLB includes provisions that try to push prayer, military recruiters, and homophobia into schools, while pushing multiculturalism, teacher innovation, and creative curriculum reform out (Ohanian 08).

12) “NCLB lacks research support because NCLB depends solely on punishment. As schools fail to make satisfactory AYP the law imposes punitive, increasingly harsh sanctions. Even those who think punishment can occasionally be beneficial would never use it as NCLB does. It punishes the entire school for the failures of the few, often the very few” (Bracey, 2004).

13) The requirement that all students must be proficient in reading, math, and science by 2014 is unrealistic.

Accountability is certainly important for American schools and educators. However, testing in several core subjects in many grades is not the answer. “The federally-mandated accountability provisions contribute to undermining, rather than improving school quality” (Williams, 2005). Undermining the public education system is exactly the goal and it is occurring. What is quite sad is that children are in the middle of this political battle. Various political groups and politicians will soon be successful at changing the face of American education. However, just as with anything, when undermining is used for success, the truth will come out in the end. As stated in *USA Today*, “The gains shown by NCLB testing must be taken with a grain of salt. Test scores are bound to

increase with the number of times a student takes a test. The student becomes versed on how the test is given through practice, preparation and the emphasis schools place on these tests over a period of year” (Griffin, 2008).

Student Achievement and Socio-Economic Factors

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

One of the greatest challenges for public education in the United States is the goal of teaching students effectively, especially children and youth living in poverty (Barr, 2003). Students living in poverty with complex problems make teaching and learning extremely difficult. These students are expected to perform as well as students from higher socioeconomic status (Ingersoll, 2004).

According to Crnic and Lamberty (as cited in NCREL, 2004) “A family's socioeconomic status is based on family income, parental education level, parental occupation, and social status in the community, such as contacts within the community, group associations, and the community's perception of the family” (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004).

> “Families with high socioeconomic status often have more success in preparing their young children for school because they typically have access to a wide

> range of resources to promote and support young children's development. They are able to provide their young children with high-quality child care, books, and toys to encourage children in various learning activities at home. Also, they have easy access to information regarding their children's health, as well as social, emotional, and cognitive development. In addition, families with high socioeconomic status often seek out information to help them better prepare their young children for school" (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004).

However, poor families are often challenged financially, socially, and educationally, and have limited support for school readiness. Parents may lack the skills for assistance with academic activities such as reading to and with their children. These lower socioeconomic families may also lack skills for health and nutrition, which create more problems at school. "Having inadequate resources and limited access to available resources can negatively affect families' decisions regarding their young children's development and learning. As a result, children from families with low socioeconomic status are at greater risk of entering kindergarten unprepared than their peers from

families with median or high socioeconomic status” (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004).

The lower socioeconomic achievement levels in public schools remain a cause of concern. Most students from low socio-economic backgrounds require additional support. Socio-economic disadvantage is generally associated with factors such as poor attendance, and higher retention and dropout rates. Schools serving poor students can also experience higher rates of staff turnover, and also have less qualified and experienced staff (Kozol, 2005). Even though a school cannot control these issues, it is the responsibility of each school to acknowledge and understand these circumstances.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Student achievement is a broad topic that can be segregated into many parts. In order to assess the success of a school, teacher quality, school leadership, parental involvement, and student assessment must be examined.

> “Classroom teachers are with students more time than their families. It is an important task to educate the future of America. There is only one way to obtain student achievement and the research is very specific. It is the teacher and what the teacher knows and can

do that is the determining factor with student achievement" (Wong, 2001).

Student achievement is more heavily influenced by teacher quality than by students' race, class, prior academic record, or school a student attends, especially among students from low-income families and African American students. The benefits associated with being taught by good teachers are cumulative. Students with the most effective teachers receive more significant educational gains than those with the least effective teachers (Ingersoll, 2004). "This suggests that the most significant gains in student achievement will likely be realized when students receive instruction from good teachers over consecutive years" (National Education Association, 2008).

"An effective teacher has four qualities: content knowledge, experience, certification, and academic ability" (Center for Public, 2006). According to Haskins and Loeb (2007), "Research on teacher quality shows not only that students who have good teachers learn more but that their learning is cumulative if they have good teachers for several consecutive years" (p.1). A quality teacher has a variety of instructional methods. Students cannot successfully learn using only one method (Sawchuck, 2008).

Leadership will also benefit a student's success rate for achievement. "The greatest single ingredient to the success of an educational organization is still school leadership" (Burgett, 2003). In a study completed by Nettles and Herrington (2007), "actions taken to better understand and improve the impact of principals on the achievement of students in their schools have the potential for widespread benefit, as individual improvements in principal practice can impact thousands of students" (p.724).

> "The success of any organization depends on the effectiveness of its leader. Much like any other institution or company, schools need strong leadership in order to excel. Schools with strong leadership promote good teaching and higher levels of learning. Effective school leaders recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for students' intellectual and educational development but also for their personal, social, emotional and physical development. Moreover, effective school leaders collaboratively create a vision of success for all leaders and use their skills in communication, cooperation, and community building to ensure that the vision becomes a reality" (Vengco, 2008, p.1).

Parent involvement is essential to raising student achievement. Without parental support, teachers and administrators face a struggle that will be difficult to overcome. The involvement in a child's education has a strong positive effect on learning. "Parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than $1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement" (University of New Hampshire, 2008, p.1). The idea of parental involvement can mean very different things. The teacher may want supportive involvement, such as helping with homework. However, the parents may see parental involvement as making major decisions in the school. Parental involvement should come in various forms (Jesse, 2008). It could mean a direct involvement by being present in schools or management and choices. It could simply mean having a supportive involvement by supporting decisions of the school, or working with a child's homework (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004).

Student achievement is measured through assessments, or standardized tests. Each school's assessment is a measurement for accountability. There are two types of

assessment, formative and summative. Formative assessment is an ongoing measurement of how a student is progressing academically. It can be in the form of quizzes, tests, or essays. Formative assessment can be teacher designed or published by text book companies. Summative assessment is standardized testing carried out by each state. This type of assessment usually takes place at the end of a school year (Center for Public, 2006).

