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BEHAVIOR OF LOCAL SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS IN ATTEMPTING
TO INFLUENCE STATE LEGISLATION AFFECTING
EDUCATION IN NEBRASKA

by

W. THOMAS ROBISON

A DISSERTATION

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BY

W. Thomas Robison

APPROVED

DATE

Dr. Howard Eckel

May 28, 1971

Dr. L. J. Kunkel

May 28, 1971

Dr. Galen Dodge

May 28, 1971

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the teaching profession, the education of our people, and the socio-economic welfare of our country has long been recognized and American faith in public education has made it today, by far, the largest and easily one of America's most important professional occupations. More than two million men and women were full-time teachers in the United States in the 1968-69 school year¹ and thousands of others taught part-time. Many scientists, physicians, accountants, and members of other professions teach one or more classes in colleges and universities. Similarly, large numbers of draftsmen teach part-time in vocational schools while many other people instruct in adult education and recreation programs.

In a democracy such as ours, and with the workings of our governmental processes in mind, it would apparently be inescapable that this, our system of education, should be quickly recognized and treated as a matter of public politics. Just the matter of funding alone relates education and educational decision-making to political activity.

¹Willard W. Wirtz, United States Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1968,69 Edition, Washington, D. C., p. 184.

For:

Public education is paid for by public funds, and public funds are raised, and allocated, through the political process.²

However, along with the public faith in education that has been developed in our country, the philosophy that schools and educators should be completely separated from politics has also existed in America since colonial times. The general public may have understood that provision for the educational process was a governmental responsibility, but "There has been a temptation throughout the American educational experience to deny that anything labeled 'politics' is involved in educational decision-making."³

The Citizenship Committee of the National Education Association confirms that this denial of a relationship between education and politics has long existed and points out that:

. . . the prevailing philosophy has been that the schools should be divorced from politics. It followed that teachers should take no part in political decisions, other than to vote.⁴

This philosophy stemmed, of course, from the opinion held by the general public relative to politics and politi-

²"Education And Politics," Carnegie Corporation of New York Quarterly, January, 1963, Volume XI, Number 1, New York.

³Laurence Iannaccone and Frank W. Lutz, Politics, Power And Policy: The Governing Of Local School Districts, Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, Ohio, 1970.

⁴An Invitation To Consider Education And Politics, Citizenship Committee, National Education Association, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C., 1962, p. 34.

cians.

'Politics' to most people meant the shenanigans of political parties, payoffs, patronage, and spoils. The word conveyed the idea of flamboyant oratory lacking substance and campaign promises with little prospect of fulfillment. It suggested feverish activity on election day and one set of rascals capturing office rather than another. Politics, in the popular view, encompassed some of the more sordid aspects of American life.⁵

Schoolmen, then, have been expected by the tax-paying public to remain aloof from politics and they, themselves, not only helped to create but helped to preserve the mythical philosophy of separation of education from political activity.

In this attitudinal environment, professional schoolmen worked diligently to preserve the autonomy of public education. To do so, they created a set of serviceable myths, which portrayed education as a unique governmental function, one that must be 'taken out of politics' and safeguarded by educators who alone could serve the public interests.⁶

From this single basic proposition (that public education is a unique function of government) has grown the more elaborate mythology with which the public schools have been surrounded:

. . . that public education . . . must therefore be accorded separate and special treatment, that it is dangerous for the public school to be associated with any other public undertaking, that the schools must have nothing to do with general politics, that the schools are both the prime exemplar and the chief champion of democracy.⁷

⁵Alan Rosenthal, Governing Education, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1969, p. VIII.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

Consequently, based on the mythology explained above:

. . . the dogma has evolved that public education must occupy a position above the political conflicts that are waged over other public services, and educators are supposed to abide by the maxim that politics and education do not mix. In the eyes of the public, schools and their operations are removed, or should be removed, from the arenas where other governmental decisions are made. A candidate for a position on the local district school board, for example, often escapes the stigma of a politician. Instead he is viewed as a good citizen who is serving his community. True, if elected, he becomes a part of an agency set apart or perhaps set above other political units.⁸

However, regardless of its development and cultivation by even schoolmen themselves, the old notion developed in this country that politics and education should not have anything to do with each other is obviously just what it has been described above as being--a myth based on a misunderstanding of politics, of the role of education in a democracy, and how that role is determined. Most facets of the socio-economic phase of American life today are, in some way, related to politics.

