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# A Study of Attitudes and Feelings about Competency Based Testing in a Selected Eastern Nebraska Public School District

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A STUDY OF ATTITUDES AND FEELINGS  
ABOUT COMPETENCY BASED TESTING IN A  
SELECTED EASTERN NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty  
University of Nebraska  
at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

David E. Cook

April 1981

UMI Number: EP74185

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the Graduate Faculty, University of Nebraska,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
Specialist in Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Supervisory Committee

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Chairman

April 21, 1984  
Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher wishes to thank those administrators and staff members who participated in the study and the graduate school committee members who guided the researcher in writing this research paper.

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Chapter I  
INTRODUCTION

The minimum competency movement can be viewed as a national response of concern about the supposed decline in academic skills in the nation's schools. When high school graduates have trouble reading a newspaper, balancing a checkbook, or filling out a job application, questions about the quality of their schooling are bound to be raised. Thus the notion of basic levels of accomplishment for all students has gained wide national appeal.

As a result state legislatures or state departments of education, in at least 33 states, have adopted some kind of minimum competency requirements for obtaining a grade promotion or receiving a diploma. All of this could be linked to the back-to-the-basics movement which states youngsters should be competent in the fundamentals.<sup>1</sup>

There have been few previous in-depth area studies conducted on how to go about competency testing. In the rush to jump on the minimum competency bandwagon, many important questions have remained unanswered. For example: (1) what kinds of tests should be given, (2) should there be one set of standards for all students nationwide or should the state or local districts make up their own tests, (3) what types of tests should be used, (4) should educators be held responsible for unsuccessful students,

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<sup>1</sup>Gene I. Maeroff, "Brouhaha Over Competency Testing," Saturday Review, 43 - July 8, 1978.



and (5) how high should the minimum levels be placed?

The competencies that are usually tested are generally life skills and academic skills. The tests used to measure life skills include exercises such as studying a road map and figuring out directions or selecting a meal from a menu and adding up the cost. According to Harlan (1975), the academic skills are reading, spelling, inquiry, writing, and math.<sup>2</sup> These traditionally have been tested during the junior high years.

Testing technology is laden with many difficult problems. The concerns over minimum competency testing are magnified because of the consequences to the student who fails. If the burden of proof for learning is placed upon the student, the court system would require a fair, equitable, and relevant test.<sup>3</sup>

The three major measurement problems that have caused the most concern are (1) reliability, (2) validity, and (3) bias. Reliability involves the stability or consistency of scores obtained by a given individual when successive measures are taken with the same instrument or with equivalent tests. A test is reliable if the repeated use produces consistent results. The test should produce similar results when similar types of students are tested,

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<sup>2</sup>Hugh A. Harlan, Nebraska Assessment Battery of Learning Skills - N-ABLES (Lincoln: Nebraska Department of Education, 1975) p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Rodney P. Riegel and Ned B. Lovell, "Minimum Competency Testing", Fastback No. 137 - Phi Delta Kappa - 1980, p. 24.

regardless of who gives the test. Overlooking time limits, according to Gearheart/Willenberg (1974), or any other deviation from details of administration may affect reliability to a considerable extent.<sup>4</sup>

An instrument is considered valid if it measures effectively that which it is designed to measure. Each test should be considered in relation to the particular use the test administrator has in mind. It may be a highly valid test for a given purpose and be unusable for some other related, but different, purpose.<sup>5</sup> Crucial to validity is a clear set of objectives. One cannot accomplish the development of a valid test without specific objectives. The competencies or learning experiences to produce them that are to be tested must be in the curriculum that is taught. If there is a discrepancy between curriculum objectives and test objectives, the tests are invalid. It would be unfair to test a student if the competencies tested were not in the school curriculum. Riegel and Lovell (1980) believe that instructional validity also requires that a comparison be made between test objectives and classroom activities and topics. The test items should measure subjects that are taught.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Bill Gearheart and Ernest P. Willenberg, Application of Pupil Assessment Information (Denver: Love Publishing Company, 1974) p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup>Riegel and Lovell, op. cit. p. 25.

The possibility of bias in tests or in test items should always be investigated by a test user. Whenever possible, there should be an investigation of possible differences in criterion-related validity for ethnic, sex, or other subsamples that can be identified when the test is given. When technically feasible, studies should be performed separately on samples differing in national origin,<sup>5</sup> race, sex, or religious affiliation.<sup>7</sup> The American Psychological Association, Inc. believes that:

"Unless a difference is observed on samples of substantial size, and unless there is a reasonable sound psychological or sociological theory upon which to explain an observed difference, the difference should be viewed with caution."<sup>8</sup>

Most educators agree that the problem of measurement is real. Many feel that minimum competency testing is inevitable even if the tests that are used are imperfect.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most educators recognize that from time to time change is necessary. In fact, it is inevitable if curriculum quality is to be improved. The competency based testing program is a prime example of one such change that may improve the quality of instructional programs in our public schools. The long range promise and, ultimately, the justification of competency based testing is to increase

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<sup>7</sup>American Psychological Association, Standards For Educational & Psychological Tests (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, Inc., 1974) p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

student learning in school and greater success in life.<sup>9</sup>

Pressure for competency based testing began in 1976 from mandates by state legislatures and state boards of education in many of our states. At first, it was known as a competency-based high school graduation testing program. Since 1976, the movement has evolved into an early warning testing program to identify students needing remedial assistance. The push for competency based testing by: (1) parents, (2) state legislatures, (3) state boards of education (4) some teacher groups and (5) school boards has resulted in many states now requiring a competency test or a minimum competency assurance at one or more grades at the elementary, junior high or senior high school levels.<sup>10</sup>

What are the attitudes and feelings of the selected school district teachers concerning competency based testing? In 1979, the selected school district formed a task force to investigate the pros and cons of competency based testing. Members of the investigating team worked at the state and local level to study the feasibility of competency testing.

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<sup>9</sup>H. H. McAshan, Competency-Based Education and Behavioral Objectives (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1979) p. 30.

<sup>10</sup>Chris Pipho, "Introduction", What's Happening In Minimum Competency Testing (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1979) p. 1.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to determine the attitudes and feelings of a selected eastern Nebraska public school district teaching staff concerning the use of competency based testing for their students in their district.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

"The aboriginal logical sin from which flows bad intellectual consequences, is the failure to define."<sup>11</sup>

The following terms will be used in the study and survey:<sup>12</sup>

1. Accountability is the process in which an individual, group, or institution is held responsible for pupil achievement, usually measured by means of a test.

