A Study to Determine the South Dakota School Districts' Information Programs, Policies, and Attitudes

Donald A. Clyde

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOL DISTRICTS' INFORMATION PROGRAMS, POLICIES, AND ATTITUDES

BY

DONALD A. CLYDE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Science, Major in Journalism, South Dakota State University 1971
A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOL
DISTRICTS' INFORMATION PROGRAMS,
POLICIES, AND ATTITUDES

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree Master of Science, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Adviser

Date

Head, Department of Journalism
and Mass Communication

Date
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A good public relations program is founded upon the premise that the school belongs to the people. This premise carries with it three major implications--first, the people have a right and an obligation to determine the kind of school they want; secondly, they have a right to know what is going on in the school; and thirdly, they must reserve the right to evaluate the results. ¹

This premise of C. C. Calhoun, professor of education at the University of Georgia, requires that people be well informed about "their" school. For one thing, ever since the founding of this republic the school system has been considered one of its most important institutions. "Educate and inform the whole mass of people," proclaimed Thomas Jefferson. "They are the only reliance for the preservation of liberty."²

Today, education remains "the bulwark of Democracy,"³ according to Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center. While admitting that this platitude has been worn threadbare by generations of school leaders,

³ Cutlip and Center, p. 394.
these authors point out that the philosophy remains intact. Most people continue to think of the school system as the bedrock of the democratic system of this nation. The schools are viewed as a basic line of protection against many forces which threaten American society. For these reasons, the public has a right to know the facts about the policies and practices of their schools.

In addition, out of this democratic tradition has come the assumption that informing the public ultimately leads to increased public confidence and support of the schools. Dr. Benjamin Fine, former education editor of The New York Times, is among those journalists and educators who have argued that public confidence and support is necessary for the proper maintenance of the education system in this country. This support and confidence must be continuously maintained, they point out, so that it will be available when it is needed. Continued public support, under this assumption, requires continuous communication with the public. J. Erle Grimmell, director of liberal arts at Wisconsin's Stout Institute, warned educators in 1937 that neglecting the channels of communication with the public would endanger the schools. He wrote:

If our communities are to support a forward-looking program of free public education, they

must be told what the schools are doing for the children. They must be told, not once a year in a formal report, but day after day, week after week, from September through June, and in vacation time. They must see as well as hear. They must feel pride in the achievements of the schools. They must hold their schools not less than their prisons and fire departments and sewage disposal plants, but as the very life of the community and its only real chance for future prosperity and distinction.5

Nineteen years later, a White House conference on education issued a statement declaring that public interest in education was essential to create and nurture good schools.6 Gordon McCloskey of Washington State University noted, however, that during the 1950's Americans had an almost blind faith in education but little real interest in the schools. He saw many reasons for this attitude—one being that the results of education are intangible, its benefits normally going to children and only indirectly to the adults who support education.7

But a decade later, in 1967, Lindley J. Stiles, former education dean at the University of Wisconsin, said that public

5 J. Erle Grinnell, Interpreting the Public Schools (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1937), p. v. Dr. Grinnell at the time of the writing was the director of liberal arts at Stout Institute, Menominee, Wisconsin.


7 McCloskey, pp. 6, 7, 30, 31.
interest in the schools had greatly increased. "The demand for information about schools is increasing dramatically," Stiles said. "War and cancer are the only subjects that claim greater public interest today." Stiles saw in the public,

... a growing awareness that education is indispensable if society and its individual members are to survive in the fiercely competitive world. With life and progress virtually dependent upon learning, the public's appetite for information about the schools will become almost insatiable ... Accustomed to progress and efficiency in other fields ... people want to know how well their schools are keeping abreast of the time. This interest is fed by an anxiety that education, despite all efforts may be falling behind. 9

Schoolmen have long been aware of the need for school-community communication. Steven H. Chaffee, journalism professor at the University of Wisconsin, and L. Scott Ward of Harvard located 201 papers, books, studies, and articles on the school communication problem dating from 1922 to 1968. 10 However, as Stiles says, "Little


9 Stiles, p. 15.

evidence is apparent to show that the individuals responsible for school information have heeded the findings and recommendations of these studies."11

School public relations has developed by visible stages, according to Calhoun. He sees five historic stages, beginning with the "town meeting," in which "the early American school formed a center around which the social, educational, and cultural life of the community revolved." The second stage may be characterized, Calhoun said,

as 'hands off' approach in which the school people contended that the administration and establishment of proper relations should be left to those who had training and experience in education. The third stage . . . a 'selling' approach . . . regarded public relations as publicity, and adopted the short intensive publicity campaigns which had proved successful in business. The fourth distinct stage, an 'educational interpretation' approach, regards the task of establishing relations as one originating only within the school itself. The fifth and now generally recognized 'cooperative endeavor' approach is based upon the philosophy that the problem of establishing desirable relationships between home, school, and community tends to be regarded more and more as a cooperative undertaking, with all parties striving toward a common purpose under the leadership of the school.12

11 Stiles, p. 17.
12 Calhoun, p. 32.
Although the "blind faith" of the public in the schools, which McCloskey saw in the 1950s, can lead to disappointments and serious problems, merely securing the attention of the public is not enough. As Calhoun says,

Timely attention of the public can either be constructive or destructive; it can exert either a positive or negative force upon the public schools. With these thoughts in mind, a public relations program in the public schools becomes not only a necessity but the threshold over which all educational problems must pass. American education generally has lagged far behind business and industry in the acceptance, development, and refinements of techniques in public relations.13

Cutlip and Center place the key to sound relationships between schools and public with the development of the idea that education is the responsibility of all citizens. To achieve this goal, educators must be aware of the public and must take the public into a partnership, using the tools of persuasion, information, and cooperation to bind the partnership in understanding.14 The more clearly the schools' goals can be presented, the more easily the people can understand the function and needs of the institution.

13 Calhoun, p. 32.

14 Cutlip and Center, p. 395.
The public has a tendency to evaluate the schools on every facet of societal interaction. Because of this tendency, expectations are great. Walter Lippmann pointed out that the public school

... promises to solve the problem which is otherwise so nearly insoluble—how to educate rapidly and efficiently the ever-expanding masses who are losing contact with the traditions of Western society. The explosive increase of the population in the past hundred and fifty years, its recent enfranchisement during the past fifty years, the dissolution, or at least the radical weakening, of the bonds of the family, the churches, and the local community have combined to make the demand almost impossibly big.15

Cutlip and Center comment on the increasing population in schools of the nation as increasing the need to inform the public because "virtually every citizen is touched directly by schools in one way or another."16

In an effort to improve school programs for disseminating information, the United States Office of Education conducted a two-year project. Project Public Information's final report stated that the 50 states and five territories are making some progress in their attempts to strengthen their communication programs. Although not satisfied with all of the state-level efforts, the project recognized that the increasingly higher priority being assigned to information

16 Cutlip and Center, p. 394.
programs was tangible evidence that many educational administrators were for the first time sensitive to the need for improved communications with teachers, students, parents, legislators, and newsmen. The progress at the state level is good, but the districts must have programs for providing information to their publics. Such programs, to be effective, must be based on a policy which has been developed to bring continuous public support and not just sporadic public attention to the schools. The importance of this policy is related by R. W. Burton, author and educator, when he says, "A public relations program that only reacts when the schools are under pressure will not do the job." Burton's statement was supported by Charles H. Harrison, director of Communications Services, a New Jersey-based educational consulting firm which specializes in school communications. "The public doesn't have to be sold on public relations if the people are convinced the public relations program itself is not merely a sometime promotion or sales pitch," Harrison said. Both authors suggest that if a district has a well conceived public relations policy in force at all times, the district will not have to sell the public on

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the idea of public relations before it can attempt to sell the program to be publicized.

A 1970 survey of a five per cent proportional sampling of 14,000 school administrators in 50 states reported that school officials realize the importance of the public relations program. Ninety-nine per cent of those responding had some type of program, but they were not at all satisfied with the manner in which it was being conducted.20 A typical criticism by a Maine superintendent stated, "Our releases are too often erratic and lose continuity."21 Much of the problem, it appears, stems from the fact that while many school administrators have some kind of public relations program few have any well developed public relations policy, nor do they have an individual to expedite the policy.

Gloria Dapper fixes the ultimate responsibility for the public relations policy with the school board. This responsibility has been spelled out by many school systems in statements of policy.22 The superintendent has to be the one to provide the direction in the public relations program. Cutlip and Center tell of the need for policy when they state, "A school program, like any other, starts with the system's


21 Nation's School, 85:31.

policies and performance. These are determined by the superintendent and the school board. They determine the educational policies upon which the program must be based. Burton, in trying to eliminate some of the gaps in the public relations policies and programs of the schools, gives the following criteria:

1. Give information to the public and listen to all opinions.

2. Provide for a continuing program of public relations, not an intermittent one.

3. Make use of all available media to disseminate information about the school program, its teachers, and its students.

4. Develop good staff morale. Staff members relate their feelings to the public, and their full support is vital. All staff members must be involved in the planning and decision-making that affects the educational program.

5. Strive for public understanding of the schools, and public support will follow naturally.

Like local school districts, state education departments have been slow to adopt public information policies, particularly written policies. As reported by Project Public Information, Louisiana, Colorado, Hawaii, and Oregon were the only states with written policies

23 Center and Cutlip, p. 402.

24 Burton, pp. 8-9.
prior to 1965. Florida, Ohio, Georgia, and Washington adopted written policies by 1968. The slow emergence of written policy is further exemplified by the states bordering South Dakota. A letter sent to the state education departments in North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota requesting a copy of their written public information policy brought a complete statement of policy from only the Iowa department diminishing to no formal written policy for Montana.

In showing the need for policy in the interaction between schools and society, Richard F. Carter, from Stanford University's Institute for Communication Research, used Newcomb's communication model. Carter equates school and society with communicator and receiver in Newcomb's model. They must orient themselves toward educational policy and toward each other, if understanding is to result. Four basic orientations are involved in the process of interaction:

1. The school's orientation towards educational policy.
2. The community's orientation towards educational policy.

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25 Gray, p. 16.

26 Letters received from the states determined the information contained here.

3. The school's orientation towards the community.
4. The community's orientation towards the schools.
(By orientation is meant attitudes toward and beliefs about the designated component.)

Agencies and groups such as the government, school board, parent groups and citizen committees affect the process of co-orientation between the school and society. Carter, like Benjamin Fine and others, feels that basic public understanding of education will lead to public support. He gives three postulates to follow when constructing a given policy:

1. The people should value education sufficiently to try to understand the problem.
2. An understanding of the situation is essential to any stable support of public education.
3. Understanding is the result of effective communications.

Objective of This Study

There are a great many problems in education today. One of them is the growing reluctance of the public to support the high cost

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of education. Communications and public relations are considered to be helpful tools in explaining school needs and policy to the public. But are the schools in South Dakota making a rational use of these tools? To do so, a public relations-community relations communication policy is needed. This thesis will evaluate the public relations policy of South Dakota schools—the policy of communicating with the public. It will focus on the school district policy. Included in the discussion will be such topics as school evaluation of the press interpretation of school activities, school-media contacts, and the school administrator's view of public interest in the schools. State-level education information policies in neighboring states will be compared with South Dakota's policy.

The thesis will attempt to analyze the public information attitudes, policies, and practices of the South Dakota school district administrators. We will attempt to determine how they provide public information, how they control it, and the nature of some of the public information problems facing their districts. Finally, the findings will be analyzed to determine if the geographic location or the size of a district (as measured by the pupil population) influences these factors.