Politics and politicians decide the wars you fight, the interest you pay, the speed you drive, the taxes you pay. Politics and politicians control the purity of your food, the schooling of your children, the value of your money, the weights and measures you use, the floor under your wages. Politics and politicians hand out subsidies to farmers, subsidies to shipbuilders, subsidies to magazines and newspapers, subsidies to bankers, subsidies to builders. Politics and politicians fix your benefits when injured,

⁸Nicholas Masters, Robert H. Salisbury, and Thomas H. Eliot, State Politics And The Public Schools, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1964, p. 3.

your benefits when unemployed, your safety on the job, your pension after retirement. Politics and politicians protect or destroy your right to speak freely, your right to meet freely, your right to worship freely, your right to organize, your right to vote. Politics and politicians control your life.⁹

And the educational process is by no means unique among all of our other public interests in that it is a public interest without political relationship.

The belief that politics and public education are separate, or even separable, could not be further from the truth. A strong commitment to the position that education is essentially a public responsibility, coupled with the fact that a public school system is a costly and complicated operation, has placed considerable burdens upon those who decide how to allocate scarce resources. Those concerned with changing the pattern of education or with introducing major innovations (which normally involve increased expenditures) are compelled to negotiate with political officials who are pressured by other interests that desire other goals--such as increased expenditures for mental health or reductions in taxation. In recent years the support of public education has become one of the states' largest expenditures.¹⁰

Bailey adds confirmation to the paragraph above by pointing out that:

More public money is spent for education than for any other single function of state and local government.¹¹

But schools are political entities because of more than just the financial relationship.

All over the United States school boards are

⁹op. cit., 4.

¹⁰op. cit., 8, p. 4.

¹¹Stephen K. Bailey, Schoolmen And Politics, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, New York, 1962.

elected or appointed through a highly political process The size, location, cost, looks, and facilities of school buildings are frequently matters of high political controversy In short, education is one of the most thoroughly political enterprises in American life . . . or for that matter in the life of any society.¹²

The existence of a relationship between education and politics is, then, in the estimation of many leading political scientists, politicians, and educators, a foregone conclusion. Iannaccone and Lutz have recently concluded that:

The educational structure at every level--local, state and federal--is regarded as a fundamental part of the American political system. From the city school board to the congressional committee, education is politics. The relationship between those who teach, when they teach, and politics is recognized as probably the single most important question in determining the course, present and future, of American education.¹³

And contrary to the old myth that schoolmen are to leave politics to others, Thomas H. Eliot, in proposing an agenda for the study of public school politics, maintained that because school districts are governmental units, school board members and superintendents are engaged in political activity whether they like it or not. He wrote:

Surely it is high time to stop being frightened by a word. Politics includes the making of governmental decisions, and the effort or struggle to gain or keep the power to make those decisions. Public schools are part of government. They are political entities.¹⁴

¹²Ibid.

¹³op. cit 3.

¹⁴Thomas H. Eliot, "Toward An Understanding Of Public School Politics," American Political Science Review, LIII, December, 1959, pp. 1032-51.

ISSUES

Definition Of Terms

Politics. Lasswell defines politics as a matter of "who gets what, when, how."¹⁵

Gould and Kolb say that:

Politics denotes those processes of human action by which conflict, concerning on the one hand the common good and on the other hand the interests of groups, is carried on or settled, always involving the use of, or struggle for power.¹⁶

Use of the term "politics," in this report, shall be based on the definition given above by Gould and Kolb and applied to governmental policy and legislative decisions made at the state level.

Political Influence. Kirst explains "political influence" as:

. . . the ability to get others to act, think, or feel as one intends. A school superintendent that persuades his board to approve a new school facility exercises influence. Enough total influence, however, must be aggregated to induce, coerce, deceive, or otherwise persuade someone to do what is required of him. Politics from this standpoint consists of acts of influence--to study patterns of influence so that proposals are adopted is to study education policy-making.¹⁷

¹⁵H. D. Lasswell, Politics, Who Gets What, When, How, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1936.

¹⁶Julius Gould and William L. Kolb, Dictionary Of The Social Sciences, The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois, 1964, p. 515.

¹⁷Michael W. Kirst, The Politics Of Education At The Local, State And Federal Levels, McCutchan Publishing Corporation, Berkeley, California, 1970, p. viii.

This term, as used here, shall refer to the efforts exerted by local superintendents when desiring to influence legislation at the state level affecting education in their districts.

