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PREVIEW

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PRESNT AND RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES
TO DETERMINE ELIGIBILITY
FOR FREE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION
IN NEBRASKA

BY

Edith Simanek Greer

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Psychology and Measurements

Lincoln, Nebraska

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E. S. G.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. BACKGROUND AND PRESENT STATUS OF THE FREE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM	17
Summary	42
III. EXPLORATION OF THE CONCEPTS AND TECHNIQUES OF PROMOTION.	46
Summary.	67
IV. THE PLACE OF TEACHERS' ESTIMATES IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROMOTION PROGRAM.	69
Summary.	89
Some Assumptions Resulting from the Investigation	92
V. FIRST STEP IN DEVELOPING A DESIRABLE PROMOTION PROGRAM	94
Summary.	113
VI. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.	115
Bibliography.	131
Appendix	136

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Items Included in Eighth Grade Examinations and Standardized Achievement Tests	27
II. Thirteen Representative Counties Arranged According to Decreasing Percentages of Failure in Promotion among Rural Pupils in the Year, 1944 .	37
III. Number and Percentage of Pupil Failures in Examinations and in Promotion for the Year 1943 and 1944 in Three Counties.	40
IV. Chi-Squares (X^2) and Contingency Coefficients (C) of Rural Teachers' Estimates of Pupils' Development in High-School Achievement and High School Teachers' Evaluation of Development.	75
V. Chi-Squares (X^2) and Contingency Coefficients (C) of Rural Teachers' Estimates of Pupils' Social Development in High School and High-School Teachers' Evaluation of Development.	77
VI. Chi-Squares (X^2) and Contingency Coefficients (C) of Rural Teachers' Estimates of Pupils' Physical Development in High School and High-School Teachers' Evaluation of Development.	79
VII. Chi-Squares (X^2) and Contingency Coefficients (C) of Rural Teachers' Estimates of Pupils' Academic, Social and Physical Development in High-School Teachers' Evaluation of Development.	83
VIII. Chi-Squares (X^2) and Contingency Coefficients (C) of Rural Teachers' Estimates of Pupils' Academic, Social and Physical Development in High School and of High-School Teachers' Evaluation of Development.	85
IX. Chi-Squares (X^2) and Contingency Coefficients (C) of Four Promotion Factors and High-School Grades	88
X. Number and Percentage of County Superintendents Checking Items on Guide for Studying Methods of Promotion	102

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For several years there has been growing discontent among school administrators, teachers, parents and pupils with the examination method by which children in Nebraska rural-elementary schools obtain free high-school tuition as provided by the Free High School Education Law. Although Nebraska's Free High School Education Law merely sets forth the procedure for qualifying for free high-school tuition, it actually determines the promotion of the children from rural-elementary schools. That this is true is evidenced by the fact that only a very small percentage of the children, who according to the law are ineligible for free high school education, attend high school by paying their own tuition.

This feeling of dissatisfaction concerning the state eighth-grade examinations was first brought to the writer's attention during her experience as Superintendent of Richardson County. In that position it soon became evident to the writer that many teachers dreaded the state eighth-grade examinations because all too often their teaching positions depended upon their pupils passing them. This predicament naturally caused the teachers to resort, during a large part of the year, to the uninteresting question and answer type of review as their principal method of teaching. Class time for other grades was shortened in order that

more time could be devoted to eighth-grade review. In many schools, books of examination questions asked in previous years were used instead of regular textbooks. In several schools, question and answer books were used. When the pupils had access to the question and answer books, they of course attempted to memorize the answers as given to them in these particular books. It was a common practice for pupils to spend long hours after school memorizing such answers.

Teachers, as well as parents, felt that the practice of promoting children solely on results obtained in one or two examinations taken in eight different subject-matter areas was extremely unfair to the children. Pupils dreaded the state eighth-grade examinations because they realized that an entire school year would be lost if they did not pass them. For months before these examinations took place, eighth-grade pupils were being constantly reminded of them both at school and at home. School was uninteresting because few new experiences were being provided. When at last the state eighth-grade examination days came, several of the children were so excited that they became physically ill. The nervousness of others was not so apparent; it was obvious, however, that they could not do their best work.

For several years every county superintendents' annual meeting brought forth heated debates concerning the advantages and the evils of the state eighth-grade examinations. There were

those superintendents who believed that these examinations should be eliminated, and that teachers in the rural schools should be allowed to promote their eighth-grade pupils as they promote those in the lower grades. Others argued that the inadequacy of training and experience of the majority of the rural teachers made it extremely unwise to place the responsibility of eighth-grade promotion on them. They stressed, too, their feeling that the pressure to pass all pupils would be so great in the districts that these teachers would be unable to fail anyone.