Student achievement can be negatively affected by many factors. Socio-economic status of a child's family has been a proven factor in studies conducted, that causes many students to experience a lack of academic success. It has been discovered that lower achieving students are more likely than others to experience unsuccessful transitions from school to employment. Lower achievement in reading comprehension and mathematics has been associated with lower engagement with school. Continued lower achievement levels for low socio-economic students will lead to continued lower participation and engagement in education and continued lower activity in employment. It is important that school and community programs are designed to increase literacy and numeracy levels and that they are given all resources necessary to ensure successful outcomes.

Technology

Schools have been through many technological changes and advances in the last century. Some of these were the introductions of radio, film, and television. Each one, in its own day, was thought to be the cure for classroom teaching problems and was the new educational trend. These ideas were usually met with resistance, and often teachers went about teaching in the same fashion they had been accustomed to teaching. The chalkboard addressed the need to show information to large groups of students; the overhead projector was another technology that is now used in the classroom. It assists teachers in the ability to show information to large groups of students for purposes of discussion and keeps the teacher facing the classroom instead of turned towards the wall, thus discouraging misbehavior. Technology has made significant advancements in the past 50 years in education. Classroom technology resources have changed dramatically over time, but a broad perspective of the field helps illuminate many of today's concepts, terms, and activities (Roblyer, 2005).

It is known by educators throughout the past few decades that traditional teaching methods are obsolete, mainly because of today's learning styles. Students in public schools are different from any ever encountered. It

is hard to imagine that these students have never known anything different from the computer and technology age. Therefore, students often experience the emotions of loneliness, defeat, and frustration. Students become apathetic and lack motivation when placed in traditional settings. Most children begin school with enthusiasm, but over time, many find the experience anxiety-provoking and psychologically threatening. Many children find it difficult to have their performance monitored in classrooms where failure carries the danger of public humiliation (Brophy, 1998).

A teacher-directed classroom is one where a majority of the instruction is presented by and under the control of the teacher. It has been the norm for so many years that teachers, students, administrators and parents have come to expect it in classrooms. With the teacher at the front of the room, the students listen as the teacher delivers the message usually in lecture format. Constant teacher directed instruction actually inhibits learning and is in no way connected to real world experiences. Even with the introduction of classroom computers and the internet for school use, most classrooms seem to function in the same fashion as they have for so many years. Active or authentic learning motivates students to take an active role in their

own education. It is necessary to use a variety of teaching styles in the classroom for the maximum effectiveness of instruction to take place. These styles would still include the traditional teaching styles because students will always need to have a strong knowledge base. It is also necessary that students be able to connect their ideas to material that they can work with in real life. Connected to an exciting world of up-to-date and lively current information through technology, students make meaning and develop insight, while the teacher shows them how to navigate and reason through the variety of resources. The front of the room disappears as networked computers support investigations, explorations and excursions. Student questions and questioning become a major focus of classroom activity as teachers demonstrate and then require effective searching, predicting, gathering, and interpreting techniques, while students use the tools and information to explore solutions to issues (eMINTS, 2007).

In recent years we have seen a growing number of research studies that indicate technology can play a positive role in academic achievement and student motivation. In many of these studies data have shown that technology can be effective in improving student learning, when it is combined with instructional strategies, like

inquiry-based and researched-based instruction. These strategies actively involve students in learning which demands higher order thinking and problem solving skills. In a true collaborative classroom setting, students will ask difficult questions, define problems, discuss solutions with other students and teachers, and set goals for themselves and their peers. Cooperative learning activities help students realize that personal effort can contribute to group as well as individual goals. This picture contrasts with classrooms where the teacher leads all discussions and the students respond to these questions. While it is best to balance the nature of a classroom from one style to another, and there will always be a need for some teacher direction in the day to day activities of a classroom, students need to feel that they are in charge of some of their learning experiences to make them meaningful.

Using technologies as constructivist tools assumes that our conceptions of education will change, that schools or classrooms, at least those that use technologies in the ways described, will reform the educational process. Although few people would ever publicly admit that schools should not emphasize meaningful learning, most people in our society tacitly accept that schools do not. Intentional learning presupposes that parents, students, and teachers

will realize this and demand more. They will demand change, so that thinking and problem solving are valued as much as memorizing (Jonassen, 2002).

Many teachers feel that teaching should be done using constructivist techniques, but they have been held back by state and federal mandates, extra duties, and other time restraints. They also lack the methods to integrate these techniques effectively into the classroom structure. Within a collaborative learning structure the teacher's role drastically changes. Rather than directing all aspects of learning, the teacher becomes a coach or facilitator who encourages the exchanges of alternative viewpoints to stimulate a rich environment for learning. In this kind of learning environment students can act as peer tutors providing assistance not only to other students, but to teachers, as well. Many students also gain responsibility for their learning and that of their classmates, as they begin to feel a larger ownership in the learning process. (Jones, 2005).

One approach to authentic teaching and learning that integrates technology into the classroom is the nationally known eMINTS program. Enhancing Missouri Instructional Networking Teaching Strategies (eMINTS) originated in Missouri and is designed to transform the instructional

process by supporting teachers as they develop student-centered, inquiry-based instructional practices, using a wide range of multimedia and computer technology. “Teachers and students explore interactive learning experiences that require them to use critical thinking skills and group problem solving techniques. Significant professional development sessions along with in-classroom coaching and mentoring are key change agents in this project” (eMINTS, 2007, p. 1).

With the use of the internet, students can visit many places within the four walls of the classroom (Beglau, 2007). The internet opens the walls and gives students and teachers unlimited information about the subjects that they are studying. A truly exciting way to make the lessons especially accessible to students is through a virtual classroom. Through an internet site, students would have access to the same material at home as they do in school. Class notes, discussions, practice quizzes, assignments, and grades can all be posted for the students and their parents. This type of contact saves valuable time in the classroom and gives the students extra support that they need, when they need it. Technology can change so much in the way that teachers teach and students learn. In order to test these new technologies, someone has to initiate the

process. Every small step will be a step towards making schools better environments for learning. As long as we are open to possibilities, we will be able to bring the best into the classrooms, and ultimately to our students.