**Previous Studies**

**Outside South Dakota**

As was mentioned earlier in this paper, Chaffee and Ward were
able to locate some 201 studies and papers concerned with school channels of communication to the public.\textsuperscript{29} The authors conclude:

Communication between citizens and the schools is the key to effective school-community relations. While the absence of communication may maintain quiescence for long periods, adequate channels are needed when controversy erupts. Selective patterns of communication are required to maintain support through low voter turnout. Understanding as a process of support is a direct product of open communication.\textsuperscript{30}

The authors list the channels of communication. School superintendents are considered the most important, followed by the principals, public relations specialists, teachers, and students. The authors mention formal organizations as a major channel of communication, including school boards, parent groups, lay advisory groups and citizens committees. The authors finish with a classification of smaller community groups which might, at times, be interested in the schools.

Another lengthy analysis of the state of communication in the schools of the nation is the Project Public Information report mentioned earlier in this study. Richard Gray, author of the report, issued the following challenge to the state departments of education:

"Project Public Information was meant to be an innovative agent, a

\textsuperscript{29} Chaffee and Ward, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{30} Chaffee and Ward, p. 5.
primer for the state agencies. It is now up to the state departments of education themselves to carry forth efforts to improve communications in the United States about education."31

Gray concludes that the needs for the future include a comprehensive education information system with the state department of education leading the way for the individual districts. Under this plan should be included a means for measuring the feedback from the various publics one has to reach. Gray said, "For too long now, school public relations have been almost wholly concerned with one way dissemination down to publics, or in most cases to what has erroneously been considered 'the' public."32

The report notes that there are few programs at higher educational institutions training needed experts. "Few colleges offer training in school public relations work, and practically none have programs to train education reporters."33 The author believes that this might be the best place to start retraining the educators in the news dissemination process. Gray relates the need for involvement of the minorities along with a basic urban orientation. If this need is not met, the communication and the sense of community that sustains communication are apt to break down, creating a complete block in the

31 Gray, p. 31.
32 Gray, p. 31.
33 Gray, p. 31.
dissemination process. Student involvement and the handling of militancy are of basic concern to the future attempts at communication for the schools. The student involvement should at least provide the relevancy that the student is demanding these days. Effective communication methods will also be needed to help keep critical situations from growing worse or turning into violence. 34

A study analyzing the value of a planned policy for the dissemination of school news by school districts was completed in 1963 by Timothy J. Burke. 35 Burke's analysis, based on a representative sample of 395 Wisconsin school districts containing both secondary and elementary schools, found:

1. Few Wisconsin public school districts follow a predetermined information policy. Concern for such a policy may be increasing, but as yet, most school districts handle communications problems as they arise.

2. Most schools have some method of allocating informational duties, but in many cases, communicating seems to be looked upon as just another duty to be performed.

3. The attitudes of school district administrators are not always on the side of the people's right to know.

4. The most frequently used channel of communication of the school districts is

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34 Gray, p. 31.

written press releases, whether or not an information specialist is employed.

5. Only three school districts in Wisconsin employ full-time PR people. Many districts use teachers on a part-time basis. The specialists replying stated that they could use more time for the accomplishment of their tasks.

6. Three types of problems—those with the media, procedural problems, and lack of time—predominate in efforts to provide the public with information.

7. Superintendents in Wisconsin are slightly more satisfied with public interest in the schools than they are with press interest. The biggest single complaint against the press is that schools must too often take the initiative in providing information.

Studies in South Dakota

Two studies pertaining to South Dakota school district efforts for communicating with the public were found. The first study was done in 1962 by Kermith E. Sheimo and the second was done in 1969 by Larry K. Tennyson.

Sheimo studied the educational news content of South Dakota daily newspapers. He found South Dakota daily newspapers to be performing creditably in accepting the responsibility of providing the people with news about their elementary and secondary schools. Sheimo found an average of 12.3 education stories per issue for a total
of 131.4 column inches. The author was quick to note the imbalance between the amount of space allocated to the coverage of the sports activities and academic matters by the papers. He found 85.42 per cent for sports and activities compared to 14.58 for academic affairs. Sheimo suggested that perhaps more cooperation is needed between schools and the newspapers in an attempt to arrive at a balance which would be more representative of the entire school function.

Tennyson, in his investigation of school-to-home communication, concluded that people wanted more information about the academic activities of the school such as teaching, learning, or pupil progress. Tennyson found attitudes of the editors toward education to be favorable but with certain discrepancies existing in the correlation between parent interest and the perceived interest by the rural editors.

Tennyson found the weekly newspaper to be a satisfactory means of disseminating the news. He discovered that advisors and superintendents showed a marked perception of the interests of the parents, but did not realize the avenue via which to approach the parent. The parent indicated need for a more personal communication—something


other than the standard mass communication method. Tennyson stated, "A further conclusion was that school information disseminators tend to use favorite means of communication rather than diversifying their efforts into other media such as radio, television, and annual reports." \(^{38}\)

The author relates a substantial dissatisfaction with the present patterns of communication with a definite trend towards needed improvement in rural South Dakota. In concluding the study, the author states,

The findings of the investigator indicated that parent demands for school news are not being satisfied with the schools' news presently being furnished. The nature of the demand seemed clearly delineated--more news is desired on topics most central to the educational process, and less is desired on topics related to the peripheral activities of South Dakota schools.

This study has suggested that the public has a right, in a democratic political system, to know what the schools are doing. To expedite an interest in the schools, school-initiated patterns of communication are needed as was indicated by Grinnell as early as 1937, McCloskey in the 1950s, and Stiles in the 1960s. These authors and educators report a changing attitude toward education, specifically more interest from the public.

Although school administrators have been aware of the need for community communications for some time, little has been done to

\(^{38}\) Tennyson, p. 59.
develop a policy for the dissemination of school information to the public. The problem is greater today with more schools demanding more from society and society demanding more from the schools. To communicate effectively the schools must have a policy, for without a written policy the information program tends to be sporadic and the results inconsistent. This thesis will try to investigate the public information policies programs and attitudes that South Dakota school districts use in communicating with the public.
CHAPTER II

PROCEDURE

Tools Used for Investigation

At the outset of this research project a letter was sent to chief state school officers in states bordering on South Dakota to establish the existence or non-existence of an education information policy at the state level. Each chief state school officer was asked to supply a copy of any written policy or to state briefly the unwritten policy under which his office carried out its public information activities. Because these responses will be discussed in Chapter IV, they will not be considered here. (See Appendix A)

The primary tool used to investigate public information activities and policy in South Dakota public school districts was a questionnaire. It was mailed to each of 190 school district superintendents in April 1971. Follow-up letters and questionnaires were sent to all non-respondents about two weeks after the original inquiry. The second mailing prompted 20 additional responses for a total of 150.

The Survey

All but five of the 195 public school districts in South Dakota were included in the survey. The five districts not included were
not totally state public schools. The remaining 190 districts were divided into four categories: small, 0 to 500 pupils; medium, 501 to 1,000; large, 1,001 to 6,500, and a separate category for districts with over 6,500 students. The Sioux Falls and Rapid City school districts were the only ones in this over 6,500 category and data relating to them will be treated separately in most cases. Table 1 shows the number of districts in each student population category.

**TABLE 1**

**FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF DISTRICTS BY PUPIL POPULATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil Population</th>
<th>Total Districts</th>
<th>Districts Returning Questionnaire</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 500</td>
<td>N = 106</td>
<td>% 55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501 - 1,000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>% 26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001 - 6,500</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>% 16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 6,500</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>% 1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The writer decided that the divisions contained in Table 1 were the logical categories while treating the two largest districts as separate entities. The districts fell into three groups within these

---

population boundaries. Burke, in his study of Wisconsin school districts, used a similar breakdown into small, medium, and large categories.\textsuperscript{40}

It is interesting to note that in Table 1 the per cent of return in each category of pupil population is approximately the same as the state total. The proximity of the percentages will make the percentages reported in this study a reasonably true reflection of the state-wide situation.

In the study the state was divided according to a "natural boundary" which is used by the various news media in South Dakota. This boundary is the Missouri River, which divides South Dakota into two areas referred to as "East of the River" and "West of the River."\textsuperscript{41} Table 2 shows the percentage of the districts surveyed in each geographic division and the percentage and number of questionnaires returned from the East River and West River areas.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{ l r r r }
\hline
 & East River & West River & Total \\
\hline
Number of districts & 146 & 44 & 190 \\
Questionnaires returned & 118 & 32 & 150 \\
Percentage returned & 80.8\% & 72.7\% & 78.9\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{QUESTIONNAIRE RETURN ACCORDING TO GEOGRAPHIC AREA}
\label{tab:2}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{40} Burke, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{41} Telephone call to Leo Hartig, Director of News and Public Affairs, KELO Television, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, June 17, 1971. The investigator had observed that the media used these state divisions.
The Questionnaire

A one-page questionnaire was sent to the superintendent of each district along with a letter explaining the nature of the research. The questionnaire, the covering letter, and the follow-up letter have been reproduced in Appendix B. Included with each questionnaire was a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return the questionnaire. This envelope was addressed to the Department of Journalism in order to bring about a better response to the study. Researchers have suggested that the more important the sponsorship of a questionnaire in the eyes of potential respondents, the more likely they are to complete and return the questionnaire. In addition, the author considered guide lines suggested by researchers in constructing the questionnaire. These guide lines pointed out the necessity for an attractive format, for keeping the questionnaire reasonably short and easy to fill out and return.

Analysis of Questions

The letter sent to state education agencies in states bordering South Dakota brought forth the policy data necessary to properly place the South Dakota findings in their Midwest setting. In turn, the


43 Selltiz, pp. 51-65.
letter (and follow-up communications) sent to the South Dakota Department of Public Instruction yielded the information necessary to place the public relations and public information policies and practices of the school districts in their proper place in the overall education information setting within this state. The questionnaire sent to the school districts was designed to yield insights into school district policies and practices as well as to show whether district and state education officials were in substantial agreement on public relation and public information policies and practices.

The actual questionnaire was divided into five parts. However, specific questions in each part were sometimes scattered throughout the questionnaire in order to reduce the problems of a question generating a bias which would influence the answer to a succeeding question related to it.

Part One of the questionnaire was designed to obtain data about school district policy regarding public relations and public information. Question 2 asked if the district had a policy while Question 13 asked for a copy of the written policy or a brief summary of the unwritten policy.

Part Two extracted information about the individual who handled the public information duties for the school district (Questions 3, 3a, and 6). The writer was particularly interested in the degree to which the superintendent delegated authority in this area (Question 3) and how much time the individual in charge of public information devoted
to this duty (Question 3a). By asking whether there was an individual delegated to the handling of school information and what percentage of the individual's time was spent at the task, the writer hoped to learn whether the individual was a full-time or part-time disseminator of news and information for the district.

Section Three, dealing with the press contacts, was designed to determine district contact in specified areas with the various media (Question 12). The section sought to determine with what media the district had contact (Question 10) and the types of coverage the media were giving the schools (Question 9).

Part Four was designed to determine whether the districts were communicating with the public and how much communication there was (Questions 4, 5, and 8). Specifically, the investigator wanted to ascertain if adequate attention was being given to providing information to the public (Question 4) and whether the administrators believed the public is interested in their schools (Question 8).

Part Five of the questionnaire was designed to discover differences between administration and news media in the perception of "news." The investigator sought to discover if what the school saw as important (Question 7) was different from what the press saw as important (Question 11).

After the investigator arranged the questions into tables for analysis, a chi square test was run on each table. Table 3 and Table 10 were found to be significant at the .05 level.
Certain areas of the questionnaire as well as some of the categories listed in the results, which will be discussed in Chapter IV, were suggested by the Burke study of Wisconsin school district policies. Although the methods used by Burke differ from those of the present study, many of the basic ideas were utilized in both the questionnaire and its analysis.

Organization of the Data

The data collected from the returned questionnaires were analyzed according to district pupil population and geographical location east or west of the Missouri River. Whenever appropriate, data were organized into tables showing percentages of each group using certain practices. The geographic breakdown was included only when there was a significant difference between returns from the respective areas. A thorough analysis of the questions, along with the trends noticed in the individual answers, will be presented on a state-wide basis.