Power. The analytical element most often stressed in politics is power. The term "power," as used here, shall denote:

. . . the influence (q.v.) exerted by a man or group through whatever means, over the conduct of other in intended ways.¹⁸

Conflict. Coser defines political conflict as

. . . struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.¹⁹

The term "conflict," as used in this report, shall reflect the definition given above and refer to the political struggle, at the state level, by administrators of local public schools for tax dollars.

The State Legislature In The Educational-Political Relationship

Even though the relationship does exist at every level of government--local, state and federal--the relationship between education and politics at the state level is one of special interest for educational administrators with the

¹⁸op. cit. 16. p. 524.

¹⁹L. A. Coser, The Functions Of Social Conflict, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1956, p. 8.

state legislature being quickly identified as a central arena of conflict.

It must be readily admitted that the influences of the federal government upon education have been manifold and profound but they have been somewhat indirect because the federal Constitution does not deal directly with education. Good explains the relationship of the federal government to education as follows:

Most profound has been the doctrine of reserved powers stated in the Tenth Amendment. This has not only left education to the states as a reserved power but it has served to warn off the federal government from interference with education in the states. It has not served to prevent Congress from distributing aid to education in the states, chiefly aid in vocational fields The First Amendment, dealing with religion and with freedom of communication; the Fourteenth Amendment with its 'due process' clause; the power to maintain a postal system and to promote science and the useful arts; the powers assigned to the Supreme Court or developed by it; the general Welfare clause (I, 8) and the taxing power--all and sundry have been used in ways that have influenced education in the states But in the past and in the main, public education has been a state function, based upon state constitutional laws.²⁰

Proper recognition must also be given to the educational-political relationship at the local level of government. But, at the local level, it must be remembered that legally, a school district is a state agency set up to carry out locally the state's responsibility for public education. In the broadest sense, even local school board members are

²⁰H. G. Good, A History Of American Education, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1963, p. 87.

therefore state rather than local officers, although elected locally. Two court cases, in different states and referred to quite extensively, confirm the popular acceptance of these points. A court ruling in Pennsylvania points out that:

While a school district is not, of course, an independent sovereignty, it does constitute a body corporate, a quasi-municipal corporation, which is an agency of the Commonwealth for the performance of prescribed governmental functions, being created and maintained for the sole purpose of administering the Commonwealth's system of public education.²¹

In Kentucky it was ruled that:

. . . they (the public schools) are not municipal institutions at all--the city schools, including high schools, are part of the state's common school system. Their trustees are officers of the state.²²

Other "courts across the nation have reinforced, with some degree of finality, the concept of public education in the United States as a state function."²³ These court decisions are, in turn, based upon and related to numerous state statutes and state constitutional provisions. Thus, the state legislature becomes the central power in the educational-political relationship in the various states.

The authority over schools and school affairs--is a central power, residing in the legislature of

²¹Burrough of Wilkinsburg V. School District of Wilkinsburg, 365 Pa. 254, 74A, 2nd 138 (1950).

²²City of Louisville V. Commonwealth, 134 Ky. 488, 121 S.W. 411 (1909).

²³Stephen J. Knezevich, Administration Of Public Education, Harper and Row, New York, 1969, p. 154.

the state. It is for the law-making power to determine whether the authority shall be exercised by a state board of education, or distributed to county, township or city organizations throughout the state²⁴

Nebraska has followed the example set in other states of centralizing the power over schools in the state legislature and Section 6, Article VII of Nebraska's Constitution makes provision for the public schools in this state a matter to be cared for by the state Unicameral. The above-mentioned Constitutional provision reads:

The legislature shall provide for the free instruction, in the common schools of this state, of all persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years.²⁵

In keeping with this Constitutional provision, an examination of the records will show that during the last session of the Nebraska Unicameral (80th session, January to September of 1969), no less than 135 bills were introduced directly concerned with the administration of education in this state. That number does not include the budget bills related to and affecting education.

Quite obviously, then, education in America is a function entrusted mainly to state government and "much of state politics is politics concerned with the public schools."²⁶

²⁴State ex rel Clark V. Haworth, 122 Ind. 462, 23 N.E. 946 (1890).

²⁵Nebraska Constitution, Article VII, Section 6.

²⁶N. A. Masters, State Politics And The Public Schools, Alfred Knopf, Inc., New York, 1964.