Summary

In this review of literature, research topics that were directly obtained from the evaluation's questionnaire were reviewed and presented. The literature review describes in detail the main issues, as selected by superintendents, in rural K-12 school districts in Missouri. Throughout the chapter the topics are blended and often one main issue affects another. Missouri school finance and governmental mandates are discussed in a section of Chapter 2 because of the direct relationship between the two. Most governmental mandates are not funded or are running short of funding and have been for several years. The government will continue to go further in debt if they do not scale back in every public agency. The requirements set for the school districts need more funding that cannot be obtained and is not available (Riedl, 2004). Student achievement and socio-economic factors are related due to the research based fact that one of the most common contributors to poor student achievement is a child that comes from a family of low socio-economic status (Kozol,

2005). Over the past decade, technology related to achievement in the classroom has developed into a focused topic and is discussed in great detail. Many researchers will say that technology, mixed with teaching approaches that are inquiry based, constructivist, project-based, and/or student centered increase student achievement. Many lower socio-economic students are positively affected by instructional styles and strategies that are non-traditional (eMINTS, 2007). However, the integration and maintenance of technology in the public school system requires funding rather than governmental mandates. Journal articles were consulted and provided a solid basis of sources and first hand research for the review of literature. The literature review supports how the main issues in rural school districts seem to blend and directly affect one another.

CHAPTER III - METHOD

Introduction/Overview

It is the goal of this study to determine the changes necessary in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts. It is important to identify what the primary issues in public schools are, according to individuals at the grass roots level. Rural school districts are experiencing difficult decisions. Due to various issues, it is becoming necessary for rural schools to consolidate important staff and/or programs that affect the education of children and the nation’s economy. It appears as if rural public schools are being forced to educate students similar to more traditional methods. There is an extreme number of requirements, laws and mandates that rural districts are struggling to meet. Proper funding is not given to schools to support these mandates. Many believe that if the mandates were lifted, funding would be available to keep from cutting staff and programs in many institutions (American Association, 2008). Many districts spend too much time, effort, and money attempting to stay on top of ever-changing policies. Educating children is overshadowed by high-stakes testing, demanding paper work, and bureaucracy (American Association, 2008). The priority of student education is being lost in requirements placed upon

districts. Unique barriers disrupt rural school acceleration. Unfortunately, school districts encounter barriers that limit or prevent successful student achievement due to factors outside of staff control.

There is not a sufficient amount of research on the issues being dealt with by the school districts, themselves. It is critical for all stakeholders to target the issues and collaborate to find conclusions in an effort to educate all children in rural Missouri. The main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are identified in this study. In Chapter 4 of this evaluation the issues are disaggregated by the size of the school district. The issues identified are also determined by the years of experience of the superintendent completing the survey. The demographic region of the school district is a factor compared in the data, as well.

Subjects

The districts identified in this evaluation were determined by significant research concerning rural areas and rural school districts. As defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census Office of Management and Budget (2007), urban and rural concepts are more sociological and geo-demographic rather than geographic.

> “For Census 2000, the Census Bureau classifies urban as all territory, population and housing units located within an urbanized area or an urban cluster. It delineates urbanized area and urban cluster boundaries to encompass densely settled territory, which consists of core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile” (Provasnik et al., 2007).

Rural consists of all territory, population and residences located outside of urban areas and urban clusters. “Geographic entities, such as census tracks, counties, metropolitan area and the area outside metropolitan area, often contain both urban and rural territory, population and housing units” (Provasnik et al., 2007).

“The average school size in the U.S. is about 525 students, rural schools’ average size is about 305 students. Most rural school districts are comprised of one, two or three schools” (Provasnik et al., 2007). Rural school districts are frequently used as community centers. Closing or consolidating schools, due to population loss or perceived cost saving measures, may result in a loss of community, and then a further reduction of educational

capacity. For many communities, the school library is the town library, the gym is the community gym and the auditorium is rented to a local group after hours. Most of the federally required paperwork is not applicable or doesn't fit with rural districts. Most small, rural school leaders must justify their involvement in national events, such as visiting congress or attending conventions, against utilizing the same dollars to educate children. A small school budget is so tight that a superintendent must defend his or her own personal development with that of educating a child (American Association, 2008). Demographic and geographic research made it possible to identify subjects for this study.

Sampling Procedures

Eight questions were used to construct the questionnaire which assisted the participants in providing the data necessary for this evaluation. Five research questions guided the four hypotheses that were formulated from expectations of the evaluation. Limitations included several possibilities to obtain results that may or may not be effective due to the survey format and the individual providing the information. Assumptions were made that the individual providing the information for the survey was honest and understood the questions in an effort to provide

the information necessary to complete the evaluation. Key terms were provided to assist the reader in understanding the issues that are most emphasized in rural schools and throughout the evaluation.

Research Setting

Each participant received the survey via email and was asked to address the survey to the best of his/her ability. This type of questionnaire setting suggests the potential limitations in the study. The questionnaire was not tested for validity but written by the researcher based on experience and research. The evaluation suggests that each superintendent has the knowledge, experience, practicality, and education to identify top issues in his/her school district.

External Validity

The validity of the questionnaire was established by the researcher. Twelve years of experience in working in rural Missouri public school districts assisted the researcher in creating the questionnaire. The researcher taught for four years and has been an administrator for seven years in rural Missouri school districts. Participants were asked to complete the survey to the best of their ability under the circumstances. It was understood that participants would be from various regions of the

state and different levels of experience. Personal emotion of participants selected could affect results, as well.

Research Design Procedure

This evaluation is qualitative in nature. It is informational and uses a survey to evaluate the main issues in rural K-12 public school districts. Qualitative Data, otherwise known as categorical data, represent the superintendent's opinion on the main issues in the school district, and data was broken into each of the following categories: enrollment size, superintendent's years of experience, and demographic region (Rumsey, 2003).

The following research questions were the basis of this evaluation: 1)What are the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts? 2)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts according to student enrollment? 3)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts based on the years of experience of the superintendent? 4)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts in relation to the demographic region? 5)In rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are the main issues the same?

Statistical Treatment of Data

The letter sent to participants with the questionnaire assured them of security and confidentiality of answers provided to the survey. The categorical data representing the characteristics of the superintendent's opinion on the issue was summarized by reporting the percentage of individuals falling into each category. Data were returned to the researcher and compiled in various tables in an attempt to address all of the research questions. The following null hypotheses were compared to statistical results and discussed in Chapter 4 and 5: 1)There are no significant differences between the main issues in targeted rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts. 2)There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, according to student enrollment. 3)There are no significant differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, based on the years of experience of the superintendent. 4)There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, in relation to the demographic region.