Tabulation of Questionnaire

The Data Processing Division of South Dakota State University was used in tabulating the data. The results of the study will be discussed in Chapter III.
CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

This chapter reports the data obtained from the questionnaire sent to South Dakota school districts and from letters sent to chief state school officers in bordering states. The data will be divided into six categories and will be reported under the following headings:

1. Midwest Comparison of Policy Formulation

Each state department of education in the six states bordering South Dakota was asked whether it had a policy, written or unwritten, for communicating with the public. If the state had a policy, a copy or written summary of the policy was requested. Every respondent sent some type of statement outlining the public information policy.

Marilou Madden, writing for the Superintendent of Public Instruction from Montana, gave a typical reply generally supporting the public's right to receive information about the schools. She wrote:

Although Montana does not at this time have a written policy, the State Superintendent of
Public Instruction supports open and continuous communication with the public at large and with specific audiences within the general public. To this end she has established a task force of office personnel to develop a plan for expanding information services and efforts. No doubt, a formal written policy for public information will evolve as part of the work of this task force.

A succinct statement of existing policy was received from Patricia G. Wunnicke, Coordinator of the Publications and Information Division of the Wyoming State Department of Education. She stated:

When originated within the department, news releases are to be edited, timed and released by the Publications Division. Division directors are responsible for informing the Publications Division of newsworthy events, before the event takes place.

When in the field, staff members should consider the public relations possibilities of their meeting or conference and get in touch with local newspapers and/or radio stations to offer reports.

An example of lofty ideals was presented by the Nebraska response, contained in the context of the "General Philosophy and Beliefs of the Nebraska Board of Education." These ideals are exemplified by the following extract:

We believe that all of the meetings in which we make decisions affecting the educational welfare of the state should be open to any citizen, and that all of the activities of the State Board
of Education should be fully reported to the Legislature and to the public.

The full policy statement can be found in Appendix A.

The Division of Public Information of the North Dakota State Department of Education has divided its program into three interacting parts. The first part is information dissemination, which includes publications, news releases to all media, documentaries, public service, resource library, and the speakers' bureau. Part two is the creation of an awareness of the school functions among administrators, teachers, lay public, and community decision-makers. Part three hopefully brings together parts one and two to generate legislative support, lay support, and positive community evaluation of the schools. The department publishes the Education Bulletin for the schools and has meetings, workshops, and event coverage plans for the entire nine-month school calendar.

James Lee, director of the Publications Section of the Minnesota Department of Education, briefly outlined the philosophy his staff has developed in four and one-half years of operation:

We believe, of course, in a systematic and thorough program of communication with the public to keep people informed not only about the policies and activities of the State Board and State Department of Education but about the progress and problems throughout the state. We believe the schools are responsible for informing the public, and due to the rapid changes in the nature of communications media we stress all types of communication—the print media, the electronic media, the use of new audio-visual techniques, and personal contacts.
Lee was quick to point out that the allocation of funds curtailed a
great many of the proposed plans for the department.

The final response from a neighboring state came from Richard
E. Schallert, Chief of the Information and Publication Services in the
Iowa Department of Education, who wrote, "Our department has no
formally-approved policy for public information." However, Schallert
did send material which he said contained the informal guidelines his
office adhered to. The material included an original policy statement
prepared by Schallert and his staff. This statement related the need
for the dissemination of news, emphasized the need for two-way
communication, and was very explicit concerning times that communication
should be restricted. Schallert said these restrictions were in the
interest of both public and individual welfare. Restrictions were
placed on information giving a financial advantage to specific
individuals, personnel information concerning health and uninvestigated
allegations which personnel have not consented to release. More
criteria may be found in Appendix A.

The Iowa material also outlined the objectives of the public
information program and specified the publics to be contacted. One
section of Schallert's material spelled out the media to be used for
the dissemination of different types of news.

The South Dakota State Department of Public Instruction's
Division of Information and Publications does not have a formally-
approved policy, but rather a proposed version of its goals and
philosophies. Contained in the proposal is material on dissemination techniques, such as news writing, speech writing, broadcast news writing, report and publications writing, editing, layout, graphics, films, radio and television.

Section 2 of the proposal identifies the various publics to whom the State Department of Public Instruction should try to disseminate information. These include the Department of Public Instruction personnel, advisory committees, the Governor, legislators, school districts, professional organizations, colleges and teachers. The general public is, of course, not to be neglected.

South Dakota school districts were asked in the questionnaire (Question 14) to agree or disagree with a list of unattributed statements extracted from the proposed South Dakota state policy. Table 3 gives the reactions of the local district respondents to these statements.

The table suggests that there is considerable agreement between the State Department of Public Education and the school districts in the state on public information policies. However, note should be taken of the disagreement level shown on Question 14 c. This extract dealt with the use of "set" speeches in various areas of department programs for use in filling a busy speaking schedule. Some 35 per cent of the local districts rejected the idea of "set" speeches, apparently suggesting that many believe the canned speech is or should be an item

44 Telephone call to Dr. Donald Barnhardt, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, to determine if the proposed state policy had become the adopted policy. As of May 20, 1971, it had not, but he said to use the proposed policy as being the valid state policy.
TABLE 3
SCHOOL DISTRICTS' REACTION TO STATE POLICY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>(N)</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 a)</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>(114)</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>(137)</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>(82)</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>(117)</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>(117)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f)</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>(143)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g)</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>(133)</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h)</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>(117)</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05
Note: The questions (14 a through 14 h) can be found in Appendix A.

of the past. This statement also drew the highest number of "No Answer" responses, suggesting that some respondents were doubtful about it.

The respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with a statement (14 a) that the mass media pay little attention to education stories unless they involved cost, conflict or controversy. More than three-quarters of the respondents (76%) agreed. On the apparently non-controversial state policy statement suggesting that "open channels of communication" are needed with the South Dakota Education Association (14 h), 18 per cent of the responding superintendents disagreed. Some administrators seem to disagree (16.7 per cent) on the value of films, radio and television for the dissemination of news (14 e). The same trend is indicated (14 d) when 14.7 per cent do not believe news releases should be made available to the radio and television media.
2. District Public Information Policies

Administrators were asked in the questionnaire whether they have a written information policy and, if so, to send a copy of the policy or to summarize any unwritten policy in a short paragraph or two. Table 4 shows the number of districts having a policy, divided according to the geographical location.

**TABLE 4**

INFORMATION POLICY IN SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOL DISTRICTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East River Districts N=118</th>
<th>West River Districts N=32</th>
<th>Total Districts 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written policy</td>
<td>15.3 (18)</td>
<td>31.3 (10)</td>
<td>18.7 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No written policy</td>
<td>83.1 (98)</td>
<td>68.8 (22)</td>
<td>80.0 (120)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1.7 (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts sending copy of their policy, written or verbal</td>
<td>32.2 (38)</td>
<td>31.3 (10)</td>
<td>32.0 (48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eighty per cent (Table 4) of the responding school districts do not have a written policy, although 32 per cent sent some statement on public information policy. Clearly, many of South Dakota's school districts are involved in public information activities but have not
bothered to formulate a written policy. In the West River area a larger percentage of the school districts have a written information policy than in the East River area.

When the districts were divided by pupil population (Table 5), it was apparent that the larger school districts were no more likely than

**TABLE 5**

INFORMATION POLICY IN SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOL DISTRICTS DIVIDED BY STUDENT POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Districts N=78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N=42</th>
<th>Large Districts N=28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N=2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written policy</td>
<td>18.0 (14)</td>
<td>16.7 (7)</td>
<td>17.9 (5)</td>
<td>100 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No written policy</td>
<td>80.8 (63)</td>
<td>83.3 (35)</td>
<td>78.6 (22)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1.3 (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Districts sending copy of their policy, written or verbal | 33.3 (26) | 31.0 (13) | 25.0 (7) | 100 (2) |

the medium or smaller ones to have a written policy on public information. This indicates that neglect of this task of policy formulation is a problem in districts of all sizes.

The policies or statements received ranged from a short summary to a full reproduction of the actual policy. A great many of the answers dealt with the authority for releasing news, a subject to be
considered in connection with the allocation of duties. Some of the statements made frequently by the administrators can be summarized by one which said, "We communicate with the public in as many ways as we have available, but we do not have an organized method." An undertone of uncertainty was projected by the administrator who related,

Where pure information and mere propaganda coincide is a "hairy" proposition. Too many releases are of a rosy, back-slapping type of news that may stray from the real information the "people" are entitled to receive. We need more information and less building of a favorable image. How this can be done, I do not know, but I'm sure the journalism colleges are aware of this.

Those districts sending a statement of policy seemed to be guided by officials who realized they had a responsibility for the dissemination of news. A superintendent from a middle-sized district explained:

Each principal is instructed to see that all activities and educational information involving their schools be covered in the local press and, if of sufficient importance, be sent to television and radio. Each director of each activity must write information to press releases about their activity. I (superintendent) will take care of broad educational releases involving the entire district.

Another attitude, almost antagonistic to the one just stated, was indicated in such statements as, "News coverage in a rural district
is different from the services in a city;" "We have no written public
information and I also feel we do not need one. Ours is a rural
community and news travels fast--especially if it's bad." Another
respondent commented, "If we feel the public should have the information,
then they will get it." Another added, "The public does not have the
right to know everything that is going on in the school." Whether some
of the replies could be called policies is doubtful, because many deal
only with methods used to disseminate information.

Only four districts sent actual copies of their existing policy
for public information. In one of these, received from a medium-sized
school, the policy was a part of the general board of education
policies and merely set the guide lines for notification about board
meetings to all concerned. Another actual policy received, from a
large school district, presented this statement of purpose:

We believe that a Public-Relations Program
is paramount to the successful operation of any
public-tax supported institution. In light of
the social, economic and spiritual turmoil now
prevalent in our country, we believe it to be
in the best interests of the Public Schools of
... the Community and its many publics,
that they are fully and completely informed of
activities, projects and programs of the local
system. By doing so, we hope to serve the
interests, both short and long range, of those
people involved in any phase of the educational
process.
To this statement was added objectives, imperatives and priorities called for by the statement of purpose. The objectives were set forth in the following list:

1. To provide information of a current nature that is of interest to our publics.

2. To attempt to bridge the "communications" gap between the schools and the publics.

3. To educate our publics in educational matters.

4. To provide the leadership and climate to accept change when it becomes apparent change is necessary.

5. To bring the school and community closer together in their attempt to provide a better education for their youth.

6. To make the community aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of the schools.

7. To create support of the schools through public involvement.

8. To coordinate and correlate activities of the school with those of the community, churches, social and civic organizations, in an attempt to provide more fully for each student.

9. To inspire students through public information to attain their educational potential.

10. To create an atmosphere of pride, both civic and personal, in the schools and their product.
To properly fulfill the objectives, the district statement lists five imperatives:

1. That all media be used in the program.
2. That information be concise, interesting, and timely.
3. That all releases carry a release date.
4. That articles other than those of activities be channeled through the Administrator of Public Relations or the superintendent.
5. That the line of authority be followed.

The imperatives are followed by a forecast of events, publications, awards, and other associated activities that the public relations department will be involved in throughout the year.

Two written policies were received from the two school districts designated as extra-large. The policy of the second-largest district relates the following:

The Board of Education recognizes the right of the public to information concerning all of its actions, its policies, and the details of its educational and business operations. The Board encourages study, discussion, and active participation by all concerned in the promotion of the best possible program of education in the community. It is the practice of the Board to utilize the advice and assistance of all interested individuals and groups in the solution of its educational and financial problems.

In recognizing the cooperating organizations in the _____ City Public Schools and by encouraging their active participation in the
educational policy-making, the Board wishes to make clear that in no way does it wish to escape its responsibility to the citizens of the community as the official governing body responsible for a final decision on all matters of policy and educational programs.