2. Basic Skills are the traditional school-taught skills in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, inquiry, and mathematics e.g., add, subtract, multiply, and divide, punctuate and capitalize correctly, etc.

3. Competencies are statements which identify specific skills, processes, and learnings students are expected to accomplish in school.

4. Content Validity is the extent to which the test items represent the curriculum to which the test-takers have been exposed.

5. Failure Rate is the proportion or percentage of students who do not pass a test or examination.

6. Instructional Validity is a measure of the extent to which the school or school district's stated curriculum objectives were translated into topics actually taught in the district's classroom.

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<sup>11</sup>John Dewey, How We Think, rev. ed. (Boston, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1933) p. 160.

<sup>12</sup>Peter W. Airasian, George F. Madaus, and Joseph J. Pedulla. Minimal Competency Testing (Englewood Cliffs: Educational Technology Publications, 1979) p. xv - xvii.

7. Life Skills are pupil performances which involve the application of school-learned basic skills to real-life situations, e.g., balance a checkbook, write a business letter, complete a job application, etc.

8. Minimal Competency Testing is a program in which students are tested to determine their mastery of certain skills defined as essential aspects of school learning or essential for performing tasks routinely confronted in adult life.

9. Standard Score is a score given in terms of standard deviation units from the mean of a test score distribution; a negative standard score indicates performance below the mean and a positive standard score indicates performance above the mean.

10. Standardized Test is a test designed to be administered and scored under uniform conditions; used to obtain comparable measures in different classes or schools and usually interpreted in terms of predetermined norms.

11. Standards are levels of performance; in minimal competency graduation programs, the standard is the lowest score which a student may attain or receive remediation of some type and still be granted a high school diploma.

12. Test is a sample of behavior used to make inferences about a pupil's performance on a larger domain of similar behaviors.

### ASSUMPTIONS

Competency based testing is here to stay and will be with us in some form or another. According to McAshan - 1979, some type of competency based education is now required in 36 states, three more since the study by Maeroff - 1978. Others are considering a state-level competency test graduation requirement. Schools and school districts all across our nation are currently developing competency based education programs.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>McAshan, op. cit., p. 7 - 10.

Minimal competency testing focuses upon the basic essential academic skills of reading, spelling, inquiry, writing, and math.<sup>14</sup> In its present movement, the states will probably determine the educational objectives. If this is presumed, it seems likely that local school districts will conduct programs so that the objectives for grade-to-grade promotion and high school graduation requirements will be met.<sup>15</sup>

It will be assumed the individuals who complete the survey form are a competent source of data and will provide it willingly. It is also believed that the individuals have the ability to understand the questions asked, as intended by the researcher, and that the individuals will answer the questions on the form intended and with integrity.

The eastern Nebraska school district that is in this study and other districts across the state will develop, in compliance with state rules and regulations, a minimum competency testing program. To do this, many questions have to be answered in order to produce a reliable testing instrument. A properly constructed and administered survey will provide this information.

#### LIMITATIONS

This study will be limited to a survey of attitudes and feelings about competency based testing in a selected

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<sup>14</sup>Harlan, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Arthur E. Wise, A Critique of Minimal Competency Testing (Washington, D.C.: Rand Corporation, 1977) p. 1.

eastern Nebraska public school district. (It is an unwritten policy of the school district that its name not be used with any study concerning the district.) The teaching staff that will be surveyed will include classroom instructors, media and library personnel, special education teachers, and guidance counselors. The study will not be concerned with specific competency identification and codification, specific curriculum developments or modifications, test development, or the test validation.

#### PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

Much of the data that will be used in this research paper will be received from a survey that will be administered to the selected school district teaching staff. The survey form used will help primarily in determining attitudes and feelings concerning the use of competency based testing for students of the selected school district teaching staff.

The style of the survey format will be multiple-choice. It will consist of an introductory question with a choice of five or more possible responses. The respondent will merely check the suggested answer that seems most agreeable or best applies to him or her.

The survey form will be field tested to determine its reliability and if all questions are understood and the responses properly relate to the question. Copies of the survey will be given to thirteen department chairpersons with a cover letter explaining the intent and use of the survey. They will be requested to read it over and answer the questions and make any comments concerning the surveyed



topic. Instructions on returning the survey form to the researcher will be included. A second test of the survey form will be given to twelve administrative heads at the central office. Basically, the same procedure will be followed.

If any discrepancies are found with the survey questions, responses, or the instructions; they will be changed to make the survey more reliable. A fifty percent return rate will be acceptable on any two of the field test exercises.

The population that will be surveyed will be a random sampling of certified public classroom teachers, and guidance counselors in the elementary, junior high, and high schools of the selected school district (approximately 120 individuals). A predetermined number of samples will be drawn at random (25% of the elementary staff members and 25% of the secondary staff members) and this will serve as the population for purposes of random sampling. The researcher wanted a balance of elementary and secondary respondents in the survey; however, no distinction will be made between the two in the analysis of the data.

The survey form that will be used is modeled after the questionnaire designed by the Educational Commission of the States.<sup>16</sup> The survey will have ten questions:

1. Should competency based testing be used in the school district for testing students?
2. What competencies should be tested?
3. How should the competencies be measured?

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<sup>16</sup>Henry M. Brickell, Minimum Competency Testing. (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1978) p. 3.

4. At what grade(s) should the competency test be administered?
5. What should be the number of levels of performance?
6. Who should determine the levels of performance?
7. To whom should the minimum competency testing program results be applied?
8. What should happen to a school if a high ratio of students within that school fail?
9. What should happen if the student fails the examination?
10. Should educators be held accountable for unsuccessful students?

Space at the end of the survey will be made available for comments. These comments will be listed with no additional statistical analysis or comparison study made on them. The researcher desires that only one answer be marked (except question number 4) by the respondents. Any question that has more than one response will be deleted from the survey results. Also, any comments that are not written in the space provided will not be listed. When the forms have been collected and tabulated, the raw score data will be determined for each item. These will be later converted to percentage scores which will indicate the degree of agreement among the respondents to each item.<sup>17</sup> The researcher believes a 30 percent agreement is acceptable or significant for this study on any of the survey questions. A return rate of 50 percent will be acceptable for the number of survey forms completed and returned for the project by this researcher. This figure will be considered

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<sup>17</sup>J. Francis Rummel, An Introduction to Research Procedures In Education - 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) p. 120 - 122.

significant and acceptable for making statistical analysis and comparisons from the data received.

### ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

#### Chapter I

Chapter I will be an introduction to the research project. It will identify the problem, purpose of the study, and the importance of the project. The definition of terms, assumptions, and the scope and limitations of the study will also be included.

#### Chapter II

In chapter II a review of the literature will be presented. It will include a summary of current studies related to the research problem.

#### Chapter III

Chapter III will be a description of the research methodology. It will identify the research design, sample of the population used, and the testing instrument. The process for data collection and analysis will be presented.

#### Chapter IV

Results of the attitude survey will be analyzed in chapter IV. Tables and charts will be used for the presentation of factual data. A summary of the research findings will conclude this chapter.

#### Chapter V

The summary and conclusion from data collected will be included in chapter V. Recommendations concerning the research findings and recommendations for further research will be made.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Results of this survey may be used to help determine whether to have a testing program at all, what is to be tested, how to measure, when to administer the test, one level or many levels of performance for students or schools, teacher accountability, and then what to do with those students who fail once they have been identified.

In 1979, the selected school district formed a task force to investigate the merits of competency based testing. An elementary school principal and two administrators from the central office were involved. The elementary principal was involved with a special report that was made to the State Board of Education and the two administrators attended the Unicameral hearing in 1979 on LR No. 124 and reported back to the task force.<sup>18</sup> The classroom teachers in the district have been concerned with competency based testing because N-ABLES and ORBIT (Objective Referenced Bank of Items and Tests) are being used.

The major strength of competency testing appears to point to the identification of specific learning objectives for students, especially in the lower grades. The full impact of competency testing on education is still uncertain. This survey will provide data that will be helpful in answering the district's questions concerning competency

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<sup>18</sup>Nebraska Unicameral, Committee On Education, Competency Based Testing, Hearing, LR 124, October 16, 1979 (Lincoln: Office of Senator Koch, 1979), p. 1 - 2.

testing. Further studies should follow to determine state-wide reaction to such a program.

This survey can serve as a spring-board for such a state-wide study. In the selected school district, the classroom instructors, media and library personnel, special education teachers, and guidance counselors will have input what the district may do as a result of this survey.

Chapter II  
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Each generation gives new form to the aspirations that shape education in its time. What may be emerging as a mark of our generation is a widespread renewal of concern for the quality and intellectual aims of education. We have reached a level of public education in America where a considerable portion of our population has become interested in questions that until recently was the concern of specialists: "...what shall we teach and to what end?"<sup>19</sup>

One of the areas in which this renewal of concern has expressed itself is in student competencies and evaluation in the elementary and secondary schools. According to Bonney and Hampleman (1962), pupil evaluation is the process of gathering, recording, and interpreting data about pupils which will constitute evidence of the amount and quality of the progress they have made toward achieving the objectives set up for them by the school.<sup>20</sup>

The research by Ebel (1979) indicates that the efficient use of measurement or evaluation often requires special guidance and assistance. Students, parents, educators, and school officials need to know periodically how successful their efforts have been so they can decide what practices to

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<sup>19</sup>Jerome S. Bruner, The Process of Education (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962) p. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Merl E. Bonney and Richard S. Hampleman, Personal-Social Evaluation Techniques (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research In Education, Inc., 1962) p. 1.

continue and which ones to change. Ebel believes it is the function of testing and measurement to provide those concerned with this information.<sup>21</sup>

There are many types and varieties of tests that educators can choose from. Some tests are used for decisions to select or reject applicants for jobs, schools, or other opportunities. The test score that is gotten from a test is a basis for a prediction, one that is explicit or one that is implied towards accomplishing a goal or objective. The test score is used to predict or estimate a likely level of performance on a criterion variable external to the test itself. A test score may be used to verify that a person has met some designated standard, that a student is qualified for a remedial program, or that a person is qualified to perform skilled tasks.<sup>22</sup>

Finding agreement on a definition of being qualified or competent is no easy task. The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines competent as "...adequate ability or qualities capable, adequate for a purpose." Webster's definition is straightforward enough; however, the problem is pinpointing the purposes that students should be "capable or adequate for."

Defining "minimal competency testing" is no easy matter, either. According to Arthur Wise:

"Minimal competency testing is the most recent evolution of the 'accountability movement' and of the 'competency-based education movement':"

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<sup>21</sup>Robert L. Ebel, Essentials of Educational Measurement, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979) p. 20.

<sup>22</sup>American Psychological Association, op. cit., p. 56.

- (1) It focuses attention upon the basic academic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic.
- (2) It presumes that the state will set educational objectives.
- (3) It presumes that the local school district will conduct its program so that the objectives will be achieved.
- (4) It emphasizes minimal objectives for grade-to-grade promotion and/or high school graduation.
- (5) It supposes that objectives will be stated and explicit and that a statewide test will determine whether the objectives were attained.<sup>23</sup>

The competency movement is difficult to define. There is neither a single spokesperson nor a consensus about who needs it. The movement is considered by some to be an important and influential development in education since the launching of Sputnik in the late 1950's. The interest in competency testing has come from many areas, according to Gonder (1978): (1) teachers who are concerned about declining test scores, (2) employers who complain they must offer on-the-job training for basics to high school graduates, (3) taxpayers are rebelling against the cost of education in the light of declining enrollments and apparent declining test results, and (4) colleges are concerned about offering increased numbers of remedial courses for incoming freshmen students.<sup>24</sup>

The research by Neill (1978) indicates that the competency

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<sup>23</sup>Wise, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>Peggy Gonder, The Competency Challenge: What Schools Are Doing (Arlington, Virginia: National School Public Relations Association, 1978) p. 8.



test movement is not new. Its roots can be traced back in ancient history. About 2,000 years ago, the Greeks attempted to cultivate competency in oratory. Early primitive societies trained their youth towards making them more competent in the survival skills. Throughout history in the fields of medicine, law, education, and engineering all have aimed at making their practitioners more proficient. In many fields, tests have been used for determining who enters and who graduates from a profession.<sup>25</sup>

More than 100 years ago, standards to judge student achievement and competency appeared. In 1865, educators in New York developed competency tests to determine students' ability. These tests were known as Regent Examinations and were used to test in approximately 25 subject areas. They were later used to award diplomas and to measure the performance of local school districts. They were later used to spot students who had learning difficulties.<sup>26</sup>

According to Neill, the general development tests (GED) have been used since 1942, to test individuals over the age of 18 and out of school to qualify to receive a high school equivalence diploma. The tests were designed to measure reading, mathematics, and interpretation of graphs and charts.