Summary

This Chapter described the methods used in this study and consisted of the following sections: subjects, sampling procedures, research setting, external validity, research design procedure, and statistical treatment of data. The next chapter discusses the results of the qualitative questionnaire evaluation and how the data addresses the proposed research questions.

CHAPTER IV - RESULTS

Introduction

The problem in rural school districts is the extreme number of requirements, laws and mandates that rural districts are struggling to uphold. Many districts spend much of their time attempting to keep up with policies and mandates without a sufficient amount of revenue. The priority of student education is being lost in bureaucratic agendas. In this evaluation the researcher is interested in investigating the following research questions: 1)What are the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts? 2)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts according to student enrollment? 3)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts based on the years of experience of the superintendent? 4)Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts in relation to the demographic region? 5)In rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are the main issues the same?

It is the goal of this study to determine the changes necessary in rural public schools diagnosed by the experts in education. Superintendents in 135 rural Missouri public school districts completed a survey of which data in this

chapter is tabulated. It is important that research is provided from school districts not just authors, skeptics, or critics. It is critical for all stakeholders to target the issues and collaborate to find conclusions, in an effort to continue educating children in rural Missouri.

The following hypotheses are suggested by the researcher and were concluded to be valid after compilation of the data obtained from the survey process: 1)There are no significant differences between the main issues in targeted rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts. 2)There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, according to student enrollment. 3)There are no significant differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, based on the years of experience of the superintendent. 4)There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, in relation to the demographic region. The following tables will address each research question and determine the null hypotheses.

Results/Analysis of Data

RURAL SCHOOLS MAIN ISSUES

Table 1

Cumulative percentages

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	83.7%	113
Student Achievement	72.6%	98
Governmental Mandates	60.7%	82
Socio-Economic Factors	48.1%	65
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	46.7%	63
Facilities	42.2%	57
Transportation	37.0%	50
Community/Parental Involvement	31.9%	43
Certified Staff	26.7%	36
Curriculum	25.2%	34
Board of Education	15.6%	21
Principal(s)	7.4%	10
Support Staff	3.0%	4
	Other	3
	answered question	135

The percentages recorded in table 1 were tabulated from 135 surveys returned. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts are district funding (83.7%), student achievement (72.6%), governmental mandates (60.7%), socio-economic factors (48.1%), and technology (46.7%).

ISSUES BY ENROLLMENT

Table 2

200 or less enrollment

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Student Achievement	81.3%	13
District Funding	75.0%	12
Socio-Economic Factors	68.8%	11
Governmental Mandates	50.0%	8
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	50.0%	8
Transportation	43.8%	7
Certified Staff	37.5%	6
Facilities	31.3%	5
Curriculum	25.0%	4
Community/Parental Involvement	12.5%	2
Board of Education	12.5%	2
Principal(s)	6.3%	1
Support Staff	6.3%	1
Other		0
answered question		16

The percentages recorded in table 2 were tabulated from 16 surveys returned from districts with 200 student enrollment or less. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with enrollment of 200 or fewer students are student achievement (81.3%), district funding (75.0%), socio-economic factors (68.8%), governmental mandates (50.0%), and technology (50.0%).

Table 3

201-400 enrollment

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	82.1%	32
Student Achievement	66.7%	26
Governmental Mandates	61.5%	24
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	51.3%	20
Transportation	43.6%	17
Socio-Economic Factors	41.0%	16
Facilities	38.5%	15
Community/Parental Involvement	35.9%	14
Certified Staff	30.8%	12
Curriculum	23.1%	9
Board of Education	12.8%	5
Principal(s)	10.3%	4
Support Staff	2.6%	1
	Other	1
	answered question	39

The percentages recorded in table 3 were tabulated from 39 surveys returned from districts with 201-400 student enrollment. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with enrollment of 201-400 students are district funding (82.1%), student achievement (66.7%), governmental mandates (61.5%), technology (51.3%), and transportation (43.6%).

Table 4

401-600 enrollment

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	81.8%	27
Student Achievement	72.7%	24
Governmental Mandates	66.7%	22
Facilities	48.5%	16
Socio-Economic Factors	48.5%	16
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	39.4%	13
Community/Parental Involvement	39.4%	13
Certified Staff	30.3%	10
Transportation	24.2%	8
Curriculum	24.2%	8
Board of Education	15.2%	5
Principal(s)	6.1%	2
Support Staff	3.0%	1
	Other	1
	answered question	33

The percentages recorded in table 4 were tabulated from 33 surveys returned from districts with 401-600 student enrollment. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with enrollment of 401-600 students are district funding (81.8%), student achievement (72.7%), governmental mandates (66.7%), facilities (48.5%), and socio-economic factors (41.6%).

Table 5

601-800 enrollment

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	83.9%	26
Student Achievement	74.2%	23
Governmental Mandates	58.1%	18
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	51.6%	16
Socio-Economic Factors	51.6%	16
Facilities	45.2%	14
Transportation	38.7%	12
Curriculum	38.7%	12
Community/Parental Involvement	25.8%	8
Certified Staff	19.4%	6
Board of Education	12.9%	4
Principal(s)	3.2%	1
Support Staff	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	31

The percentages recorded in table 5 were tabulated from 31 surveys returned from districts with 601-800 student enrollment. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with enrollment of 601-800 students are district funding (83.9%), student achievement (74.2%), governmental mandates (58.1%), technology (51.6%), and socio-economic factors (51.6%).

Table 6

801-1000 enrollment

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	100.0%	16
Student Achievement	75.0%	12
Governmental Mandates	62.5%	10
Facilities	43.8%	7
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	37.5%	6
Transportation	37.5%	6
Socio-Economic Factors	37.5%	6
Community/Parental Involvement	37.5%	6
Board of Education	31.3%	5
Certified Staff	12.5%	2
Principal(s)	12.5%	2
Support Staff	6.3%	1
Curriculum	6.3%	1
	Other	1
	answered question	16

The percentages recorded in table 6 were tabulated from 16 surveys returned from districts with 801-1000 student enrollment. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with enrollment of 801-1000 students are district funding (100%), student achievement (75.0%), governmental mandates (62.5%), facilities (43.8%), and technology, socio-economic factors, transportation, and community/parental involvement all with (37.5%).