The policy elaborates on the criteria for promoting good relations:

a. The Board of Education will transact all official business in open meetings which the press, the public, and school employees are welcome to attend, and at which communications, both oral and written, will be received and considered.

b. The Board will function as speedily and as efficiently as circumstances will permit, and always with due regard for the public interest.

c. Board members will familiarize themselves with the work of the school system in all major areas and shall bring to the professional direction of the schools the viewpoint, the knowledge, and the wisdom of the community.

d. The Board will make provisions for recording proceedings of all meetings. Minutes of all Board meetings shall be considered matters of public record.

e. The Board will keep in mind that maintaining the confidence and respect of the community is of paramount importance to the success of the educational program of the district.

The second segment of the policy, entitled "Community Information," provides the following guidelines:

a. The Superintendent and staff shall decide upon and follow a continuing program of
information designed to acquaint the citizens of the community and the public generally with the achievements and the needs of the schools.

b. The Superintendent shall be responsible for:

1. News releases and the publication of educational reports.

2. The photographing of school activities for publication.

3. The presentation of school groups on radio and television.

4. The preparation of special school programs for community entertainment and understanding both in the schools and elsewhere.

c. The Superintendent shall be authorized to arrange for the participation of the schools in educational exhibits both local, state, and national, within the limit of funds provided by the Board.

d. Principals, teachers, and other school personnel will bear in mind that community opinion depends upon the daily life of the school. They should seek the following objectives as they have opportunity in their respective fields of service:

1. Acquaint patrons with the work of the schools.

2. Give courteous and thoughtful consideration to all inquiries and suggestions and carefully investigate all complaints. Make parents feel welcome in the school office and the classroom.

3. Cooperate with parent-teacher groups and with other organizations of patrons seeking information or offering assistance to the schools.
4. Maintain all pupil relations with firmness, intelligence, and sympathy so as to command their respect and love and so to enlist the cooperation of the home.

5. Observe inter-staff relations conducive to high morals and meriting the respect of pupils, patrons, and the administrative and supervisory staff.

As compared with the foregoing detailed report of the second-largest district in the state, the largest district in the state sent the following:

Adequate public support for public education is dependent upon the maintenance of good public opinion. Opinions are formed on the basis of available information or lack of it. Misinformation grows where information voids exist. A program to create an interested and informed public provides continuing information and consists of facts, statistics, plans, forecasts and information about people involved.

The policy designates five principles of an effective public information program. They are:

1. The program must be a planned, systematic two-way process between the educational system and its internal and external publics.

2. The program must be many-faceted and must include a variety of media.

3. The program must affect the internal as well as the external publics, and must stress the dissemination of factual, objective, and realistic data about the school district.
4. The program must be dynamic and sensitive to change as events and evaluations of the program determine its effectiveness.

5. The program must provide involvement and must achieve feedback.

3. Allocation of Information Duties

Slightly less than one-half of South Dakota's school districts have an individual designated to handle public information (Table 6). The designation of an individual for the duties of relating public information shows a slight upward movement from the small to the large districts.

| TABLE 6 |
| DISTRICTS WITH INDIVIDUAL DELEGATED TO HANDLE PUBLIC INFORMATION |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Districts N-78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N-42</th>
<th>Large Districts N-28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N-2</th>
<th>Totals 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% 44.9 (33)</td>
<td>% 45.2 (19)</td>
<td>% 46.4 (13)</td>
<td>% 100 (2)</td>
<td>% 46.0 (69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although 46 per cent of the school districts have an individual to handle public information, only 56 per cent of these individuals spend 25 per cent of their time or less on public information duties (Table 7). Fewer than two per cent of the respondents spend 50 per cent or more of their time on information duties. This small percentage
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Working Time</th>
<th>Small Districts (N=78)</th>
<th>Medium Districts (N=42)</th>
<th>Large Districts (N=28)</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts (N=2)</th>
<th>Total (N=150)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 to 75</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>1.3 (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 50</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>2.7 (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 25</td>
<td>60.3 (47)</td>
<td>57.1 (24)</td>
<td>42.9 (12)</td>
<td>56.0 (84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 0</td>
<td>35.9 (28)</td>
<td>42.7 (18)</td>
<td>50.0 (14)</td>
<td></td>
<td>40.0 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

indicates that relatively few districts have a person spending even one quarter of his time on public information. Also, the response to Question 1 indicated that 93.3 per cent of the superintendents handle information duties as part of their jobs. The closest any district comes to having a full-time information specialist is in the extra-large district in the western part of the state. This district indicated that one individual spends from 50 to 75 per cent of his time on public information duties. Three small districts and one large district report having individuals in the 25 to 50 per cent range, indicating, perhaps, a half-time position for the dissemination of information.
The total number of districts in Table 7 is larger than the total in Table 6, which reports districts with an individual designated to handle public information. This discrepancy occurred because some of the districts did not indicate that there was a delegated individual and, therefore, could not be considered in Table 6. However, they did indicate a percentage of some individual’s time allocated to public information duties and had to be considered in Table 7. The time designated would, in many cases, be the time put in by the respondent to the questionnaire, which in most instances (93.3 per cent) was the superintendent.

The training of the individual assigned to the information area is shown in Table 8. The most common preparation was completion of a course or two in journalism or in education information. Eleven individuals had a journalism degree or minor; nine had 5 to 10 hours in journalism; and seven had past employment with a news medium. The 50.7 per cent in the no-answer category could indicate that the respondent did not know the qualifications or, more likely, that there were none to present.

The results point to very limited special training of the individual responsible for public information. Even in the large districts, fewer than one-fifth of these individuals have a degree or minor in journalism. Fewer than half of the large districts responding to this study report any training or experience in journalism or educational information skills for their public information expert.
TABLE 8
SPECIAL TRAINING OF THE INDIVIDUAL HANDLING PUBLIC INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Districts N-78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N-42</th>
<th>Large Districts N-28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N-2</th>
<th>Total 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism degree or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minor</td>
<td>2.6 (2)</td>
<td>9.5 (4)</td>
<td>17.9 (5)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7.3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course or two</td>
<td>34.6 (27)</td>
<td>31.0 (13)</td>
<td>17.9 (5)</td>
<td>100 (2)</td>
<td>31.3 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in journalism or</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 hours</td>
<td>7.7 (6)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6.0 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in journalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past employment</td>
<td>6.4 (5)</td>
<td>4.8 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4.7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a news medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>48.7 (38)</td>
<td>52.4 (22)</td>
<td>57.1 (16)</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.7 (76)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Types of Media Contacts

In an effort to determine how they utilized news media to communicate with the general public, the investigator asked the superintendents about six types of media contacts. The superintendents had a choice of five responses for each type of media contact. "Continually" and "frequently" were considered positive replies, followed by "sometimes" in the middle area, with "seldom" and "never" considered a negative response to the question.
The results in Table 9 indicate that local school district superintendents in South Dakota and the news media were most frequently

TABLE 9

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS USING SIX TYPES OF PRESS CONTACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Districts</th>
<th>Medium Districts</th>
<th>Large Districts</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts</th>
<th>Total Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal visits to the media</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually</td>
<td>5.1 (4)</td>
<td>16.7 (7)</td>
<td>35.7 (10)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>14.7 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>28.2 (22)</td>
<td>42.9 (18)</td>
<td>35.7 (10)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>34.0 (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>30.8 (24)</td>
<td>21.4 (9)</td>
<td>17.9 (5)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>25.3 (38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>20.5 (16)</td>
<td>14.3 (6)</td>
<td>10.7 (3)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>16.7 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>9.0 (7)</td>
<td>4.8 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>6.0 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>6.4 (5)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.3 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District press conferences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually</td>
<td>1.3 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.3 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>2.0 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>11.4 (9)</td>
<td>11.9 (5)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10.7 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>24.4 (19)</td>
<td>23.8 (10)</td>
<td>21.4 (6)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>24.0 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>53.9 (42)</td>
<td>52.4 (22)</td>
<td>53.6 (15)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>52.7 (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>9.0 (7)</td>
<td>9.5 (4)</td>
<td>10.7 (3)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>9.3 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written news releases</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually</td>
<td>15.4 (12)</td>
<td>23.8 (10)</td>
<td>32.1 (9)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>21.3 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>42.3 (33)</td>
<td>47.6 (20)</td>
<td>50.0 (14)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>44.7 (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>33.3 (26)</td>
<td>23.8 (10)</td>
<td>14.3 (4)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>27.3 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>2.6 (2)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>2.6 (2)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.0 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3.9 (3)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.0 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 9 (continued)

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS USING SIX TYPES OF PRESS CONTACTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Districts N-78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N-42</th>
<th>Large Districts N-28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N-2</th>
<th>Total Districts 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate telephone contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually</td>
<td>5.1 (4)</td>
<td>9.5 (4)</td>
<td>21.4 (6)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>10.0 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>34.6 (27)</td>
<td>40.5 (17)</td>
<td>46.4 (13)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>38.7 (58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>30.8 (24)</td>
<td>45.2 (19)</td>
<td>21.4 (6)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>32.7 (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>12.8 (10)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8.7 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3.9 (3)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>12.8 (10)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7.3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media visits to district office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>10.8 (3)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>3.3 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>11.5 (9)</td>
<td>11.9 (5)</td>
<td>35.7 (10)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>16.7 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>18.0 (14)</td>
<td>28.6 (12)</td>
<td>25.0 (7)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>22.0 (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>32.1 (25)</td>
<td>26.2 (11)</td>
<td>14.3 (4)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>26.7 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>30.8 (24)</td>
<td>23.8 (10)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>24.0 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>7.7 (6)</td>
<td>7.1 (3)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>7.3 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give news to reporters who telephone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually</td>
<td>10.3 (8)</td>
<td>14.3 (6)</td>
<td>17.9 (5)</td>
<td>100.0 (2)</td>
<td>14.0 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>37.2 (29)</td>
<td>40.5 (17)</td>
<td>28.6 (8)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>36.0 (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>29.5 (23)</td>
<td>23.8 (10)</td>
<td>28.6 (6)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27.3 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>11.5 (9)</td>
<td>21.4 (9)</td>
<td>21.4 (6)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>16.0 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>7.7 (6)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4.0 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>3.9 (3)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
in contact through written news releases. There was also frequent telephone contacts, quite often with the school official initiating the call. In addition, there normally was a good deal of visiting of news media offices by school officials, especially in the larger districts. Only about 20 per cent of the school district respondents said representatives of the media visited the school offices continually or frequently. However, 50 per cent of the districts indicated that news media initiated telephone contacts "continually" or "frequently," suggesting that the media are interested in the schools. The school superintendents apparently have to rely on visiting the media as 48.7 per cent report making personal visits.

Press conferences are seldom used by South Dakota school districts. More than one-half of the respondents never call press conferences. One small district did report that it used the press conference continually. The only other district to report continual usage of this technique was a large district. Only one of the extra-large districts plus two smaller schools use the press conference "frequently."

All of the channels for contacting the media listed on Table 9, except one, were used more often by the large districts than either the medium or smaller districts. The lone exception, "giving information to reporter who telephones," is used more in the medium district than in the small or large. The investigator expected to find that the larger districts would make more contacts with the press. This turned out to be the case.
The superintendents were asked to rate the coverage of their school districts by the various news media along a continuum ranging from excellent, very good or good through fair to below average, poor, and extremely poor. The results in Table 10 show that 8 per cent of the school districts rated media coverage excellent, 20.7 per cent very good, and 26.7 good. Thus, a total of 55.4 per cent saw the news media giving good or better coverage of the activities of the district. An additional 26.7 per cent of the respondents said their districts received "fair" media coverage.