Neill claims the minimum competency testing movement

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<sup>25</sup>Shirley Boes Neill, The Competency Movement - Problems and Solutions (Sacramento, Calif.: American Association of School Administrators, 1978) p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

has been a trend towards accountability and such tests are not new. The British have used an examination system similar to competency based testing for over 100 years.

In early Boston, the schools used the Common Exam and as was mentioned earlier New York had used the Regent Examination. Riegel (1980) states that in the early history of our country, it was common for rural school districts to administer competency tests during the 8th grade for admission to the 9th grade.<sup>27</sup>

The starting point for the more modern minimal competency testing trends was derived from the educational objectives movement which gained prominence in the early 1960's. The first step to the rise of the objective movement came from the field of educational technology. The use of teaching machines and programmed instruction gained popularity in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The central theme for the programmed instruction approach was the identification of the terminal behavior that the student was expected to demonstrate at the conclusion of the programmed sequence of instruction according to Airasian (1979).<sup>28</sup> Out of the programmed instruction movement came a book written by Robert Mager (1962). His book provided examples and procedures for stating objectives that most educators could implement. Mager felt that if:

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<sup>27</sup>Riegel, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>28</sup>Airasian, op. cit., p. 34.

"...an instructor decides he will teach his students something, several kinds of activity are necessary on his part if he is to succeed. He must first decide upon the goals he intends to reach at the end of his course or program. He must then select procedures, content, and methods that are relevant to the objectives; cause the students to interact with appropriate subject matter in accordance with principles of learning; and, finally measure or evaluate the student's performance according to the objectives or goals originally selected."<sup>29</sup>

In the early 1960's, Airasian (1979) felt the federal government tipped the scales toward the widespread use of educational objectives. A management technique which called for a clear identification of program objectives was developed. It charted the stages required to meet these objectives with a follow-up evaluation of the extent to which the objectives were attained. The ideas inherent in this accountability approach spread to education in the form of Planning-Programmed-Budgeting Systems (PPBS) and HEW guidelines for program evaluation and specification.<sup>30</sup>

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965. The law provided funds for local school districts to improve education, particularly for disadvantaged students. The Act was later amended for local school districts to conduct evaluations of their programs. The emphasis on formulated objectives in terms of student behavior and evaluation was quickly emulated, according to Unruh and Alexander (1970), by the state authorities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Robert F. Mager, Preparing Instructional Objectives (Palo Alto, Calif.: Fearon Publishers, 1962) p. 1.

<sup>30</sup>Airasian, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>31</sup>Glenys G. Unruh and William M. Alexander, Innovations In Secondary Education (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, Inc., 1970) p. 224 - 228.

The influence of the objectives movement can be observed in the minimal competency testing programs because the specification of precise statements about what students are to do are also required. These statements are competencies which denote the basic fundamental capabilities the student should possess.<sup>32</sup>

The next milestone to the competency movement came in 1969 with the "Right To Read" program. In launching this program, U.S. Commissioner of Education - James E. Allen, Jr., pointed out that approximately one-half of the nation's unemployed young people were functional illiterates. Commissioner Allen further stated:

"We should immediately set for ourselves the goal of assuring that by the end of the 1970's the right to read shall be a reality for all - that no one shall be leaving our schools without the skill and the desire necessary to read to the full limits of his capability."<sup>33</sup>

During this same time, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores had fallen in both the verbal section and the math section. The table below represents the average national scores from 1972 through 1980 for the verbal and math skills that were tested:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Airasian, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>33</sup>Ruth Ann Davis, The School Library Media Center, 2nd ed., (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1974) p. 123.

<sup>34</sup>Mildred McQueen, "Accountability - Pt. III - National Assessment" - Research Report (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1971) p. 1 - 4.

Table I

SAT Verbal Scores  
1972-1980

<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>
453	445	444	434	431	429	429	427	424

SAT Mathematics Scores

484	481	480	472	472	470	468	467	466
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The public pointed their finger at the schools claiming there was a lack of emphasis on the basics. Parents favored a return to traditional teaching styles, including more homework and stricter discipline.<sup>35</sup>

Tracing the further development of the competency movement, the Denver Public Schools required their students to pass a competency test for graduation as early as 1961. Oregon was the first state to pass legislation for a state-wide competency testing program in 1973, according to Riegel (1980). Many state legislatures and state boards of education began to mandate minimum competency testing policies in 1976. It became known as competency based-education high school graduation programs. However, now the movement has evolved into an early warning test system to detect students who need remedial training and assistance. Since 1979, Frahn and Covington (1979) state that many schools require a

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<sup>35</sup>Mildred McQueen, "Accountability - Pt. III - National Assessment" - Research Report (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1971) p. 1 - 4.

minimum testing program at the elementary, junior high, and at the senior high level.<sup>36</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, the Elementary - Secondary Education Act of 1965 provided funds to states to assist them in developing competency standards. Parnell (1978) estimated that in 1978, approximately 65% of high school seniors must pass a competency test as a condition for graduation. The 1978 Gallup Poll on public attitudes toward public schools indicated that two out of three that were surveyed favored school students be required to pass a standard proficiency examination to receive a high school diploma.<sup>37</sup> H.E.W. Secretary Joseph Califano stated that he recommended the use of competency tests at state and local levels. He supported the U.S. Department of Education decision to insure that training and information would be available to help state and local districts.<sup>38</sup>

School districts all across our nation are currently developing competency based education testing programs. States who have lead this movement include: Colorado,

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<sup>36</sup>Robert Frahm and Jamie Covington, What's Happening In Minimum Competency Testing (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1979) p. 1.