SUPERINTENDENT EXPERIENCE

Table 7

3 years or less experience

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	79.2%	42
Student Achievement	79.2%	42
Governmental Mandates	49.1%	26
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	45.3%	24
Socio-Economic Factors	45.3%	24
Facilities	43.4%	23
Community/Parental Involvement	39.6%	21
Curriculum	37.7%	20
Transportation	35.8%	19
Certified Staff	22.6%	12
Board of Education	11.3%	6
Principal(s)	7.5%	4
Support Staff	3.8%	2
	Other	1
	answered question	53

The percentages recorded in table 7 were tabulated from 53 surveys returned from district superintendents with 3 years experience or less. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with district superintendents who have 3 years experience or less are district funding (79.2%), student achievement (79.2%), governmental mandates (49.1%), technology (45.3%), and socio-economic factors (45.3%).

Table 8

4-10 years experience

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	82.5%	47
Student Achievement	66.7%	38
Governmental Mandates	63.2%	36
Socio-Economic Factors	50.9%	29
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	49.1%	28
Facilities	42.1%	24
Transportation	42.1%	24
Certified Staff	33.3%	19
Community/Parental Involvement	26.3%	15
Curriculum	17.5%	10
Board of Education	17.5%	10
Principal(s)	8.8%	5
Support Staff	1.8%	1
	Other	2
	answered question	57

The percentages recorded in table 8 were tabulated from 57 surveys returned from district superintendents with 4-10 years of experience. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with district superintendents who have 4-10 years of experience are district funding (82.5%), student achievement (66.7%), governmental mandates (63.2%), socio-economic factors (50.9%), and technology (49.1%).

Table 9

11-15 years experience

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	93.3%	14
Governmental Mandates	80.0%	12
Student Achievement	80.0%	12
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	46.7%	7
Facilities	40.0%	6
Socio-Economic Factors	40.0%	6
Community/Parental Involvement	33.3%	5
Certified Staff	26.7%	4
Transportation	20.0%	3
Curriculum	20.0%	3
Board of Education	13.3%	2
Support Staff	6.7%	1
Principal(s)	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	15

The percentages recorded in table 9 were tabulated from 15 surveys returned from district superintendents with 11-15 years of experience. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with district superintendents who have 11-15 years of experience are district funding (93.3%), student achievement (80.0%), governmental mandates (80.0%), technology (46.7%), socio-economic factors (40.0%), and facilities (40.0%).

Table 10

16-25 years experience

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	100.0%	7
Governmental Mandates	85.7%	6
Socio-Economic Factors	85.7%	6
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	42.9%	3
Facilities	42.9%	3
Transportation	42.9%	3
Student Achievement	42.9%	3
Board of Education	28.6%	2
Principal(s)	14.3%	1
Curriculum	14.3%	1
Certified Staff	0.0%	0
Support Staff	0.0%	0
Community/Parental Involvement	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	7

The percentages recorded in table 10 were tabulated from 7 surveys returned from district superintendents with 16-25 years of experience. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with district superintendents who have 16-25 years of experience are district funding (100%), governmental mandates (85.7%), socio-economic factors (85.7%), technology, facilities, transportation, and student achievement all with (42.9%).

Table 11

26 years or more experience

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	100.0%	3
Student Achievement	100.0%	3
Governmental Mandates	66.7%	2
Community/Parental Involvement	66.7%	2
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	33.3%	1
Certified Staff	33.3%	1
Facilities	33.3%	1
Transportation	33.3%	1
Board of Education	33.3%	1
Principal(s)	0.0%	0
Support Staff	0.0%	0
Socio-Economic Factors	0.0%	0
Curriculum	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	3

The percentages recorded in table 11 were tabulated from 3 surveys returned from district superintendents with 26-30 years of experience. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues in rural K-12 public school districts with district superintendents who have 26-30 years of experience are district funding and student achievement (100%), governmental mandates and community/parental involvement (66.7%), and technology, certified staff, facilities, transportation, and Board of Education with (33.3%).

DEMOGRAPHIC REGIONS

Table 12

SE-Cape Girardeau region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	70.6%	12
Student Achievement	70.6%	12
Governmental Mandates	64.7%	11
Socio-Economic Factors	64.7%	11
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	58.8%	10
Facilities	41.2%	7
Community/Parental Involvement	35.3%	6
Curriculum	35.3%	6
Certified Staff	23.5%	4
Transportation	23.5%	4
Board of Education	11.8%	2
Principal(s)	0.0%	0
Support Staff	0.0%	0
Other		0
answered question		17

The percentages recorded in table 12 were tabulated from 17 surveys returned from districts in the SE Cape Girardeau region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding and student achievement each with (70.6%), governmental mandates and socio-economic factors each with (64.7%), and technology (58.8%).

Table 13

Heart of MO-Columbia region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	69.2%	9
Student Achievement	69.2%	9
Governmental Mandates	61.5%	8
Facilities	53.8%	7
Transportation	53.8%	7
Socio-Economic Factors	46.2%	6
Community/Parental Involvement	46.2%	6
Curriculum	46.2%	6
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	23.1%	3
Certified Staff	23.1%	3
Principal(s)	7.7%	1
Board of Education	7.7%	1
Support Staff	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	13

The percentages recorded in table 13 were tabulated from 13 surveys returned from districts in the Heart of MO-Columbia region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding and student achievement each with (69.2%), governmental mandates (61.5%), and transportation and facilities each with (53.8%).

Table 14

Kansas City region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	100.0%	1
Governmental Mandates	100.0%	1
District Funding	100.0%	1
Socio-Economic Factors	100.0%	1
Student Achievement	100.0%	1
Certified Staff	0.0%	0
Principal(s)	0.0%	0
Support Staff	0.0%	0
Facilities	0.0%	0
Transportation	0.0%	0
Community/Parental Involvement	0.0%	0
Curriculum	0.0%	0
Board of Education	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	1

The percentages recorded in table 14 were tabulated from 1 survey returned from districts in the Kansas City region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the district targeted in the region are district funding, technology, student achievement, governmental mandates, and socio-economic factors.