A total of 18 per cent of the districts rated media coverage as below average or worse. More than 20 per cent of the small districts

### TABLE 10
SUPERINTENDENTS' RATINGS OF THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small District</th>
<th>Medium District</th>
<th>Large District</th>
<th>Ex-Large District</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N-78</td>
<td>N-42</td>
<td>N-28</td>
<td>N-2</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excellent</strong></td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>7.1 (3)</td>
<td>25.0 (7)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>8.0 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Very Good</strong></td>
<td>15.4 (12)</td>
<td>23.8 (10)</td>
<td>32.1 (9)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>20.7 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td>29.5 (23)</td>
<td>31.0 (13)</td>
<td>10.7 (3)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>26.7 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fair</strong></td>
<td>30.8 (24)</td>
<td>21.4 (9)</td>
<td>25.0 (7)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>26.7 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Below Avg.</strong></td>
<td>12.8 (10)</td>
<td>11.9 (5)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>10.0 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>7.7 (6)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>4.7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ex-Poor</strong></td>
<td>2.6 (2)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.3 (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05
and 16.7 per cent of the medium-sized districts, but only 7.1 per cent of the large districts put media coverage in these categories.

The superintendents were asked to select the best news medium in terms of the medium's dissemination of district school news. The sample was divided into East and West River categories because of the relatively small number of newspapers and broadcasting stations west of the river. This could have, we believed, affected the ratings.

**TABLE 11**

SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEWS OF NEWS MEDIUM DOING BEST JOB IN DISSEMINATION OF SCHOOL NEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East River Districts N-118</th>
<th>West River Districts N-32</th>
<th>Total Districts 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Print media</strong></td>
<td>88.1 (104)</td>
<td>78.1 (25)</td>
<td>86.0 (129)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radio and TV</strong></td>
<td>9.9 (1)</td>
<td>3.1 (1)</td>
<td>1.3 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal contacts</strong></td>
<td>9.3 (11)</td>
<td>15.6 (5)</td>
<td>10.7 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No answer</strong></td>
<td>1.7 (2)</td>
<td>3.1 (1)</td>
<td>2.0 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In both East and West areas print media are rated as the best channel for reaching the public, with personal contact next and broadcast media a poor third.

In 88 per cent of the East River districts print media provides more information most frequently, 10 per cent higher than West River districts. Considering the state as a whole, 86 per cent of the
respondents indicated that the print medium was doing the best job. Although slight differences do occur, the trend is clearly towards the print media in the state, followed by the personal contact, with the radio and television networks third.

**TABLE 12**

SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEWS OF NEWS MEDIUM DOING BEST JOB IN DISSEMINATION OF SCHOOL NEWS; DIVIDED BY DISTRICT STUDENT POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Large</th>
<th>Ex-Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print media</td>
<td>85.9% (67)</td>
<td>85.7% (36)</td>
<td>85.7% (24)</td>
<td>100% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio and TV</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>7.1%  (2)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
<td>12.8% (10)</td>
<td>11.9% (5)</td>
<td>3.6%  (1)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1.3%  (1)</td>
<td>2.4%  (1)</td>
<td>3.6%  (1)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was no difference among the various-sized districts in the percentage of respondents who indicated that the print media was doing the best job providing the public with school information. Some small and medium districts saw personal contacts a valuable information channel, but very few large districts did. Startling was the lack of radio and television coverage in the districts, according to the superintendents. Only two of the respondents, both from large districts, indicated that television and radio were the best means of disseminating school district information.
5. Interpretation of Public Information Effort

The administrators' interpretation of the public information effort of the school was obtained by asking three questions. They were asked whether the district was paying adequate attention to providing information to the public, whether they believed the public was informed about the school and whether they believed the public was interested in the schools.

### Table 13

**Adequacy of District Public Information Efforts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Districts</th>
<th>Medium Districts</th>
<th>Large Districts</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts</th>
<th>Total Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N-78</td>
<td>N-42</td>
<td>N-28</td>
<td>N-2</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.2 (22)</td>
<td>14.3 (6)</td>
<td>21.4 (6)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>23.3 (35)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not adequate</td>
<td>66.7 (52)</td>
<td>81.0 (34)</td>
<td>78.6 (22)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
<td>72.7 (109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>5.1 (4)</td>
<td>4.8 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.7 (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 indicates that the respondents from the small districts are more satisfied with their public information efforts than those from medium-sized or large districts. The fact that less than one-fourth of the total respondents reported that the public information effort was adequate would indicate that there is much dissatisfaction with the present public information programs.
Slightly more than one-third of the respondents believed that more than 60 per cent of the public in their districts was informed about the school district programs and policies. Therefore, while 23.3 per cent of the respondents indicated the public information policy was adequate, more than one-third of the respondents indicated that over 60 per cent of the public was informed.

Table 14 shows East River respondents are more likely to see their publics as informed—38.2 per cent in the East and 25.1 per cent in the West see more than 60 per cent of their publics informed. The small districts indicated the largest percentage informed, with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of public informed</th>
<th>East River Districts N=118</th>
<th>West River Districts N=32</th>
<th>Total Districts 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100 to 80</td>
<td>10.2 (12)</td>
<td>6.3 (2)</td>
<td>9.3 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 60</td>
<td>28.0 (33)</td>
<td>18.8 (6)</td>
<td>26.0 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 40</td>
<td>31.4 (37)</td>
<td>40.6 (13)</td>
<td>33.3 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 20</td>
<td>22.0 (26)</td>
<td>25.0 (8)</td>
<td>22.7 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 0</td>
<td>6.0 (7)</td>
<td>6.3 (2)</td>
<td>6.0 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>2.5 (3)</td>
<td>3.1 (1)</td>
<td>2.7 (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

large district being second and the medium-sized district in third place. However, the superintendents from the medium-sized districts
indicated about one-half of their public was informed in the 40 to 60 per cent range. The state total in this 40 to 60 per cent range was 33.3 per cent.

**TABLE 15**

**ADMINISTRATORS’ OPINIONS ON EXTENT TO WHICH PUBLIC INFORMED ABOUT SCHOOL DISTRICT DIVIDED BY STUDENT POPULATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Small Districts N-78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N-42</th>
<th>Large Districts N-28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of public informed</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 to 80</td>
<td>15.4 (12)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 to 60</td>
<td>28.2 (22)</td>
<td>19.1 (8)</td>
<td>28.6 (8)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 40</td>
<td>29.5 (23)</td>
<td>40.5 (17)</td>
<td>35.7 (10)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 to 20</td>
<td>19.2 (15)</td>
<td>31.0 (13)</td>
<td>17.9 (5)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 0</td>
<td>6.4 (5)</td>
<td>4.8 (2)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>1.3 (1)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>7.1 (2)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another question asked administrators to report the level of district public interest in the schools. Excellent, very good, and good responses were considered to indicate a positive interest in the schools; fair indicated a more or less neutral interest, with below average, poor, and extremely poor choices reflecting negative interest by the public.

According to the school administrators responding, the public has a positive interest in the schools in most school districts in both the East and the West River area (Table 16). A total of 79.3 per cent
TABLE 16

ADMINISTRATORS' EVALUATIONS OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East River Districts N-118</th>
<th>West River Districts N-32</th>
<th>Total Districts 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of public interest</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>7.6 (9)</td>
<td>12.5 (4)</td>
<td>8.7 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>42.4 (50)</td>
<td>28.1 (9)</td>
<td>39.3 (59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>28.0 (33)</td>
<td>43.8 (14)</td>
<td>31.3 (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>17.0 (20)</td>
<td>9.4 (3)</td>
<td>15.3 (23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>4.2 (5)</td>
<td>6.3 (2)</td>
<td>4.7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-poor</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>.9 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.7 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 17

ADMINISTRATORS' EVALUATIONS OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE SCHOOLS DIVIDED BY STUDENT POPULATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Small Districts N-78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N-42</th>
<th>Large Districts N-28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of public interest</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>9.0 (7)</td>
<td>4.8 (2)</td>
<td>14.3 (4)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>37.2 (29)</td>
<td>40.5 (17)</td>
<td>42.9 (12)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>33.3 (26)</td>
<td>31.0 (13)</td>
<td>28.6 (8)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>14.1 (11)</td>
<td>19.1 (8)</td>
<td>10.7 (3)</td>
<td>50.0 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>6.4 (5)</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>3.6 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex-poor</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.4 (1)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the school districts reported the public to be positively interested in the schools, even though nearly 75 per cent of the school districts admit to not paying enough attention to providing information to the interested public (Table 13).

Since there is this active interest on the part of the public, it would seem to be the duty of the districts to respond by providing more information. The need for more dissemination is further suggested when the 15.3 per cent of the districts reporting "fair" public interest in the schools is added to the 79.3 per cent, making a total of 94.6 per cent of the public with some interest in school activities. When the districts are divided according to student population, it is clear that public interest in the school is positive in large, medium and small districts.

6. Perception of Important School News

The investigator wanted to determine if there was a difference between the most important school news as seen by the administrators and what the administrators thought the press was interested in. Two questions were asked—one question asked the administrators which of three types of school information they thought was the most valuable to the public; the second asked them what type of school information the press wanted.

The respondents, as Table 18 shows, generally held teaching/learning activities and policies to be the most important school news
TABLE 18

MOST VALUABLE SCHOOL NEWS AREAS AS SEEN
BY DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>East River Districts N=118</th>
<th>West River Districts N=32</th>
<th>Total Districts 150</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(finance, taxes, personnel, etc.)</td>
<td>22.0 (26)</td>
<td>18.8 (6)</td>
<td>21.3 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/learning</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pupil progress, innovations, etc.)</td>
<td>44.1 (52)</td>
<td>50.0 (16)</td>
<td>45.3 (68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activities</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sports, debate, drama, etc.)</td>
<td>7.6 (9)</td>
<td>9.4 (3)</td>
<td>8.0 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
<td>% (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.3 (31)</td>
<td>21.9 (7)</td>
<td>25.3 (38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

area for the public. Only one-half as many local superintendents saw
the administrative area involving problems of finances, taxes, and
personnel as more important. Most administrators saw student activities,
including sports, as least important of the three areas in terms of
informing the public. The same pattern of attitudes showed up among
respondents both East of the River and West of the River.
Dividing the districts according to pupil population (Table 19) on this same question, the same pattern emerged. In all district categories a plurality of respondents saw teaching/learning activities most valuable, administrative areas less valuable (as indicated by Table 19 the large districts were tied at 14.3 per cent in the administrative and student activities categories), and student activities least valuable to the public. Among our respondents, those from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Small Districts N-78</th>
<th>Medium Districts N-42</th>
<th>Large Districts N-28</th>
<th>Ex-Large Districts N-2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>20.5 (16)</td>
<td>28.6 (12)</td>
<td>14.3 (4)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(finance, taxes, personnel, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/learning</td>
<td>50.0 (39)</td>
<td>33.3 (14)</td>
<td>46.4 (13)</td>
<td>100 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pupil progress, innovations, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activities</td>
<td>6.4 (5)</td>
<td>7.1 (3)</td>
<td>14.3 (4)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sports, debate, drama, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>23.1 (18)</td>
<td>31.0 (13)</td>
<td>25.0 (7)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 19
MOST VALUABLE SCHOOL NEWS AREAS AS SEEN BY DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS DIVIDED BY STUDENT POPULATION
medium-sized districts were somewhat more likely to see the administrative area as an important school news subject, while more respondents from large districts than from small and medium-sized districts considered student activities to be important. In general, however, the overall pattern was the same regardless of the district's pupil population.

In the eyes of the superintendents responding to the survey, the press is much more interested in the area of school news which is of least value to the public. Administrators were asked to rank press interest in various school news topics which were then combined in the three general news areas of administration, teaching/learning, and student activities. The ranking was on a one-to-five scale with five indicating high interest. As Table 20 shows, the school officials saw press interest in administration and teaching/learning low with press interest in student activities twice as high. The same pattern was found to exist state-wide with only minor changes in both the East River and West River districts. The pattern remained the same in large, small, and medium-sized districts.