The legislature of each state determines basic policies in education; how local boards of education shall be elected, how many people shall serve on local school boards, what rights and responsibilities the local board shall possess, what specific subjects shall or shall not be taught in the public schools, how many years of education shall be available to all or various types of pupils, what standards shall be required for admission of pupils to schools, what promotion and graduation requirements shall be, and even what textbooks shall be used. The state legislature determines the instructional program, the certification of teachers (which prescribes how much professional preparation each teacher shall have and in what areas or grade levels he may teach), the safety and quality of school facilities, and what financial resources shall be made available for the support of education in the state and in the local school districts.

No one today questions the authority of the state legislature to influence the organization and operation of public education within its boundaries so long as such actions do not violate limits set by the state constitution or rights guaranteed to individuals by the United States Constitution.²⁷

History Of Educational Administrator Participation In The Political Arena

One would expect, in light of the information above, politics at the state level to be a field in which school administrators would have developed a great deal of knowledge, ability, and influence.

When appropriations are necessary or changes must be effected enabling education to keep pace with the needs of the society which it serves, it is primarily the state legislature, quite obviously, with its power over schools, that

²⁷Stephen J. Knezevich, Administration Of Public Education, Harper and Row, New York, 1969, p. 154.

must be influenced and persuaded to provide the finance or to allow the changes. Adequate financial provision as well as other operational innovations necessary to enabling the educational system to meet the demands made upon it are certainly prerogatives of the state legislature.

As the power over schools is a legislative one, it is not exhausted by exercise. The legislature, having tried one plan, is not precluded from trying another. It has a complete choice of methods, and may change its plans as often as it deems necessary or expedient²⁸

But it must be pointed out that state legislatures are under pressure from many quarters and financial provision and operational innovation for any one social interest are brought about, in many instances, only as the result of political conflict. For it must be remembered that state governments have many legitimate concerns--for health, highways, and welfare, for example--as well as education and the equitable allocation of resources in support of these interests is an extraordinarily intricate - and political - business.

Not everyone comprehends this trading out of interests in the political market place. That is one reason why many political decisions do not in fact reflect accurately the most widely held public values but do often reflect those of 'interests' which understand the political process very well indeed.²⁹

The relationship between politics, education and edu-

²⁸op. cit., 15.

²⁹op. cit., 2.

cational decision-making at the state level, then, involves a conflict between education and a host of other public interests concerning priority assignment relative to, among other political ramifications as shown previously, adequate financing. This is the American political process.

Through this process, the community--as small as the township, as large as the nation--decides both the total amount it is prepared to spend for a host of public benefits, and how the total amount will be split up among them. In short, the political forum is where the citizenry fights about the things it cares about; it is where the public assigns priorities and establishes its values in rank order.³⁰

The state legislature becomes the central political forum in which these conflicts must be resolved. And in the estimation of many leading political and educational figures it is extremely important that education be given better consideration among the states' political concerns. In their opinion much of the socio-economic life of the nation is related to the welfare and progress of the educational process.

Education is the source of supply of trained people, of specialists for management and operation, and of research for the advancement of basic knowledge and the application of that knowledge through new processes and new procedures.³¹

David D. Henry, University of Illinois, further points out that:

It is a great problem in a growing and prosperous nation to have the public understand the relationship between education and prosperity, even

³⁰op. cit., 2.

³¹David D. Henry, What Priority For Education? University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1961, pp. 3-5.

security. We cannot have the last two without the first.³²

"Who gets what, when, how,"³³ then, becomes a highly important issue and it appears likely that the conflict over political priority may well become more intense as increased demands are made on education as well as on other state interests. It is being predicted that:

. . . we shall see an increasing percentage of students completing high school and going on to college; a great growth of junior colleges; much higher public and private expenditures for education; and investment in computer-assisted instruction and other new materials and methods.³⁴

It is further predicted that:

Within the next ten years we shall probably have established a norm of fourteen years free education, with greatly expanded scholarship and loan funds to carry students beyond that to college. After this period of formal education, the process of learning and retaining will continue throughout a person's career, leading to new programs and new relationships between business, unions, government, schools, and universities to institutionalize this process.³⁵

Again, it is in the political arena at the state level, with our present governmental processes in mind, where the largest amount of the financing to meet increased demands on education must be competed for and obtained.

In 1920, more than 83 per cent of the revenue for public education came from local government;

³²Ibid.

³³op. cit., 15.