Table 15

NE-Truman/Kirksville region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	100.0%	11
Student Achievement	90.9%	10
Governmental Mandates	63.6%	7
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	54.5%	6
Certified Staff	36.4%	4
Transportation	36.4%	4
Socio-Economic Factors	36.4%	4
Facilities	27.3%	3
Community/Parental Involvement	27.3%	3
Support Staff	9.1%	1
Curriculum	9.1%	1
Board of Education	9.1%	1
Principal(s)	0.0%	0
	Other	1
	answered question	11

The percentages recorded in table 15 were tabulated from 11 surveys returned from districts in the NE Truman/Kirksville region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding (100.0%), student achievement (90.9%), governmental mandates (63.6%), technology (54.5%), and certified staff, transportation and socio-economic factors each with (36.4%).

Table 16

NW-Maryville region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	89.5%	17
Governmental Mandates	73.7%	14
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	57.9%	11
Transportation	57.9%	11
Facilities	47.4%	9
Student Achievement	47.4%	9
Socio-Economic Factors	42.1%	8
Community/Parental Involvement	26.3%	5
Board of Education	21.1%	4
Curriculum	15.8%	3
Certified Staff	10.5%	2
Principal(s)	5.3%	1
Support Staff	5.3%	1
	Other	1
	answered question	19

The percentages recorded in table 16 were tabulated from 19 surveys returned from districts in the NW Maryville region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding (89.5%), governmental mandates (73.7%), technology (57.9%), transportation (57.9%), and facilities and student achievement each with (47.4%).

Table 17

South Central-Rolla region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	83.3%	15
Student Achievement	61.1%	11
Governmental Mandates	55.6%	10
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	50.0%	9
Facilities	50.0%	9
Transportation	44.4%	8
Socio-Economic Factors	38.9%	7
Certified Staff	33.3%	6
Community/Parental Involvement	22.2%	4
Curriculum	22.2%	4
Board of Education	22.2%	4
Principal(s)	11.1%	2
Support Staff	5.6%	1
	Other	0
	answered question	18

The percentages recorded in table 17 were tabulated from 18 surveys returned from districts in the South Central-Rolla region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding (83.3%), student achievement (61.1%), governmental mandates (55.6%), technology (50.0%), and facilities (50.0%).

Table 18

SW-Springfield region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	88.0%	22
Student Achievement	84.0%	21
Governmental Mandates	64.0%	16
Socio-Economic Factors	64.0%	16
Facilities	48.0%	12
Community/Parental Involvement	36.0%	9
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	28.0%	7
Transportation	28.0%	7
Certified Staff	16.0%	4
Curriculum	16.0%	4
Board of Education	16.0%	4
Principal(s)	8.0%	2
Support Staff	4.0%	1
Other		0
answered question		25

The percentages recorded in table 18 were tabulated from 25 surveys returned from districts in the SW-Springfield region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding (88.8%), student achievement (84.0%), governmental mandates (64.0%), socio-economic factors (64.0%) and facilities (48.0%).

Table 19

St. Louis region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Governmental Mandates	100.0%	1
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	100.0%	1
District Funding	100.0%	1
Socio-Economic Factors	100.0%	1
Community/Parental Involvement	100.0%	1
Certified Staff	0.0%	0
Principal(s)	0.0%	0
Support Staff	0.0%	0
Facilities	0.0%	0
Transportation	0.0%	0
Student Achievement	0.0%	0
Curriculum	0.0%	0
Board of Education	0.0%	0
	Other	0
	answered question	1

The percentages recorded in table 19 were tabulated from 1 survey returned from districts in the St. Louis region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding, technology, community/parental involvement, governmental mandates, and socio-economic factors with (100%).

Table 20

Central-Warrensburg region

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
District Funding	83.3%	25
Student Achievement	83.3%	25
Governmental Mandates	53.3%	16
Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)	46.7%	14
Certified Staff	40.0%	12
Socio-Economic Factors	36.7%	11
Facilities	33.3%	10
Curriculum	33.3%	10
Transportation	30.0%	9
Community/Parental Involvement	30.0%	9
Board of Education	16.7%	5
Principal(s)	13.3%	4
Support Staff	0.0%	0
	Other	1
	answered question	30

The percentages recorded in table 20 were tabulated from 30 surveys returned from districts in the Central-Warrensburg region. These results conclude that the cumulative top five issues for the districts targeted in the region are district funding (83.3%), student achievement (83.3%), governmental mandates (53.3%), technology (46.7%) and certified staff (40.0%).

Deductive Conclusions

The overall main issues selected in this study by percentage were district funding (84%), student achievement (73%), governmental mandates (61%), socio-economic factors (48%), and technology (47%). However, it is significant that, in every statistical correlation made with the research questions suggested, three main issues were in the top five, one hundred percent (100%) of the time. District Funding, Student Achievement, and Governmental mandates were selected by districts in all categories of enrollment, years of superintendent experience, and in each region.

Summary

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requires all students to be proficient at reading and mathematics by the year 2014 (Stover, 2007). This mandate will be accomplished by ESOL students, special education students, students of all races, genders, and ethnic backgrounds. Students with single parent families, tragic backgrounds, dysfunctional situations and even students who have been placed in group homes must meet the requirements. NCLB does not focus on vital programs needed for life success, but only on reading and math (Stover, March 2007).

State and Federal Law requirements make it extremely difficult for the rural public schools to stay up with the

ever-changing education mandates. It is especially difficult for rural schools to maintain student accountability mandates, mandated transportation, and most importantly massive student assessments. There are numerous financial education shortfalls by the government. The federal IDEA law is not fully funded. NCLB and requirements that are set forth are not fully funded (“Usa Today Magazine,” 2008). Missouri state school district transportation requirements are funded at approximately 50% of what was originally planned, and the Missouri state aid formula has increases that do not cover the funding decreases to Missouri schools, that took place from 2002-2005. Nonetheless, Missouri public schools provide transportation, meals, clothing for some, safe shelter on a daily basis, and caring adult role models for almost 900,000 children every day (http://www.dese.mo.gov/, November 29, 2008). This is sometimes hard to understand when billions of dollars are earmarked for more standardized student testing (Ohanian, 2008).