The Press Interest Index presented in Table 20 was worked out simply by multiplying the index level by the number of district superintendents checking that level on the questionnaire. As one can see, nearly one-half of the respondents saw the press as having an extremely high interest in student activities. However, one should note that many superintendents believed that in their districts the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking of Interest</th>
<th>Responses by Districts</th>
<th>Press Interest Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five (High Interest)</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>(20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One (Low Interest)</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>(72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five (High Interest)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One (Low Interest)</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five (High Interest)</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
press had a very low interest in student activities, undoubtedly reflecting a general lack of press interest in those districts in any school activities. In contrast less than ten per cent of the respondents actually stated that the press had a minimum (Level One) interest in either administration or teaching/learning areas. Rather, about one-half of the superintendents simply did not answer these questions.

Undoubtedly, in some areas the press had little interest in administration and teaching/learning activities of the local schools, areas which the school administrators believe the public should be better informed. And in additional areas the press is simply not interested in the schools; even stories on student activities are not of enough news value to justify the paper or station’s attention, space, and effort. However, the responses suggest that about one-half of the superintendents in South Dakota have so little contact with the press and so little understanding of its needs that they cannot even judge if the press is or is not interested in news about the administration and teaching/learning activities at the schools.

More than one-fifth of the superintendents (21.3 per cent) believe it would be of considerable value to the public if it knew more about the administrative activities of the schools (Table 18), which include such matters as finance, taxes, and personnel problems. Only 16.7 per cent of the district superintendents believed the press had a high level of interest (Level Four or Five) in this general area. Still, in their detailed answers to this question, many superintendents stated
that the press was highly interested in some information which would come under the general heading of administration—school board activities, personnel actions, building programs, financial planning, and tax impact.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The fact that the South Dakota Department of Public Instruction has written a proposed public information policy makes it one of the leaders in this area in the Upper Midwest. Two of the states bordering on South Dakota—North Dakota and Iowa—have written policies on public information for their state education agencies. However, the remaining four—Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, and Minnesota—operate on the basis of unwritten guidelines whose adequacy and consistency are open to question.

Responses from the state education agencies of the six states bordering South Dakota indicated a concern with public information policy. Such concern has been indicated regularly over the years, most recently in surveys conducted by the U. S. Office of Education's Project Public Information. Still, four of the six state agencies remain without a written information policy.

The development of written public information policies by the state education agencies in North Dakota and Iowa was an important step. Both policies indicate by their contents that officials there are aware of and concerned with channels of dissemination, publics to be affected, measurement of the results of communication efforts, and the need for two-way communication. The fact that there are written
policies also helps give direction to the public information policies. This is a move toward answering the criticism of the Maine superintendent, who said, "Our releases are too often erratic and lose continuity."

The South Dakota Department of Public Instruction has only a proposed public information policy. However, the proposed policy, which is the current departmental guideline, does provide a good deal of information about the operation of an education information policy as well as policy itself. It includes statements on the need for research, news dissemination techniques, and the identification of publics to be reached. And the proposed policy makes it clear that the Department of Public Instruction's public information goals are to reach all the people of South Dakota with a positive program of news dissemination. The Department has rejected the idea that public agencies must wait for the news media.

School District Reaction to State Policy

In general, most local school superintendents in South Dakota agree with the public information policy of the State Department of Public Instruction. But some of the extracted policy statements brought considerable disagreement.

More than one-third of the administrators objected to this idea of using a "set" or "canned" talk for speaking engagements. A possible reason for the objection would be the fear that the State Department of Public Instruction would start suggesting what material should be used in the "set" speeches. Another reason could be that local
superintendents see school problems as too diverse for the use of the "set" speech approach. A possible third reason could be the administrators fear that the press would not cover "set" speeches, already knowing the general content.

Also contained in the South Dakota state policy is a statement calling for open channels of communication with the South Dakota Education Association in order to achieve the widest possible dissemination of information. One-fifth of the administrators indicated that they did not agree with this.

The superintendents' reactions suggest that some of them do not place much value in the SDEA for the purpose of dissemination of news events or that they see other problems inherent in such a relationship. The South Dakota Department of Public Instruction also stated in its proposed policy guidelines that the news media tend to pay attention to education only when conflict, controversy, or cost is apparent. Three-fourths of the local district administrators responding to this survey agreed. The news media are, of course, oriented toward the coverage of items which will arouse public curiosity and the policy statement of the Department of Public Instruction and a majority of the superintendents recognize this.

The proposed state-level policy also suggested that news written for the press should be condensed for the short radio and television newscasts. The administrators indicated a disagreement level of nearly 15 per cent, suggesting that many of them are not ready to make
extra efforts to utilize radio and television as channels for the dissemination of district information. This attitude is further suggested by the fact that nearly 17 per cent of the administrators disagreed with the state policy suggestion that increased use should be made of films, radio, and television.

It is reasonable to believe that stories would be sent to radio and television stations less often than to the papers, because newspapers exist in many more communities than do broadcasting media. However, this result does suggest that the districts in South Dakota are perhaps not familiar with the electronic media and do not know how to utilize these channels. This would indicate that the state educators are going to have public information problems since radio and television have become increasingly important in the area of public information.

District Public Information Policies

Many local school districts in South Dakota have been active in public information, but they have not bothered to formulate a written policy. Although 80 per cent of the districts do not have a written policy, 32 per cent of the superintendents in this survey provided a copy of the policy guidelines of which they were aware and by which they operated.

School districts in the West River area were more likely to have a written policy on public information. This trend was not
expected since both population and news media were concentrated in the East River area. The author especially expected that the influence of the media should be stronger in the East River area.

The more populous school districts were no more likely to have a written policy than the others. The task of informing the public should require more attention in the larger districts and one might expect more attention to be paid to establishing public information policies, but this is apparently not so.

Analysis of Local District Policies

The public information policies received from the districts ranged from a short statement to lengthy reproductions of existing policy. While a great many of the answers dealt with the authority for disseminating news, some indicated an attempt at developing a positive public information policy. The criteria in the local policies which were provided to the investigator seemed to be developed by the person who was in charge of the dissemination of information. However, since this was the superintendent in 93.3 per cent of the districts, this represents hardly any delegation of authority in the area of public information. In short, the local district superintendent remains in direct control of developing and carrying out public information policies.

Several things were apparent from the statements of verbal policies received from the administrators. One was an almost
antagonistic attitude towards the idea of public information with many administrators clinging to the cliche, "no news is good news" or even supporting "the public be damned" point of view. Many administrators also were uncertain as to the difference between information and propaganda. It was also clear that the delegation of important public information duties by the superintendent was rare even when there was an individual assigned to assist in this area. The superintendent might delegate minor tasks to a staff member, but he personally attended to dealing with the press and the writing of important news releases.

The lack of a well organized program for handling public information was most apparent, of course, by the fact that only 32 of 150 respondents supplied information indicating that even verbal guide lines were well enough formulated to commit to writing. One superintendent undoubtedly suggested the typical situation when he wrote, "We communicate with the public in as many ways as we have available, but we do not have an organized method."

It seems clear that local school superintendents in South Dakota are aware of the need for public information programs but are unwilling or unable to devote enough personal attention to the problem to get a program organized. They also believe that a mishandled public information program could bring serious difficulties, thus are unwilling to delegate important duties in the area. They themselves have little awareness of what a good public information program might
consist of as suggested by their inability to distinguish clearly between information and propaganda. Consequently, they are not sure what should be disseminated to the public.

The four districts that sent actual written public information policies were from the middle, large, and extra-large size districts. The middle-sized district's policy was contained in the framework of the general policy of the board of education. The large and extra-large districts sent copies of actual written policies pertaining specifically to the information dissemination role of the school district. The difference among the approaches to the formulation of policy indicates that even when a school district recognizes the need for a written public information policy, there is no clear agreement of what it should consist of. The development of a state-level policy by the Department of Public Instruction may help in this area.

**Allocation of Information Duties**

As was indicated earlier, the actual delegation of information duties is practically non-existent; however, one district superintendent did indicate a person spending 50 to 75 per cent of his time on public information activities. Four other respondents indicated that they had individuals working as half-time disseminators of school news. The remaining districts in the sample indicated that perhaps 25 per cent of one individual's time would be spent on information duties. This indicates clearly that, as yet, there is little concern at the
district level for having a person spend a substantial amount of time handling the problems of communicating with the public.

The most common preparation for the public information people was a course or two in journalism or in educational public information. The large districts reported only one-fifth of the public information people with some training in journalism. One-half of the responding administrators also appeared not to know any special preparation of the designated individual, since they did not answer the qualifications question.

By virtue of the lagging qualifications, it would seem that, if the districts were faced with a problem that needed to be adequately portrayed to the public, the districts would have serious communication problems to overcome. This has been illustrated nation-wide, for example, by the public schools that have been faced with the problem of announcing and justifying the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum.

**Types of Media Contacts**

Although there was some variation in the reports about the training of the individual delegated for disseminating news, there was little variation in the channel used by the administrators to contact the media. A large majority of the districts reported that they used the news release more often than any other means of contacting the public. However, there were also frequent telephone contacts, quite
often with the schools initiating the call. There also was a good deal of visiting of news media offices by school officials, especially in the larger districts.

One inference to be drawn from the reported press contacts is that the school is making most of the moves which culminate in the dissemination of news. This supports the argument that it is time for the school district to assign an individual to expedite the process.

With one exception, press conferences were not reported as a regularly used channel of communication. The one exception was a small district which reported the use of the press conference continually. It is possible the superintendent considered any meeting with a local reporter a press conference. The responses to this question indicated that press conferences are being used for special occasions, perhaps during times of emergencies, for communicating with the public.

Interpretation of Public Information Effort

The respondents believed their district information programs were not adequate, but indicated a high percentage of the public was being informed about the schools. The explanation of this paradox is suggested by the administrators' interpretation of the public interest in education. All but eight of the respondents to this study indicated that the public had a positive interest in the schools. School districts, both East and West of the River and with varying pupil populations, reported a high level of public interest. Since there is
this active interest on the part of the public, it would seem to be the duty of the districts to fill this need by giving more information. As indicated by the results, the districts do not report events to the public adequately, but apparently an interested public is able to ferret out the news about the schools.

**Perception of Important School News**

In supplying news to the interested public, there was some discrepancy between information the administrators thought was most valuable and their views of what the press considered newsworthy. The administrators indicated that the teaching/learning aspect of education was the most valuable category of school news. However, they perceived the interest of the press as being focused on news concerning student activities.

The school superintendents are, undoubtedly, reflecting the situation as it is. The news media have always been more interested in student activities, including sports, for numerous reasons. For one thing, the public seems to be more interested in these activities carried out by the people in the school system who are most important to the members of the public—the students, their sons, daughters, relatives and neighbors. Also, it requires much more effort on the part of a reporter or editor to understand the administrative issues or teaching/learning activities of the school than it does to understand a football game, for example.
One solution to the problem of not knowing the interest of each other would be the employment of a public information specialist. Perhaps merely giving one person on the staff some concentrated training in the area of public information could be arranged at little cost to the school. This person could possibly make the step towards better press relations by bridging the interest gap. Presenting to the press some of the administrative problems of the school would be a logical step in this process. Perhaps after this initial effort, then the individual could try to use press interest in student activities to get better coverage in the administrative and the teaching/learning areas.

Efforts in communication are going to have to come from the schools because the press does not seem to want to make the effort. But for the schools to establish a sound foundation for such communication they are going to have to formulate policies in the area of communication with the public. As yet, the states surrounding South Dakota have only taken small steps in the direction of policy formulation. The school districts of South Dakota have progressed to about the same plateau as the State Department of Public Instruction in that they have made a great many proposals.

As a part of policy, the districts should include some provision for the inclusion of more than basic media contact. A great many of the South Dakota school districts rely heavily on one medium for relaying information to the public. Good policy would also include delegation of information duties. Today in South Dakota school public
information is largely handled by the superintendent himself with very little delegation of authority for releasing news.