<sup>37</sup>Dale Parnell, "The Case For Competency-Based Education", Fastback No. 118 (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1978) p. 7.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

Nevada, Florida, North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, New York, and Arizona.<sup>39</sup> Spurred by national concern that too many of our high school graduates were seriously deficient in the basics necessary to function as effective and useful citizens, the Educational Testing Service (ETS) publication reported on federal, state, and local school district activities. The ETS (Table II) report described activities relating to minimum standards and basic skills assessment of thirty-one states. The 1977 ETS report described activities that were part of a continuing process which was subject to change and modification by the states. The information on the report includes: (1) states that have passed legislation, (2) minimum competency programs that have been mandated at the state and/or local level, (3) what grade levels are assessed, and (4) the use of the standards and tests.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Neill, op. cit., p. 41 - 46

<sup>40</sup>ETS Information Report, Basic Skills Assessment Around The Nation (New York: Educational Testing Service, (1977) p. 2 - 3.

TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING \*

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
California	Local school district	Once between 4-6 grades; once between 7-9; & twice between 10-11 grades	Reading, comprehension, writing computation skills	For remediation & grade promotion decisions
Colorado	Local boards	9-12 test; twice a year	Local district option	Local district option for high school graduation
Delaware	State Dept. of Education after baseline test is given	Baseline instrument grade 11 - 1978	Reading, writing & math	For high school graduation
Florida	State & local Boards	Grades 3, 5, 8, & 11	Basic skill areas functional literacy	For high school graduation, grade promotion & early exit from high school
Georgia	State board & State Dept.	Grade 4, 8, & 11	Grades 4 & 8 reading, math social studies & science - 11 grade test under development	State board of Education has not taken final action on the use of the tests yet



TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
Idaha	State Board of Education	Grades 9 - 12	Reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling	For high school graduation at the option of the local districts
Kentucky	State Department with Task Force Assist-	Grades 3, 5, 8, and 11	Criterion referenced test in reading, writing and arithmetic	For high school graduation and grade promotion
Louisiana	State	Grades 4, 8, and 11	Basic communication & computational skill areas with criterion refer. test	No mention of graduation or grade promotion
Maine	State Department of Education	Grade 11	Determined by commissioner of education & state wide committee	For high school graduation
Maryland	State Board of Education	Grades 2 - 12 Grades 3, 7, 9 and 11	Reading	For grade promotion and high school graduation

TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
Michigan	State Department of	Grades 4, 7, & 10	Reading and Math	For local district use
Missouri	State Department of Education	Grade 8	Application of reading, mathematics, gov't. economic skills	No mandate for graduation or grade promotion
Nebraska	Local school districts	Begins in grade 5 and continues until mastery is achieved by each student in each skill	Reading, writing and mathematics	State developed test is not to be used for grade retention or promotion
Nevada	State Board of Education	Grades 6, 9, & 12	Reading, writing and mathematics	For high school graduation
New Hampshire	State Dept. of Education	Grade 4 - Grade 8 & 12 under development	Communications & Mathematics	Grade promotion & high school graduation not mentioned
New Jersey	State Dept. of Education	Grades 3, 6, 9, & 11	Reading and mathematics - life skills under development	Ident. of students needing instructional assistance

TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
New Mexico	State Dept.	Elementary level - grade choice up to local district & grade 10	Elementary - local option Secondary - proficiency battery based on adult performance APL & writing sample	Proficiency endorsement on high school diploma if test is passed
New York	State Board of Regents	Grades 9 - 12	Reading and math with a criterion referenced test; & civics, citizenship, pract. science, health, drug education, writing and language skills	for high school graduation
North Carolina	By competency test commission created by law	Grade 11 - beginning in 1978-79	to be determined by Competency test commission	for high school graduation
"	"	Grades 1 & 2 criterion referenced test	"	To be determined by competency test commission
"	"	Grades 3, 6, & 9 - "norm" referenced test	"	"

TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
Oregon	Local districts	District option	Reading, writing, & computation - local option for personal dev. - social respon. & career development	For high school graduation
Oklahoma	Decision will follow baseline data test	Grades 3, 6, & 9 Grade 12	Reading Survival skills	Decision will follow baseline data test
Rhode Island	- - - - -	Grades 4, 8, & age 17 used in pilot test	Comprehension - analysis and evaluation known as the "life skills"	For local dist. & state dept. use - competency base high school diploma under study
Tennessee	State Dept. of Education	Grades 11 & 12	Reading, math, grammar and spelling	For high school graduation class of 1982
"	State Board of Education - Nov. 10, 1977	Grades 4, 5, 6, and 8	Subjects of discretion of local district	Remediation

TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
Utah	Local school district	Option of local school district	Reading, writing, speaking, listening arithmetic, democratic gov't - consumerism & problem solving	For high school graduation class of 1980
Vermont	State Board of Education	Continuous	Reading, writing, speaking, listening and math - area of reasoning is under study	For high school graduation
Virginia	Broad - State Specific - Local	- - - - -	Functional literacy in comm. skills - reading, writing & speaking. Computational skills, history & cultures of U.S. including process of dem. gov't & economic system. Ability to pursue higher education or gain employment	For high school graduation - class of 1981 and remediation

TABLE II STATE ACTIVITY  
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING

STATE	SETTING OF STANDARDS	GRADE LEVELS ASSESSED	SKILL AREAS ASSESSED	USE OF STANDARDS AND TESTS
Virginia	State Board of Education in cooperation with local districts	All grades yearly with first emphasis in grades K-6	Reading, communications & mathematics	To measure progress of individual students
Washington	Local Districts	4th & 8th grades	Standardized achievement test in reading, math & language arts	For school district and parent use
Wyoming	Local districts will establish specific standards	- - - - -	Reading, writing, & computing with proficiency. Process and structure of democratic governance and free enterprise	For high school graduation

\* Barbara S. Miller, Minimum Competency Testing - A Report of Four Regional Conferences (St. Louis, Missouri: CEMREL, Inc., 1978) p. 63 - 72.

McAshan states that in 1980, over thirty-six states have taken legislative or state board of education action to identify minimum basic or life skills that students need to attain for graduation. Many of the other states have studied the issues through task force studies, interim and educational commission studies, or some other form of group study. In 1979, eight states had introduced minimum competency testing legislation. Many seem to be pending in the state legislatures or have yet to be enacted.