District Funding, Student Achievement, and Governmental mandates were selected by districts in all sub-categories of enrollment, years of superintendent experience, and each region in this evaluation. The main issues selected in this evaluation by the largest

percentage overall were district funding (84%), student achievement (73%), governmental mandates (61%), socio-economic factors (48%), and technology (47%). However, as previously stated, it is significant that in every statistical correlation made, with the research questions suggested, three issues were in the top five one hundred percent (100%) of the time. District funding, student achievement, and governmental mandates are the main issues, therefore, the obstacles that have to be overcome by rural school districts in Missouri.

Research suggests there is no better time than the present to remove the overwhelming Federal government influence in public schools and allow local level constituents to decide where funding is most needed. These efforts at the local level would increase student achievement. It is necessary for the public school to be relieved of a “one size fits all” bureaucracy (Davidson, 2008).

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

Introduction

Rural school districts are experiencing difficult decisions. Due to a few main issues it is becoming necessary for rural schools to cut or consolidate vital programs and staff involved in the education process of children. There is an extreme number of requirements, laws and mandates that rural districts are struggling to deal with. Districts are spending valuable instructional time attempting to meet State and Federal requirements with a lack of sufficient revenue to do so. The most important topics of emphasis in school districts have become meeting the requirements of high-stakes testing, demanding paper work, and bureaucracy. The priority of student education is being lost in requirements placed upon districts. While rural school districts deal with the aforementioned, many rural areas are also experiencing a decline in county population, and therefore, a decline in the public school district enrollment (Schwartzbeck, 2003). All of these situations have driven the following questions for this evaluation.

Research Questions

1. What are the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts?

2. Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts according to student enrollment?
3. Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts based on the years of experience of the superintendent?
4. Are there differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts in relation to the demographic region?
5. In rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts are the main issues the same?

It is important to know and consider what the primary issues in public schools are, according to individuals who work in these institutions on a daily basis. There is research on individual topics in rural public schools. However, there is not a sufficient amount of research on the issues that are being dealt with, from individuals associated with school districts. It is necessary to obtain this data and act on the statistics provided from the source, in an effort to assist public school districts and States with public school governmental and financial struggles. All stakeholders must focus on the issues and collaborate to find conclusions, in an effort to provide a sense of security for rural Missouri public school

districts. The following null hypotheses were addressed in the study and proven to be valid.

Hypotheses

1. There are no significant differences between the main issues in targeted rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts.
2. There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, according to student enrollment.
3. There are no significant differences in the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, based on the years of experience of the superintendent.
4. There are no significant differences between the main issues in rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts, targeted, in relation to the demographic region.

Implication for Effective Schools

"NCLB is now a time bomb ticking at the heart of public education and threatening massive damage from multiple directions. But for all its horrors, there are still lots of reasons to believe that it can be effectively opposed or modified before it is too late. Unfortunately,

there is no way to avoid how negative this law is for rural public schools (Ohanian, 2008).

As uninformed as the public is on NCLB, the potential for getting its support to reform or repeal this law is substantial. The more the public knows about the details of this law, the more they will oppose it. Most people are not in favor of Federal control of local schools, especially around the issues of curriculum and instruction, and especially when the Federal government only supplies approximately 10% of school funding. While people hold this position for different reasons, they can be intentionally united against this particular version of bureaucratic Federal Government interference in state and local education. Many states are in various stages of non-compliance or passive resistance to key NCLB mandates (Ohanian, 2008).

Educators need to document publicly NCLB's unfunded costs and its counterproductive expenditures, while proposing alternative spending plans. In Congress there are numerous bills that have been introduced to modify or repeal parts of NCLB. They include rebuttals on NCLB's testing mandates, measures to suspend the sanctions in any year that full funding is not provided, and proposals to change the testing rules to give schools credit for making

relative progress over time. We should determine the best of these bills and then publicly press state and national officials to support them. Both large teacher unions will be working for NCLB reform, though there are significant differences between them. It's also useful to press state and local union affiliates to put some energy into educating the public about NCLB and lobby local officials to support changes.

Recommendations

Accountability for public schools is at the very highest. The Missouri Assessment Program’s standardized exam is one of the most difficult in the United States. Many school districts meet the high stakes accountability measures, while needing more important items, such as, building improvements, increased salaries, and better qualified staff. High stakes testing is not the sole answer to educating kids (Stiggins, 2007). Test scores measure student ability on that particular day, in that subject.

While the Federal government struggles to enforce leaving no child behind, many rural schools do not have the resources to keep up. Lawmakers often overlook rural educational challenges that differ widely from those faced by urban schools. Quite frankly, legislators often do not understand the public school system and do not ask school

superintendents for assistance. With programs such as NCLB, the government is seeking to better the education of students, but we need to be sure to remind the government that rural schools need help in funding the mandates that are being required. Schools in rural areas face financial challenges uncommon in urban areas that have a larger tax base and, therefore, obtain more local revenue.

Consolidation, often suggested as a money saving cure-all, is not the answer for rural schools, if state financial assistance, not connected to enrollment, is not in the future. Many schools that have, or could, consolidate to a single countywide district will experience the same problems but on a larger scale ("Usa Today Magazine," 2008). About 70% of the districts across America are rural districts, but they make up fewer than half the students. Funding in Missouri is directly related to enrollment. With many rural schools having steady or declining enrollments, it makes it difficult to prepare kids for a global economy on limited, declining or stagnate resources. However, the mandates from Washington continue to keep coming (Bard, Gardener, & Weiland, 2005).

Private School options are options that groups of legislators and certain taxpayer groups will stress are the answer to having better schools in Missouri. However,

private school tuition is more costly especially that considering private schools in Missouri do not have to have programs in special education, counseling, drop-out prevention, bilingual, health services, security, and many others that are required of the public school system.