The information specialist in charge of giving information to the public would be able to have a "feel" of the public interpretation of the schools; thus, when trouble was spotted the person in charge could be ready to combat it. This interpretation of the public attitude would be one of the more vital areas of concern for the specialist. The schools are continually attempting to get bonds passed and are failing miserably in a great many instances. How can this be in a society with so much interest in education? The problem lies at least partially in not having an informed public. To have an informed public the school must have a program for information, a person to implement the program and some specific guide lines for the person to follow, i.e., a policy.

Suggestions for Further Study

Several opportunities for additional research are indicated. The most obvious need for future research is an investigation designed to measure the press reaction to the same questions posed to the administrators in this study. A great many studies have indicated that there are indeed problems in school-press relations.

Another study, which would merit investigation, would be an analysis of the individuals who prepare the school information policy, such as school board members.
An analysis of the cause and effect of the public relations specialist on a school issue would be carried out. The cause—why he was hired; the effect—how much good has he done since being hired. Also connected with this study would be the gauging of the taxpayers' opinions about spending their tax money for hiring someone to tell them how it is being spent.

A study of the characteristics of the superintendents who are doing a good job of news dissemination as opposed to the one who is doing a poor job of news dissemination would be useful.

And, in depth, a study of a school system's communication practice and procedure with both the internal and external publics would be another beneficial study.
APPENDIX A

Public Information Policies

Iowa
Minnesota
Montana
Nebraska
North Dakota
South Dakota
Wyoming
A PROGRAM OF PUBLIC INFORMATION FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

An important concern of every public agency is effective two-way
communication with the public it serves. With this goal in mind the
Cabinet submits the following program for the consideration of the
Superintendent of Public Instruction.

I. Policy Statement

The Iowa Department of Public Instruction, as an agent of the
public, upholds, as a matter of principle, the public's right to know.
Disclosure of departmental actions is the best insurance against
needless misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

The news media, which seek information on behalf of the public,
are therefore entitled to full and candid answers to their questions.

With a few exceptions, the Department of Public Instruction
greets the media with an open door, open records, and open meetings.
The exceptions are made in the interest of public and individual
welfare. They include:

A. Information that could give financial advantage
to specific individuals, such as plans for
purchasing real estate.

B. Personnel information concerning matters of
health, uninvestigated allegations, and the
like, which employees, students, clients, or
teachers have not consented to release.

C. Information, the release of which is the
responsibility of the State Board of Public
Instruction, or which is contingent upon
State Board action.
D. Information which, in the opinion of the division director concerned, requires an inordinate amount of time and effort to assemble.

The Department of Public Instruction upholds the principle of two-way communication. Just as it is important that the public be fully informed by the Department, so too the Department desires to keep abreast of public opinion.

The Department is aware that this policy of open communication may sometimes result in the misuse or misquotation of information. It is the Department's position, however, that the needs of an aware and active public outweigh any inconvenience the Department may experience in the pursuit of total communication.

II. Objectives of a public information program

A. To provide vital educational information to the public.

B. To interpret activities of the DPI to its publics.

C. To interpret public opinion to the Department.

D. To augment public understanding of the Department's role in providing equal educational opportunities for all Iowans.

E. To build and maintain the confidence of the public in the Department.

F. To increase understanding of Department policies.

G. To assist Iowa school districts in establishing programs of communications with their own publics.
III. Publics to be contacted

A. DPI professional and clerical staff.
B. Advisory committees of the Department.
C. Administrators and teachers of Iowa schools.
D. Students of Iowa schools and colleges.
E. The Governor and other elected state officials.
F. Members of the General Assembly of Iowa.
G. Members of Iowa's Congressional delegation.
H. Public libraries.
I. Professional organizations and other groups having an interest in education, such as
   veterans organizations
   farm groups
   organizations of teachers and administrators
   associations of school board members and school officials
   labor groups
   extracurricular activities associations
   parent organizations
   civic organizations
   public service agencies
   service clubs
   professional organizations in law, medicine, etc.
   other organizations, both lay and professional, that have an interest in educational issues of the day
J. The general public
IV. Media to be used

A. DPI publications, such as:
   - Educational Bulletin
   - Biennial Report
   - News of the Week (internal)
   - DPI Newsletter
   - Special flyers and information pieces

B. News releases (with special adaptation to the needs of press, radio and TV)

C. Press conferences

D. Radio and TV programs on public service time, including
   - interviews (taped and live)
   - panel discussions
   - talk program participation
   - spot announcements

E. Speakers bureau

F. Billboards

G. Audio-visual aids, including
   - chart presentations
   - posters
   - exhibits
   - videotape presentations
   - slides
   - films
   - filmstrips
   - recordings

H. Postage meter indicia

I. Stuffers and other attachments for Department mailing

J. House organs of other organizations

K. Pick-up leaflets for doctors' offices and business places
March 16, 1971

Donald A. Clyde
118 6th Street
Brookings, South Dakota 57006

Dear Mr. Clyde:

I am responding to your March 10 request for information on our State Department policy for communications with the public.

Our only statement in effect is one which is outdated. A new statement has been proposed but it will not take effect until through federal aid and/or state legislation--we have the staff and budget to implement it.

I will, therefore, briefly outline the philosophy which we have developed in our 4½ years of operation. You might keep in mind the fact that we don't always have the time or staff to live up to the ideal.

We believe, of course, in a systematic and thorough program of communication with the public to keep people informed not only about the policies and activities of the State Board and State Department of Education but about the progress and problems of public elementary, secondary, and vocational programs throughout the state. We believe that the State Department of Education should be the most reliable of all relevant and timely information on education in the state, but limitations in our Department--again, usually limitations of staff and budget--sometimes make this difficult. The limitations often force us to restrict our operations and concentrate on specified audiences--such as the Legislature, education and governmental agencies, and our own staff--rather the general public. We believe that the schools themselves are responsible for informing the public, so we have held meetings encouraging the establishment of professionally staffed communications programs. Due to the rapid changes in the nature of communications media, we attempt to stress all types of communication--the print
media, the electronic media, the use of new audio-visual techniques, and personal contact. We have no formal evaluation or feedback program, but we plan to establish one as soon as funds are available. Meanwhile we make use of informal feedback procedures as we plan our future projects.

If you have any questions about our program or would like samples of our work, please let me know.

Sincerely,

James Lee, Director
Publications Section

JL:sa
March 25, 1971

Mr. Donald A. Clyde
Brookings
South Dakota 57006

Dear Mr. Clyde:

Mrs. Colburg has asked me to reply to your letter of March 10, 1971, concerning the public information policy for our office.

Although Montana does not at this time have a written policy, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction supports open and continuous communication with the public at large and with specific audiences within the general public. To this end she has established a task force of office personnel to develop a plan for expanding information services and efforts. No doubt a formal written policy for public information will evolve as part of the work of this task force.

If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Marilou Madden
Information Services Supervisor
The State Board of Education, which is a Constitutional body elected by the people, has many functions. Primarily it is a policy-making body with the responsibility of seeing that the State Department of Education functions effectively within the framework developed by the Legislature and by the Board. Stated simply, the State Board and the Department of Education are obligated by statute to perform a broad leadership function and to accept the responsibility for promoting the efficiency, welfare and improvement in the state school system in every way possible. One of the several ways the State Board can exercise this leadership role effectively is through the adoption and promotion of certain general philosophies and beliefs. Most of the statements which follow are a part of a revision made July 10, 1962. Policies adopted after that date are so indicated.

1. The State Board of Education is dedicated to the proposition that its paramount purpose lies in contributing in every way possible to the improvement of elementary and secondary education in Nebraska. In carrying out the legal function of providing "enlightened professional leadership, guidance, and supervision of the state school system," the Board expects a vigorous but also a realistic and reasonable program of activity.

2. As a board we conceive it to be our duty to act as a policy-making body, and with the advice and counsel of lay and professional individuals and groups to give leadership to the establishment of an educational program dedicated to the welfare of the people of this state.
3. We believe that a sound education system requires the thinking of the whole people. Accordingly, we have sought and will continue to seek the counsel and best thought of people from all walks of life, as well as the teaching profession, in the formation of regulatory and administrative policies. We believe that every citizen should become acquainted with, and remain constantly alert to, the changing education problems of our vast and varied communities.

4. We believe that all of the meetings in which we make decisions affecting the educational welfare of the state should be open to any citizen, and that all of the activities of the State Board of Education should be fully reported to the Legislature and to the public.

5. We believe that the Legislature and the people of Nebraska are rightfully entitled to know how all of the education funds appropriated for the Nebraska Department of Education are spent, together with all funds originating from national appropriations or from private gifts and endowments. To that end our budgeting and control of funds will be uniform and fully reported.

6. We believe irrevocably in the local management of school districts. It shall be our policy to encourage local boards of education to assume and to exercise the control of education within their communities in accordance with state laws.

7. We are unalterably opposed to any form of federal control of education. We believe that all national funds appropriated for the use of the several states should lose their identity at the time of their appropriation and should become subject to management and expenditure by state and local boards of education.
8. We believe that as the elected representatives of the people of the State of Nebraska, it is our responsibility to interpret to the best of our ability the educational needs of the state and the goals and objectives of the State Board, and to make those interpretations known to the Legislature, the Governor, and the public. In this responsibility we shall welcome the counsel of professional educators and the sound advice of local school boards and citizens interested in the educational welfare of Nebraska.

9. We believe that local boards of education should assume a responsibility to develop and operate programs of adult education which will meet the expressed interests and needs of all segments of their community. A program of adult education should include courses in general and cultural education as well as vocational and avocational. Public school facilities should be utilized for the maximum educational benefit of all persons in the school district, and the public relations aspect of a strong adult education program should be recognized. To this end the State Board proposes to offer both leadership and consultative services to local school officials to assist them in their development of strong diversified programs of adult education.
Information Dissemination

1. Publications
2. News Releases—radio, television, newspaper
3. Documentary
4. Public Service
5. Resource Library
6. Speaker's Bureau

Purpose

To create an awareness among:

1. Administrators
2. Teachers
3. Lay Public
4. Decision Makers

Results

1. Communication
2. Cooperation
3. Image Building
4. Legislative Support
5. Lay Support
6. Leadership Role
7. Evaluation

Projections

May:
Begin work on Public Service Announcements for Back to School. Organize Public Information services in schools. Plan evaluation of North Dakota Education (including info services). Publicize June 2 schoolboard elections.

June:
July: Continue work on PSA's and Evaluations. Begin planning regional workshops on Public Information. Contact weekly newspapers about a weekly column on educational trends, new developments and coming activities. Begin preparing posters and ads for weekly newspaper use.


Nov: Plan and begin work on Legislative PSA's. Begin feedback polls on educational programs for Legislative use.

Dec: Continue work on Legislative releases and information.

Jan: Begin promoting the Speaker's Bureau. Organize educational program for Legislature.

The above are tentative plans for programs to be carried out by the Division of Public Information of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, subject to approval by Superintendent M. F. Peterson.
DIVISION OF INFORMATION AND PUBLICATIONS

Goals and Philosophy (proposed)

I. Dissemination Resources

A. News Writing -- Only the Rapid City Journal and the Sioux Falls Argus Leader and almost none of the broadcast media maintain full-time education writers. Although education has become front-page news during the past decade, largely because of the major social issues impinging upon education, few stories other than those involving cost, conflict or controversy, attract coverage by the mass media of communications. Educational agencies or institutions, like those of business, industry and civic affairs, increasingly must generate and distribute their own news copy if they are to appear regularly in the news. Increasingly, the press expects this service of state departments of education.

B. Speech Writing -- Public speaking is one of the most frequent activities of supervisors, administrators and other professional members of the Department of Public Instruction. Demand for such appearances usually increases with responsibility, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction often burdened with almost unmanageable commitments. "Set" speeches on various areas of department policy and programs can be a valuable resource for all department members in responding to invitations for appearances.
C. Broadcast News Writing -- Occasionally, and perhaps most of the time, news written for the press should be briefed for the shorter format of radio and television newscasts.