During the past few years, while in the State Department of Public Instruction, the writer has had numerous requests from county superintendents, teachers, parents and children to help change the Free High School Education Law in order that the system of promoting the rural-elementary children to high school might be more just and helpful to each child. School people asked also that the provisions of the law be changed in such a way that all county superintendents would abide by the law. It has appeared to the writer, however, that before any revision is possible, a careful study of the present system and the possibilities for its improvement must be made.

Statement of the Problem

The general problem with which the writer of this study is concerned is the improvement of Nebraska's program for providing free high-school education for pupils who reside in

non-high-school districts and attend rural-elementary schools, outside of high school districts.

This problem resolves itself into the following parts:

(1) What are the methods of measurement and evaluation now being used in Nebraska's procedure for qualifying for free high-school education and what evidences of inadequacies are found in actual practice? (2) What educationally sound promotion techniques are available and might be used? (3) In the light of a thorough study of the operation of the present procedure and in the light of the best theory and actual practice, what recommendations can be made for the improvement of Nebraska's program?

Purpose of this Study

Although discussions regarding Nebraska's program of promotion have been conducted for a long time and several studies have been undertaken, there is sufficient evidence that the promotion problem in the State has not been solved to the satisfaction of the people. It is the writer's purpose in this study to examine carefully the various aspects of the program provided by law and the procedures used in actual practice to determine what outcomes of the program may be unfair and what outcomes may be limiting the educational opportunities of rural youth. If the findings warrant, it is also the writer's purpose in the light of available literature, research studies and experimentation, to propose practices which will be more equitable and more conducive to broader pupil experiences.

Procedures Followed in this Study

The procedures used in attempting a solution to the problem are aimed at answering two sets of questions. The first set of four questions constitutes an outline of the first phase of the study and leads up to the recommendations of the most desirable promotion program toward which Nebraska should be working. The first question is: What is the present status of Nebraska's method of promoting rural-elementary pupils from the eighth-grade to high school? The procedures necessary to answer this question include: (1) a careful consideration of the evaluation of Nebraska's present Free High School Education Law and its several pertinent rulings, (2) an investigation of several of the various programs followed by counties in promoting rural-elementary pupils from the eighth grade to high school and (3) an analysis of the regular eighth-grade examinations and standardized achievement tests in regard to the number and type of items covered in corresponding subjects.

The second question asks: What are the basic factors of a desirable program and the available methods of measurement and evaluation which might be used to determine promotion in Nebraska's program? The answer to this involves an investigation of available literature, including research studies, a study of various practices of other states obtained through correspondence with the various state departments of public instruction.

The third inquiry made is: As a result of investigation what techniques are found to be of comparatively great value to a comprehensive promotion program for Nebraska? To answer this an investigation of several techniques of educational measurement, such as regular state examinations, standardized achievement tests, rural teachers' grades and rural teachers' estimates needs to be made.

The fourth question is: What conclusions seem to be warranted and what recommendations can be made for the most desirable promotion program toward which Nebraska should strive? To answer this will require a summarization of the results of the investigation, the reading of the literature and the inquiry concerning practices in other states, and the application of the desirable factors found to the Nebraska rural-promotion program.

The second set of three questions serve as an outline of the next phase of the study and concern themselves with the first steps to be taken in modifying the present program. The first question is: What type of program for promoting rural-elementary pupils from grade eight to high school do the school people, especially county superintendents and rural teachers, want at this time? The reply requires that questionnaires be sent to county superintendents and teachers and that personal interviews and group meetings be held with school people in order to discover whether any change is desired and, if it is, how great a change is wanted.

The second inquiry stated is: What recommendations may seem to be warranted for the first steps in the revision of the Free High School Education Law? The answer to this involves an implementation of desirable promotion practices, to the Nebraska promotion program keeping in view the opinions and judgments of the county superintendents and teachers.

The third question is: What further recommendation can be made for procedures which can be used as the result of the first steps in the revision of the Free High School Education Law? The recommendations will include a planning of a progressively better program in the light of desirable promotion practices and wishes of county superintendents and teachers.

Delimiting the Study

The writer has stated, previously, the aims of the study. It may help, at this point, to list some of the limitations which are being placed upon it.