Summary

This evaluation is significant to various groups of stakeholders interested in public education. In Chapter 1 it is stated that the purpose of this evaluation was to identify and examine the top issues rural school districts are experiencing. The objective of public schools is the education of the students. Throughout the research for this project, it is noted by the researcher, that a number of references state that too much emphasis is placed on meeting mandates and overcoming obstacles that are created by outside sources, rather than precious time educating children. Eight questions were used to construct the questionnaire which guided the participants to provide the data necessary for this evaluation. Five research questions were asked and four hypotheses were formulated from expectations of the evaluation. Limitations included several possibilities to obtain results that may or may not be effective due to the individual providing the information and the format of the qualitative questionnaire

evaluation. Assumptions were made that the individual providing the information for the survey is educated, qualified, and was honest in providing the information necessary to complete the evaluation. Key terms were provided to assist the reader in understanding the issues that are most emphasized in rural schools and throughout the evaluation.

Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature that provides the basis for this investigation and a perspective for issues in rural school districts in Missouri. The main areas of research identified in the review of literature are (a)district funding – the revenue process in which school districts are funded in the state of Missouri is described in detail in an effort to provide the reader with the basic knowledge to understand the issues that rural districts are experiencing, (b)student achievement – a thorough explanation of how student achievement and progress is required to be measured in public schools and the obstacles that are present for students to achieve to the best of their ability, (c) governmental mandates – major time and money consuming mandates are investigated in an effort for the reader to understand the complexity of the public school system and the government's interferences. The No Child Left Behind Act, the

Individuals with Disabilities Act, and the Federal Title I Program were evaluated in this section of Chapter 2, (d) socio-economic factors – the financial stability and generational levels of economic status of communities and families is reported in an effort to assist the reader in what obstacles stand in the way of educating children in poverty, (e) technology – the educational needs, requirements, and maintenance required to incorporate appropriate technology in the educational process is reported in Chapter 2, as well.

Chapter 3 presents the research designs and methods of investigation and focuses on addressing the research questions. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data collected and data so conclusions can be formulated. Chapter 5 contains the summary of research findings and conclusions that may be drawn from the data and its analysis. Information and solutions that are applicable and replicable are defined.

In summary, it is obvious that extreme governmental mandates, not to mention a lack of sufficient funding to uphold to these mandates, have a negative effect on student achievement. All rural Missouri K-12 Public School Districts surveyed have the opinion that governmental mandates, funding, and student achievement are the three

issues of concern. This evaluation supports that there is no better time than the present to remove the overwhelming Federal government influence in public schools and allow local level constituents to decide where funding is most needed. These efforts at the local level would increase student achievement. The results of this evaluation support the necessity for the public school to be relieved of unnecessary bureaucracy and to allow public school decisions to be made at the local level. When the Government relieves the stresses, fiscally and instructionally, in Missouri public schools there will be more effort to focus on the topics which can have a positive effect on student achievement.

> “You can’t do anything about classroom performance until you’ve dealt with the following problems; brutal popularity contests leading to school violence, intransigent peer pressure trumping teacher authority, lack of respect for school and for learning, inability to get or keep good teachers, waning parental interest, patience and support, continuous parent-teacher-administrator confrontations, mixed messages to kids, and delinquency, cynicism, unemployability, and alienation” (Eakman, 2004).

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APPENDICES

8/29/08

Dear Colleague,

I appreciate your effort, support, and time for this endeavor to target the key issues in a majority of rural area schools. Your responses will be totally confidential. I, as the researcher, will be the only individual to see your answers. This survey entails questions that will enable government officials, superintendents, and rural school district patrons across the state to understand the issues faced in rural schools.

The process should only take 5-10 minutes of your time. If you don't have time in the near future please try to get the information to me by October 15th, 2008. You are the expert, from the grassroots level, and your knowledge is needed for this evaluation. Results of the evaluation will be emailed by the summer of 2009 to all participants.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jason L. Buckner
Superintendent

1. Name of District _____

2. K-12 Student Enrollment

   O 200 or fewer

   O 201 – 400

   O 401 – 600

   O 601 – 800

   O 801 – 1000

3. Approximate City Population

   O Fewer than 1000

   O 1001 – 5000

   O 5001 – 10,000

   O 10,001 – 15,000

   O More than 15,001

4. Approximate Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage

   O 0 - 20%

   O 21 – 40%

   O 41 – 60%

   O 61 – 80%

   O 81 – 100%

5. RPDC Region

   O Central-Warrensburg

   O Heart of MO-Columbia

   O Kansas City

   O NE-Truman/Kirksville

   O NW-Maryville

   O SE-Cape Girardeau

   O South Central-Rolla

   O St. Louis

   O SW-Springfield

6. Years of experience you have as a Missouri Public School Superintendent

   O 3 years or less

   O 4 – 10 years

   O 10 – 15 years

   O 16 – 25 years

   O 26 or more

7. Please mark the five key issues in your school district. If one of your five key issues is not listed, please mark other and list on the line.

   O Board of Education

   O Certified Staff

   O Community/Parental Involvement

   O Curriculum

   O District Funding

   O Facilities

   O Governmental Mandates

   O Principal(s)

   O Socio-Economic Factors

   O Student Achievement

   O Support Staff

   O Technology (Needs, Requirements, and Maintenance)

   O Transportation

   O Other (please specify) _____

8. Please explain your district's main issue from the previous choices and include possible solutions for this issue.

   _____

   _____

   _____

VITA

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High School – Licking R-VIII

Education:

Doctoral Candidate May ‘08, emphasis: Administration

Lindenwood University-St. Louis, MO

Educational Specialist, emphasis: Superintendency

Lincoln University-Jefferson City, MO

Masters in Educational Administration, emphasis: Secondary Principalship

Southwest Baptist University-Bolivar, MO

Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education, emphasis: Earth Science

Southeast Missouri State University-Cape Girardeau, MO

Associate of Arts, emphasis: General Studies

Jefferson College-Hillsboro, MO

Missouri Certifications:

Superintendent K-12th gr.

Principal 9th-12th gr.

Earth Science/General Science 7th-12th gr.

Administrative Experience:

Weaubleau R-III School District-Weaubleau, MO

2006-present Superintendent

Laclede Co. C-5 School District-Lebanon, MO

2003-2006 Superintendent

Blackwater R-III School District-Blackwater, MO

2002-2003 Principal

Teaching Experience:

Bunker R-III School District-Bunker, MO

1999-2002

Licking R-VIII School District-Licking, MO

1997-1998