D. Report and Publication Writing -- With the transition of the Department of Public Instruction from a largely regulatory and statistic-gathering agency to the role of program administrator and leader in education, the volume of reports and other publications has mushroomed. Although this is by no means our chief and paramount function, the need for centralized publications writers skilled both in research and exposition and accustomed to the style of general publications has been shown.

E. Editing, Layout and Graphics Services -- While the output of a good writer can be sent unedited for printing or other reproduction, increased volume of communication has warranted taking control of other steps in the dissemination process. Present capabilities include: editing, composition, layout, graphics, photography, and consultation in final printing.

F. Films, Radio, and Television -- While the printed page continues to undergird the communications process, increased use is being made of films, radio and television. The Department of Public Instruction has recognized the effectiveness of the audio/visual communications medium and presently
has capabilities for 16 mm film production along with desired radio and television production.

II. Audiences of Dissemination

A. The State Government -- Within the state government may be included the Department of Public Instruction itself, the executive and legislative branches, and the comparable units of other states with

1. The State Board of Education. "The closest, most continuous, and most official of all the relationships sustained by the state board of education," says Dean M. Schweickhard in The Role and Policymaking Activities of State Boards of Education in a 1967 U. S. Office of Education-financed special research study, "is its relationship with the chief state school officer." The reverse should be equally true: a chief state school officer's first objective, and that of the department, should be a well informed board that can function knowledgeable in its important policy-making role.

2. Members of the Department of Public Instruction. Equally important if a department such as the Department of Public Instruction is to assume leadership is that its members are kept abreast of new educational developments.

3. Advisory Committees. In the development of state plans for the use of various federal funds, the Department of Public Instruction has encouraged the involvement of educators, laymen and representatives of related agencies. This widened circle of advisors has provided new avenues for two-way communication between the department and the field.

4. The Governor. Whether or not the Department of Public Instruction is to be tied politically to the prevailing state administration, a close
working relationship and mutual understanding between the various departments of state government is desirable.

5. Legislators. State legislators rightly can be referred to as The Big School Board. It is they who fashion the statutes and make the appropriations within which funds the schools operate. It has been the policy of the Department of Public Instruction to inform the members of the Legislature—especially the education committeemen—of significant developments throughout the year.

B. The Education Establishment -- In expanding their leadership roles, state departments of education across the country have placed greater emphasis on reaching the educational practitioners. The South Dakota Department of Public Instruction has also assumed this responsibility.

1. School Districts. The Department of Public Instruction communicates most frequently with local school districts in the state. Directives, bulletins and various publications are issued as well as conducting many kinds of meetings and conferences involving representatives of school districts.

2. Professional Organizations. Open channels of communication are quite necessary with the South Dakota Education Association to achieve the widest possible dissemination of information.

3. Colleges of Education. The various colleges of education are considered a vital means of dissemination of information and are presently on all major publication mailing lists.

C. The General Publics
Mr. Donald A. Clyde  
118 6th Street  
Brookings, South Dakota 57006  

Dear Mr. Clyde:  

The only written policy of the Wyoming Education Department having to do with public information is included in our "Publications Policies and Procedures," and reads as follows:  

"When originated within the Department, news releases are to be edited, timed and released by the Publications Division. Division directors are responsible for informing the Publications Division of newsworthy events, before the event takes place.  

"When in the field, staff members should consider the public relations possibilities of their meeting or conference, and get in touch with local newspapers and/or radio stations to offer reports."  

Sincerely,  

(Mrs.) Patricia G. Wunnicke  
Coordinator  
Publications and Information Division
APPENDIX B

Questionnaire
Letters of Correspondence
QUESTIONNAIRE

School District ______________________ Enrollment __________________

1. What is the position of the respondent?
   Superintendent ___ Administrative Staff ___ Teacher ___

2. Does your District have a written public information policy?
   Yes ___ No ___

3. Is any one individual delegated to handle the public information duties in the district?
   Yes ___ No ___

   What percent of his time does the individual spend on public information duties?
   0 to 25% ___ 25 to 50% ___ 50 to 75% ___ 75 to 100% ___

4. Do you feel adequate attention is paid by your district to providing information to the public? Yes ___ No ___

5. What percentage of the public do you feel is informed about events in your school district?
   0 to 20% ___ 20 to 40% ___ 40 to 60% ___ 60 to 80% ___
   80 to 100% ___

6. What special training does the person handling public information have?
   Journalism degree or minor ___
   A course or two in journalism or education-information ___
   5-10 hours in journalism ___
   Past employment with a news medium ___

7. Which of the following types of school information do you feel would be of the most value to the public?
   Administration, finance, taxes, personnel, etc. ___
   Teaching, learning, innovations, pupil progress, etc. ___
   Student activities, sports, debate, drama, etc. ___
8. Do you feel the public interest in your school is:

Excellent ______ Very Good ______ Good ______ Fair ______
Below Average ______ Poor ______ Extremely Poor ______

9. Would you rate the news media coverage of your school district as:

Excellent ______ Very Good ______ Good ______ Fair ______
Below Average ______ Poor ______ Extremely Poor ______

10. What news medium provides the most information to the public about your school district?

The Print Media ______ Radio and Television ______ Personal Contacts ______

11. Which of the following do you think the press is more interested in covering? Please designate the importance placed on each item selected by the use of a number from one to five, with the five expressing the highest interest. More than one could have the same number.

( ) Extra-curricular activities ( ) Parent-teacher association
( ) School finance ( ) Discipline of students
( ) Course of study ( ) Buildings and building programs
( ) Value of education ( ) Methods of instruction
( ) Board of education ( ) Pupil Progress and achievement
( ) Teachers ( ) Attendance
( ) Administrators ( ) Behavior of students
( ) Health of students

12. How much contact does your district have with the news media in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal visits to the media</th>
<th>Continually</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District press conferences</td>
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<td>News releases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiate telephone contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media visits to district office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give news to reporters who telephone</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13. Please enclose a statement of your public information policy if it is written. If it is not, please summarize your policy in a short paragraph or two.

14. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

   a) Although education has become front-page news during the past decade, largely because of the major social issues impinging upon education, few stories other than those involving cost, conflict or controversy, attract coverage by the mass media of communications.  

   b) Educational agencies or institutions, like those of business, industry and civic affairs, increasingly must generate and distribute their own news copy if they are to appear regularly in the news.

   c) "Set" speeches on various areas of department policy and programs can be a valuable resource for all department members in responding to invitations for appearances.

   d) Occasionally, and perhaps most of the time, news written for the press should be briefed for the shorter format of radio and television newscasts.

   e) While the printed page continues to undergird the communications process, increased use is being made of films, radio and television.

   f) Equally important if a department such as the Department of Public Instruction is to assume leadership is that its members are kept abreast of new educational developments.
g) The Department of Public Instruction communicates most frequently with local school districts in the state. Directives, bulletins, and various publications are issued as well as conducting many kinds of meetings and conferences involving representatives of school districts.

h) Open channels of communication are quite necessary with the South Dakota Education Association to achieve the widest possible dissemination of information.
Dear Sir:

I am currently gathering information for my master's thesis and would like to enlist your aid in determining if the school districts of South Dakota have a policy, written or verbal, for communicating with the public.

I have enclosed a questionnaire which should take but a few minutes of your time to complete. A stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Your replies to the questionnaire will be kept in the strictest confidence with only a statistical compilation being made public.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Clyde, Graduate Student
Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communications
South Dakota State University

Enclosures
Dear Sir:

Enclosed is a duplicate of the questionnaire I sent to your office about two weeks ago. I realize you are extremely busy with pertinent school matters; however, I would appreciate your taking a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

I have received to date about a 75 per cent return. Although this return is promising, I would like to have at least an 80 per cent return.

Again, I thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Clyde, Graduate Student
Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communications
South Dakota State University

Enclosure
Public Relations Department  
State Department of Education  
Bismarck, North Dakota

Dear Sir:

I am currently gathering information for my Master's Thesis and would like to enlist your aid in determining if the North Dakota State Department of Education has a policy, written or verbal, for communicating with the public. I am sending an inquiry letter to the states bordering on South Dakota to see if they have a policy. This will be used as one chapter of my thesis, so any help you can give me will be greatly appreciated. If your state has a written policy, then I would appreciate a copy; however, if the policy is a verbal one, then perhaps a summary paragraph will give me enough insight to your overall policy.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Clyde, Graduate Student  
Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communications  
South Dakota State University

Note: This letter was also sent to the same office in the following states:  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82001  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68500  
Helena, Montana 59601  
Des Moines, Iowa 50300

and: James Lee, Information Director  
State Department of Education  
Centennial Building  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55100
Mr. Gary Hansen  
Department of Publications and Public Information  
State Department of Education  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501

Dear Mr. Hansen:

I am currently gathering information for my Master's Thesis and would like to enlist your aid in finding if the State Department of Education has a policy, written or verbal, for communicating with the public. If our state has some written policy, then I would appreciate a copy, but if the policy is not written, then perhaps a few words from you would summarize the state policy.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Clyde, Graduate Student  
Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communications  
South Dakota State University
Mr. Don Barnhart  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Department of Public Instruction  
State of South Dakota  
Pierre, South Dakota 57501  

Dear Mr. Barnhart:

I sent a letter to your Department of Public Relations the 10th of last month requesting information about a state public relations policy. At the same time, I sent similar requests to the State Education Departments of North Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Montana, Minnesota, and Iowa. I had received copies of their policies by the 20th of March. I still had not heard from my own state.

I gave your department another week and then I called to see what the problem was. The date of the call was March 27 and at that time I was promised some action on the situation and, as yet, I have not received any. I would think the office of Public Relations would have the courtesy to send a post card explaining the delay, but apparently they don't feel it is necessary. If you do not have a written state policy, then would you mind summarizing in a few paragraphs what you feel the policy should entail.

I thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Clyde, Graduate Student  
Dept. of Journalism & Mass Communications  
South Dakota State University
April 16, 1971

Mr. Donald A. Clyde  
118 Sixth Street  
Brookings, South Dakota 57006

Dear Mr. Clyde:

I regret the delay in answering your letter of March 10. An extended absence due to illness has left me far behind in much of my work.

Our department has no formally-approved policy for public information. The attached documents, however, outline informal guidelines which we generally follow in our activities.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Schallert, Chief  
Information and Publication Services

Enclosure
Mr. Donald A. Clyde  
118 Sixth Street  
Brookings, South Dakota 57006

Dear Mr. Clyde:

I certainly am pleased that you contacted me personally regarding the request that you had made to our Division of Information and Publications and to which you received no response.

I am enclosing the proposed philosophy and objectives of the Division. I hope this reaches you in time to be of use to you.

Again, thanks for contacting me.

Sincerely,

Don Barnhart  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

Enclosure
Mr. Donald A. Clyde  
118 6th Street  
Brookings, South Dakota 57006  

Dear Mr. Clyde:  

Your letter of March 10, addressed to Mr. Gary Hansen, has been referred to me. Mr. Hansen has resigned from the Department of Public Instruction and no one is available in the Publications Office to answer your letter.  

The Department of Public Instruction has not developed a definite policy for communicating with the public. I am sure that Mr. Hansen had a policy which was developed in cooperation with the former State Superintendent and the State Board of Education. However, this was a verbal policy and would no longer be in force since the change in the administration of this office and the resignation of Mr. Hansen.  

Perhaps when a new information specialist is employed, a written policy will be developed. Until that time we would have no information to supply.  

Sincerely yours,  

F. R. Wanek  
Director of Special Services  

FRW:mh
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Carter, Richard F. et al. Communities And Their Schools (Stanford University, 1960), (Mimeographed).


Gray, Richard G. Project Public Information Finale, (Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction, November, 1970).