The Nebraska Assessment Battery of Essential Learning Skills (N-ABLES), pronounced "enables", has been developed to aid schools in Nebraska in their testing program. N-ABLES identifies certain essential skills and provides a means of determining whether or not students have mastered basic skills. The Nebraska Department of Education believes N-ABLES will serve as a uniform standard for educational literacy and will assist the students to experience greater success in learning.<sup>41</sup>

The Westside Community School District of Omaha, Nebraska, developed its own approach to minimum competency testing. Impetus for the competency program initially came from the Westside teaching staff, when the back to the basics movement was first initiated. The district parents had voiced concern about the writing skills of students; however, no organized effort was developed to

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<sup>41</sup>Harlan, op. cit., p. 1-2.

encourage the district to establish competencies. The district decided to set up a long range planning committee to study its needs and to determine what direction they wanted to go. The committee consisted of fifteen teachers and two principals. The intent of the committee was to plan three to five years ahead to establish areas and levels of competency for parent, student, and board reaction. Guidelines for the implementation of the competency program were established:

1. All students with the exception of special education students would be required to take competency tests.
2. Tests would be waived for students with identified learning disabilities and this would be noted on their transcripts.
3. Tests would be given early in a student's high school career so that appropriate remedial help could be given.
4. Minimum competency requirements would not dominate the curriculum to the point of excluding courses with expectations well beyond the minimum.<sup>42</sup>

The Westside School District competency requirements are for: reading, writing, math, the democratic process, problem solving, oral communication, and consumerism. Beginning with the graduating class of 1974-75, the Westside School District has used the competencies as part of their graduation requirements.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Westside Community Schools, Minimum Competency Graduation Requirements - A Program That Works (Omaha, Nebraska: Westside Community Schools) p. 4.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



Presently, in 1980, the competency movement has centered around three issues:

1. Back-to-the-basics
2. Minimal competency
3. Competency-based education<sup>44</sup>

Parents and other groups who favor back-to-the-basics approach favor traditional teaching styles, more homework, more rote memorization, and walls where once "open" classrooms existed. Such schools would stress discipline, patriotism, and the three "R's". Gonder states the general public feels the schools are offering too many frills. If they would return to the basics, students would become more proficient in these skills.

Unlike the back-to-the-basics movement, which focuses on curriculum and teaching methods, the minimal competency technique depends upon testing.<sup>45</sup> While the push for basics comes from parents and teachers, the desire to set minimal competency standards has been initiated from state legislatures, state boards of education, and even some members of Congress. Gonder reports that some groups want to give a test as the final hurdle for high school graduation. They believe this would add validity to the high school diploma by documenting skills the student could perform.

While minimal competency focuses basically on testing, competency-based education, on the other hand, is a broad

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<sup>44</sup>Gonder, op. cit. p. 11.

<sup>45</sup>Gonder, op. cit. p. 12.

approach that seeks to relate school goals to what occurs in the classroom. Most theorists define competency-based education as "...a system for organizing and evaluating instruction". Competency-based education (CBE) differs from the traditional approach in requiring students to master skills which have been preset to standards.<sup>46</sup>

According to Thompson (1977), essential requirements of demonstrated proficiency generate a system of inter-dependent elements:

1. Specifications of outcomes or competencies to be known by students in performance terms.
2. Instruction leading to mastery of these outcomes.
3. Evaluation of outcome mastery.
4. Certification on the basis of mastery.
5. Program improvement in response to student achievement.<sup>47</sup>

The whole concept of CBE is that it consists of the systematic linkage of competency-based instruction, with measurement, and certification built around specific outcomes.

What is the future of competency based testing in America? First, the complexities of minimal competency testing are many and real. Several states have delayed

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<sup>46</sup>Sydney Thompson, Competency-Based Education - Theory and Practice (Burlington, California: Association of California School Administrators - School Management Digest, Series 1, No. 9, 1977) p. 3.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. p. 4.

mandating their programs because of technical problems they have encountered. Second, the momentum has slowed especially when the program has been tied to the receipt of a high school diploma. On the positive side, the use of competency tests remains high for early diagnosis of learning problems. Airasian (1979) supports the public viewpoint that if schools are not satisfactorily teaching the basic skills, the minimal competency testing movement will be with us for many years to come in one form or another.

The competency movement is more than a new form of testing, according to Airasian:

"...it can provide the impetus to re-examine our educational system and our expectations for it. If questions are not posed...by the public, the movement will be little more than an historical curiosity. The minimal competency testing movement may do much of what it is capable of doing: (1) increase our knowledge of schooling (teaching) and, (3) the process of education. In accomplishing this end, the minimal competency testing movement may engender an educational system which is both desirable and capable of preparing students who are well-ground in the basics of reading, writing, and mathematics. <sup>48</sup>

Competency activity in the states and in local school districts has been described as constantly changing. Under such conditions, it is impossible to know for certain what its long term effects on education will be.

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<sup>48</sup> Airasian, op. cit., p. 219 - 220.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this descriptive study was to assess the attitudes and feelings of a selected eastern Nebraska public school district teaching staff toward the use of competency based testing in their school district.

To assess these attitudes and feelings a survey instrument was developed. The survey form which was modeled after the Educational Commission of the States questionnaire, was pretested to determine if the selected staff members understood the ten survey questions and the researcher's desire to know if they wanted to have competency based testing for the students in their school district. The pretest or field test instrument was administered to thirteen department chairpersons in the researcher's building and ten central office administrators. They were instructed to return the forms to the researcher after completing the survey. One change was made as a result of the field testing. Of the twenty-one survey forms that were returned, three of the selected staff members answered only the first question and did not complete the remainder. The introductory paragraph was changed to instruct those who took the survey to answer "all" questions as if minimum competency testing were to be used in their district.

The school district teaching staff population, according to records in the central office, is 480 staff members. By level, there are 230 elementary staff members and 250

secondary staff members. The population, that was surveyed to determine their attitudes about competency based testing, consisted of kindergarten through twelfth grade certified public classroom teachers, library and media personnel, special education teachers, and guidance counselors in the selected school district. Both elementary and secondary staff members were included in the sampling because the researcher wanted a stratification or balance of respondents from the district staff members. No distinctions were made between the two groups in the analysis of the data. The researcher wanted one-fourth of the total teaching staff population sampled. Since a variation existed in the population with respect to the characteristics being investigated, the larger the sample the more reliable the results would be, according to Rummel (1964).<sup>49</sup> A total of 58 elementary staff members and 63 secondary staff members were chosen. Random numbers from a table were used to determine which staff members were selected for the survey.<sup>50</sup>

When the staff members were selected they were grouped according to their building. A cover letter was written to the building principal explaining who the researcher was, the purpose of the survey, how the building administrator was to distribute and collect the completed survey forms, and what was to be done with the survey forms after they were returned

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<sup>49</sup>Rummel, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>50</sup>Mosteller, Frederick, Robert E. K. Rourke, and George B. Thomas, Jr. Probability: A First Course. (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1961) p. 288.

to the principal. A similar cover letter was written to the selected staff members explaining the intent of the survey, who the researcher was, and what to do with the completed form. The building administrator was instructed to return the completed forms to the researcher within one school week. Follow-up calls were made to four of the eight elementary schools reminding the building administrator about the deadline of returning the completed survey forms. Two more follow-up calls reminding three of the elementary principals about the survey forms resulted in the district schools returning seventy percent of the survey forms that were sent out.