It is not the writer's aim or purpose:

- (1) to attempt to present a complete history of the free high school education program in Nebraska.
- (2) to make evaluations of promotion procedures from grade eight to grade nine used in city-elementary schools as compared with those in rural-elementary schools.
- (3) to compare the recommended promotion program with the present program in terms of subject-matter achievement but rather in terms of

greater equality, of enlargement of educational opportunities for all pupils and of greater consideration of all aspects of the growth and development of children.

- (4) to study the promotion programs and the teachers' estimates in all counties of the state but only in a few representative counties.
- (5) to evaluate the various philosophies of promotion expressed by different authors in literature.

PREVIEW

Definitions

The following terms used in this study are defined:

Nebraska's promotion program, Nebraska's free high-school education program and Nebraska's free high-school tuition program: These expressions designate the program by which rural-elementary pupils, included under the law, earn free high-school education as provided by the Free High School Education Law.

Regular eighth-grade examinations, regular state examinations and state eighth-grade examinations: These expressions indicate the examinations furnished by the Nebraska State Department of Public Instruction according to the provisions of the Free High School Education Law.

Rural schools: This expression refers to the rural-elementary schools.

Rural teachers: This expression designates the rural-elementary teachers.

High School grades: This expression refers to all grades above the eighth grade.

Accredited High Schools: This expression refers to the Nebraska high schools whose graduates are admitted to the University of Nebraska without submitting to examinations for admission.

Approved High Schools: This expression indicates the Nebraska high schools which do not meet the standards of accreditation set by the University of Nebraska but meet the standards of approval set by the State Department of Public Instruction.

Review of Related Research

Within recent years many studies concerned with the promotion of elementary-school pupils have appeared. A careful analysis of research literature brought forth, however, only a few studies which treated specifically the techniques of promoting rural pupils from the eighth grade to high school.

One investigation¹ treats Nebraska's promotion program for its rural eighth grade pupils. This study which was made by George Garfield Hansen is an investigation of the comparative prognostic values of the regular state examination marks, rural teachers' marks and Standard Graduation Examination scores. In obtaining his comparisons Dr. Hansen used the regular state-examination marks and rural teachers' marks of 1043 Madison County eighth-grade pupils during the years, 1932-1937, and the regular state-examination marks, teachers' marks and Standard Graduation Examination scores for 188 pupils of the 1937 group. He compared the high-school marks of those pupils who attended high school with their regular state-examination marks, rural-teachers' marks and Standard Graduation scores. His investigation showed:

1. The average coefficient of correlation of county examinations² and high school marks to be .37 with

¹ George Garfield Hansen, "A Study of Achievement Marks of Rural Eighth Grade Pupils of Madison County, Nebraska During the Years 1932-1937 inclusive." Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Department of Education, University of Nebraska, (June, 1940)

² The author designates state eighth-grade examinations by the use of the term "county examinations."

a probable error = $+.0009$

2. The average coefficient of correlation of teacher's marks and high school marks to be $.30$ with P.E. = $\pm .009$
3. The average coefficient of correlation of Standard Graduation Examinations and high school marks to be $.416$ with P.E. = $\pm .02$
4. The average coefficient of correlation of teachers' marks and county examinations to be $.41$ with P.E. = $\pm .017^1$

Among his conclusions are the following:

"According to this study it appears that the county examination marks are more predictive of success in high school than teachers' marks, if we say such correlations have any prognostic value at all. However as both r 's are low the writer feels that there is not enough difference to offset the arguments that county examinations require too much time for cramming and are the cause of the rural teacher spending too much time with the eighth grade at the expense of other grades.

It is evident that a standardized examination such as the Standard Graduation Examination (Otis-Orleans) is more predictive than either county-examination marks or teachers' marks."²

Dr. Hansen found that on the whole, rural-teachers' marks were higher than other marks. The mean of the averages of the regular state-examination marks was five points lower than the mean of the averages of teachers' marks but only $.8$ point lower than the mean of the averages of high-school marks. He found too, that

¹Ibid., p. 72

²Ibid., pp. 72-73

the regular state-examination marks varied more than rural teachers' marks or high-school marks.

There is also the study¹ made by Fae A. Evans which pertains to promoting Nebraska's rural pupils from the eighth grade to high school. In it he investigated, through correspondence, the practices carried on in other states in regard to the use of the state eighth-grade examinations in promotions. In addition to this, he obtained by means of a questionnaire the reactions of the county superintendents of Nebraska and the rural teachers in three counties to such state eighth-grade examinations.