³⁴William K. Reed, "The Forces Of Impending Social Change," Dateline, National Association of Manufacturers, 277 Park Avenue, New York, December, 1968, Vol. 13, No. 3.

³⁵Ibid.

by 1960, that proportion had slipped to 56.5 per cent. Most of the difference was made up by state governments. And in the absence of federal aid, it is likely that more and more of the burden will be borne by them because, rigid though their tax structures may be, they seem positively supple when compared with those of local governments, which are based almost entirely on property taxes.³⁶

The Research Department of the National Education Association has pointed out that:

It is estimated that in 1969-70, 6.7 per cent of the revenue receipts of public elementary and secondary schools is coming from the federal government; 40.8 per cent, from the state governments; and about 52.5 per cent, from the local governments. Ten years ago 4.4 per cent came from the federal government, 39.1 per cent, from the state governments; and about 56.5 per cent from the local governments.³⁷

And if education does not share sufficiently in the plan of providing for public interests, where may the fault lie:

. . . except with those who are either too lazy or too naive to press the case effectively for their own 'interests'?³⁸

It would appear, then, that educators, and especially school administrators, in their role of leadership in the field of education and knowing its needs, have had a special responsibility to become politically knowledgeable and active in the relationship between education and politics in

³⁶"The State And Public Education," Carnegie Corporation of New York Quarterly, January, 1963, Volume XI, Number 1, New York.

³⁷NEA Research Bulletin, Volume 48, Number 2, May, 1970, Research Division, National Education Association, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C., p. 39.

³⁸op. cit., 2.

its manifestation in the state legislature. One would think that, as the official representatives of their school districts, their administrative efforts would be tempered with a studied political behavior in an attempt to gain the best possible advantages for those whom they represent and guide.

Teachers who see children dropping out of the system every day from hunger, neglect and lack of pride, ought to be hounding state and federal lawmakers into action.³⁹

Senator Walter F. Mondale of Minnesota believes that:

Because the educators are cast by circumstance in the role of purveyors of fact and wisdom, they have a special responsibility to raise their voices, and demand change in the order of national priorities.⁴⁰

The Senator also believes that:

Unless the educators as the potentially strongest force for constructive change do speak with conviction, they cannot expect the imbalance of priorities to change.⁴¹

However,

. . . the cherished and time-hallowed myth (that schoolmen should have nothing to do with politics) says this is not so, and adherence to the fiction has weakened the 'schoolmen' (defined as professional educators, state education officials, and leaders of professional educational associations) in their competitive struggle for the scarce financial resources of the states. And it is the school-

³⁹Senator Walter F. Mondale, Minnesota, American Association Of Junior Colleges, Special Bulletin, March 24, 1969, 1315 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

men themselves who have done the most to establish and propagate the myth.⁴²

Consequently, throughout our national history our state educational processes have been, for the most part, provided for and directed by elected or appointed politicians, and indirectly, influenced by local political pressures exerted by interest groups. And whatever the reason for their having failed to do so - whether it has been because of an unwillingness to assume the risks involved, because of actual political suppression, or because they have actually given credence to the mythical philosophy of separation of education and politics - educational administrators have, in general, remained aloof from open participation in the political arena. They stand accused of failing to assume an influential role in the relationship between education and politics by non-educators involved in the educational-political process, as well as by some of their own number and other educators. Various charges have been lodged against them. Bailey asserts that:

. . . most of the time in most of the states disorder and naivete are the schoolmen's outstanding political characteristics. Keeping politics out of education and vice versa has not precluded factional debates about educational programs and policies, but has simply had the effect of lessening the visibility of educational conflicts. And invisible politics is rarely good politics.⁴³

⁴²op. cit., 36.

⁴³op. cit., 11.

THE PROBLEM

Statement Of The Problem

What are the behavioral alternatives exercised by superintendents of local public schools when legislation that will affect public education is pending before the state legislature and they desire to influence the final legislative decision? Are there significant positive relationships between certain behavioral alternatives of superintendents and the passing of state legislation viewed by the superintendent as being in the interest of his district? What is the relationship between membership in administrator organizations and the behavioral alternatives exercised by superintendents desiring to influence state legislation?

Variables

1. Type of success desired (legislative interests).
2. Behavioral alternatives exercised.
 - (a) Role expectation of:
 1. Self
 2. Employer (Board of Education).
 3. Professional peers.
 4. Community
 - (b) Personality needs.
3. Effectiveness of alternatives exercised on political issues (in the past).