When the completed survey forms were returned, a tabulation of the results was made. A raw score was determined by counting the number of times a particular answer was marked on the survey form. A percentage score was tabulated by dividing the raw score into the number of times an answer was marked by the total number of respondents who responded to that question. Any question that had more than one response by the individual (except question number four) was deleted from the survey results. The results of the survey will show no distinction between the elementary and secondary respondents. Both the raw score and the percentage score were tabulated from all the total responses with no distinction made between an elementary or secondary respondent. All the comments that were written in the space provided at the end of the survey were included in the results

of the survey. These comments are included in the appendixes. Also, any statements that were not written in the space provided were not included in the results. No statistical analysis or comparison study was made on the comment section of the survey. The comments were copied as they were received from the respondents.

## Chapter IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of this study was to survey a selected eastern Nebraska public school district to determine the attitudes and feelings concerning the use of competency based testing for students in their district. The survey was conducted by the researcher and the results portray the feelings of the selected staff members of the district.

Of the one-hundred and twenty-one survey forms that were sent out, eighty-five were returned. The rate of return was seventy percent. The directions for completing the survey stated that "all" questions were to be answered only once, except question number four. Not all questions were answered by the respondents; some questions were answered more than once (other than question number four). These responses were not tabulated in the final results of the survey. The ten questions, therefore, had a different number of total responses. Of the eighty-five returned surveys, fifteen were returned uncompleted. There were twenty-four respondents who made comments about the survey topic.

The first question on the survey asked the respondents if they wanted competency based testing in their school district. Thirty-four felt that minimum competency testing should be used. Fourteen believed competency testing should not be used. Sixteen thought other means could be used to determine competencies. Thirteen wanted more study and research completed on the topic, eight were undecided.



The second question posed by the survey asked what competencies should be tested. Two wanted the basic skills which applied to the life study areas. Twenty-five felt basic skills in the school subjects were more important. Thirty-one wanted both the basic and life skills tested. Nine wanted more study and research, while two were undecided.

Question three on the survey dealt with how the district should measure the competencies tested. Two thought students should be tested by school performance tests. Sixteen would use paper and pencil tests administered in the classroom. Five wanted simulated job performance situations set up in the classroom. Twenty-seven wanted school performance tests, paper and pencil tests, and simulated performance situations used. Nineteen were undecided.

Question number four on the survey asked at what grade(s) should the competency test be administered. The table below represents the responses of the participants in the survey:

Table III

Responses to Question Four  
On Survey Instrument

14 - 1st Grade	10 - 5th Grade	46 - 9th Grade
12 - 2nd Grade	52 - 6th Grade	17 - 10th Grade
25 - 3rd Grade	7 - 7th Grade	12 - 11th Grade
15 - 4th Grade	21 - 8th Grade	55 - 12th Grade

The responses for grades one through four totaled eighty. The respondents marked grades five through eight a total of ninety times. For grades nine through twelve, one-hundred and thirty responses were made. Most respondents felt the sixth, the ninth, and the twelfth

grades were levels that needed to be tested most often.

The fifth survey question asked what should be the number of levels of performance. Thirteen wanted a single standard set for all. Ten felt a graduated standard should be set according to a student's talents and interests. No respondent felt performance levels should be tied exclusively to a student's ability. Twenty-four thought negotiated standards worked out by the student, the parents, and the teachers were best. There were twenty that were undecided.

The sixth question asked the respondents who should determine the levels of performance. Nine felt they should be determined by national standards. Four thought the state legislature and state board of education should set the levels. Forty-five believed teachers, administrators, recent graduates, employers, parents, and other informed adults should determine the levels. Eight wanted an acceptable failure rate determined by the examiners to determine the levels of performance.

Question seven on the survey asked the respondents to determine to whom should the minimum testing program results be applied. Twenty-eight felt the results should be applied equally to all. Only one believed the evaluation should pertain only to the school. There were thirty respondents who wanted the evaluation to apply only to the student. No respondent felt the minimum competency testing program results should apply to the teacher. Seventeen were undecided.

The eighth question asked what should happen to a school if a high ratio of students within that school failed the competency test. No one felt the school should be put on accreditation probation. Only four believed test retakes should be given. A total of thirty-nine wanted to evaluate and change the curriculum. Nine wanted school probation, test retakes, and the curriculum evaluated. Fifteen were undecided about this question.

Question number nine asked what should happen if the student should fail the examination. Only four thought the student should be retained and/or not receive a diploma. Six felt test retakes should be possible. Nineteen believed the students should be given remedial help. Twenty-four of the respondents wanted the student retained, test retakes given, and remedial help given to the student. Eight were undecided.

The last question on the survey asked should educators be held accountable for unsuccessful students. Only four felt they should be directly responsible for unsuccessful students. Seventeen believed educators should not be held responsible. Five wanted test retakes. A total of thirty-one respondents believed more study and research was needed. Eight were undecided concerning this question.

The comment section of the survey was completed by twenty-four of the respondents. Most comments centered around question number ten. Many felt the teacher could not be held accountable because of the many variables

that would be involved. Some of the respondents believed much more study and research should be carried out on this topic. All the comments are listed in the appendixes.

Table number four lists the questions, the frequency of response, and the percentage of response of the survey.