His main findings are as follows:

- (1) Thirteen states give no examinations.
- (2) Eighteen states give state-wide examinations as a basis for determining promotion.
- (3) In nine other states, counties have the option of determining whether or not to give eighth-grade examinations.
- (4) Three states give state-wide examinations in the seventh grade. In these states the seventh grade is the last grade in the elementary school.
- (5) One state gives state-wide examinations in the sixth grade. In this state the elementary school ends with the sixth grade.

Conditions in Nebraska --

- (1) Rural educators in Nebraska are not satisfied with the eighth-grade examination situation as it exists. They do not think the examinations provide a true test of educational ability.

¹ Fae A. Evans, "A Study of the Bases to be Used for Determining Promotion from the Small Rural School to the High School," Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Education, University of Nebraska, (July 1940).

- (2) The lower grades seem to suffer from lack of attention as a result of the existing situation. This seems in part to be due to inferior teaching.
- (3) It appears that the rural teachers are not in a position to assume the responsibility for determining promotion from the eighth grade, even though over half of the rural teachers would like to assume this responsibility.
- (4) There seems to be a desire on the part of most rural educators to want to try some substitute for the leaving examinations.¹
- (5) County superintendents want proof that the substitute is better than the present type of examination before accepting a change.
- (6) Both county superintendents and rural teachers agree that students would be advanced just as far educationally if they were promoted one grade each year, and did not take the eighth grade examinations.
- (7) They also agree that educational standards of rural schools would not suffer if something were substituted for the eighth grade leaving examinations.
- (8) The present examinations do not serve as an economy measure by keeping the student who cannot pass the tests in the grades for another year, thus making it possible for him to finish high school in four years.²

An investigation of the eighth-grade promotion plan in Kansas was made by Martin Ebert Little.³ In Kansas, the common-school-diploma law, passed in 1913, required an average grade of

¹ The author designates state eighth-grade examinations by use of the term "leaving examinations."

² Ibid., pp. 53-59

³ Martin Ebert Little, A Study of the Eighth Grade Diploma Situation in Kansas Studies in Education, No. 13. Emporia, Kansas: Kansas State Teachers College, (June 1937)

eighty per cent in all examination subjects and no grade below sixty per cent. First- and second-class cities have never had to give the examinations and recently third-class city elementary schools connected with senior high schools have been exempted by some county superintendents. In this study Mr. Little attempts to throw some light on the Kansas diploma situation. This study includes an inquiry directed to county superintendents asking them to state their opinions regarding the examination plan for providing eighth grade diplomas, and the arguments in support of their opinions. It involves, too, obtaining the plans of neighboring states for promotion programs and the opinions of education officials in each state on their particular program. This study includes too, an investigation of the relationship of teacher preparation to eighth-grade failures. Mr. Little uses in this part of his study an analysis of the training of teachers in Sumner County and a comparison of the number of failures suffered by eighth-grade pupils in each school with the training of the teacher in that particular school.

Mr. Little's conclusions follow:

- (1) The county examination problem long has been a serious problem to the elementary teacher or principal, but it has been given little attention by men on the secondary level. The reason for this is that secondary teachers of the past have based a child's preparation for high school entirely upon his factual knowledge.
- (2) Thirty-eight county superintendents of Kansas favor abolishing the county diploma examination,

and allowing the teacher to promote to the ninth grade in the same manner that she has promoted from the seventh to the eighth grade.

(3) The chief arguments presented by those wishing to abolish the examinations are:

- a. Abolition would save cramming and worry.
- b. The year could be spent in learning useful facts.
- c. The tests are very expensive.
- d. Teachers are better prepared to promote than an examining board.
- e. There is no greater difference between promotion from the eighth grade to the ninth than from the third to the fourth or any two grades.
- f. The tests prohibit constructive teaching.
- g. The tests are not uniform at present because some schools promote with their use and some do not.

(4) Fifty-six county superintendents of Kansas favor retention of the present county examination.

(5) The principal arguments in favor of the county examinations are:

- a. Teachers are not competent because of lack of professional and educational qualifications.
- b. Placing the responsibility of promotion on the teacher would cause the community to have an influence on her promotions.
- c. Many county superintendents contend that the teachers do not want the responsibility.
- d. The teacher must have an aid to her own judgment.
- e. Uniformity of promotion is desired.
- f. Because teachers are poorly prepared to teach, their work needs to be checked by some central authority.
- g. Abolition of the tests would cause poorly prepared high school students.
- h. The tests would cause a uniformity in teacher's grading.
- i. Educational standards would be lowered with an elimination of the tests.