Table IV  
Frequency and Percentage of Responses  
to Survey Instrument

Survey Items	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
1. Should competency based testing be used in the school district for testing students?		
A. Minimum competency testing should be used.	<u>34</u>	<u>40%</u>
B. Minimum competency testing should not be used.	<u>14</u>	<u>16%</u>
C. Other means can be used to determine competencies.	<u>16</u>	<u>18%</u>
D. More study and research is needed.	<u>13</u>	<u>15%</u>
E. Undecided. (85 responded to this question...)	<u>8</u>	<u>9%</u>
2. What competencies should be tested?		
A. Basic skills applied in the life areas (family, citizenship, work, etc.)	<u>2</u>	<u>3%</u>
B. Basic skills applied in the school subjects (reading, writing, math, social studies, science, etc.)	<u>25</u>	<u>36%</u>
C. All of the above.	<u>31</u>	<u>45%</u>
D. More study and research is needed.	<u>9</u>	<u>13%</u>
E. Undecided. (69 responded to this question)	<u>2</u>	<u>3%</u>

Table IV  
Frequency and Percentage of Responses  
to Survey Instrument

Survey Items	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
3. How should the competencies be measured?		
A. Through school performance tests (paintings, essays, speeches, touchdowns, goals, awards, etc.).	<u>2</u>	<u>3%</u>
B. Paper and pencil tests administered in the classroom.	<u>16</u>	<u>23%</u>
C. Simulated performance situations	<u>5</u>	<u>7%</u>
D. All of the above	<u>27</u>	<u>39%</u>
E. Undecided (69 responded to this question...)	<u>19</u>	<u>28%</u>
4. At what grade(s) should the competency test be administered?		
<u>14 / 4%</u> 1st Grade <u>10 / 3%</u> 5th Grade <u>46 / 16%</u> 9th Grade		
<u>12 / 4%</u> 2nd Grade <u>52 / 18%</u> 6th Grade <u>17 / 6%</u> 10th Grade		
<u>25 / 9%</u> 3rd Grade <u>7 / 2%</u> 7th Grade <u>12 / 4%</u> 11th Grade		
<u>15 / 5%</u> 4th Grade <u>21 / 7%</u> 8th Grade <u>55 / 19%</u> 12th Grade		
(The respondents marked 286 times on question No. 4...)		
5. What should be the number of levels of performance?		
A. A single standard should be set for all.	<u>13</u>	<u>19%</u>
B. A graduated standard should be set for all.	<u>10</u>	<u>15%</u>
C. Differentiated standards should be set according to a student's talents and interests.	<u>0</u>	<u>0%</u>

Table IV  
 Frequency and Percentage of Responses  
 to Survey Instrument

Survey Items	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
D. Negotiated standards should be worked out by the student, the parents, and the teachers (IEP).	<u>24</u>	<u>36%</u>
E. Undecided. (67 responded to this question...)	<u>20</u>	<u>30%</u>
6. Who should determine the levels of performance?		
A. Determined by national standards.	<u>9</u>	<u>13%</u>
B. Determined by State legislatures and state board of education.	<u>4</u>	<u>6%</u>
C. Determined according to actual test performance of successful adults (average score representative of cross-section of successful adults).	<u>3</u>	<u>4%</u>
D. Determined according to judgements of teachers, administrators, recent graduates, employers, parents and other informed adults of the community.	<u>45</u>	<u>65%</u>
E. Determined according to an acceptable failure rate that the majority of examiners could agree upon. (69 responded to this question...)	<u>8</u>	<u>12%</u>
7. To whom should the minimum competency testing program results be applied?		
A. Results should be applied to all equally.	<u>28</u>	<u>37%</u>
B. Results should be used only in the evaluation of the school.	<u>1</u>	<u>1%</u>

Table IV  
Frequency and Percentage of Responses  
to Survey Instrument

Survey Items	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
C. Results should be used only in evaluation of the student.	<u>30</u>	<u>39%</u>
D. Results should be used only in the evaluation of the teacher.	<u>0</u>	<u>0%</u>
E. Undecided. (76 responded to this question...)	<u>17</u>	<u>22%</u>
8. What should happen to a school if a high ratio of students within that school fail?		
A. The school should be put on accreditation probation.	<u>0</u>	<u>0%</u>
B. Test retakes should be possible.	<u>4</u>	<u>6%</u>
C. The curriculum should be evaluated.	<u>39</u>	<u>58%</u>
D. All of the above.	<u>9</u>	<u>13%</u>
E. Undecided. (67 responded to this question...)	<u>15</u>	<u>22%</u>
9. What should happen if the student fails the examination?		
A. The student should be retained and/or not receive a diploma.	<u>4</u>	<u>7%</u>
B. Test retakes should be possible.	<u>6</u>	<u>10%</u>
C. The student should be given remedial help.	<u>19</u>	<u>31%</u>
D. All of the above.	<u>24</u>	<u>39%</u>
E. Undecided. (61 responded to this question...)	<u>8</u>	<u>13%</u>

Table IV  
 Frequency and Percentage of Responses  
 to Survey Instrument

Survey Items	Frequency of Response	Percentage of Response
10. Should educators be held accountable for unsuccessful students?		
A. Educators should be held responsible.	<u>4</u>	<u>6%</u>
B. Educators should not be held responsible.	<u>17</u>	<u>26%</u>
C. Test retakes should be possible.	<u>5</u>	<u>8%</u>
D. More study and research is needed.	<u>31</u>	<u>48%</u>
E. Undecided. (65 responded to this question...)	<u>8</u>	<u>12%</u>



## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS - RECOMMENDATIONS - SUMMARY

#### CONCLUSIONS

Some major conclusions can be drawn from this study concerning the attitudes and feelings of the district staff members on competency based testing for their students. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed believed that the levels of performance, of those students who would take the competency tests, should be determined according to judgements of teachers, administrators, recent graduates, employers, parents, and other informed adults of the community. This was the highest level of agreement among the respondents.

A second strong conclusion was that if a high ratio of students within a school should fail the competency test, the curriculum should be evaluated. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed supported this decision.

A third area of consensus concerned accountability of teachers. Six percent of the respondents felt educators should be held responsible while twenty-six percent believed they should not be held responsible. A total of forty-eight percent wanted more study and research on the subject of accountability.

A fourth area of agreement concerned what competencies should be tested. Three percent believed the life skills were the most important while thirty-six percent wanted the basic skills tested. A total of forty-five percent of the respondents felt both the life and basic skills should be

the major areas of testing.

Other conclusions that can be drawn from this study were that minimum competency testing is supported by forty percent of those respondents surveyed. A total of thirty-four percent of those surveyed felt minimum competency testing should not be used or that other means could be used to determine competencies. Twenty-four percent wanted more study and research and/or were undecided about whether to have competency testing or not. The major conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this question is that the respondents were divided in their opinion.

Only three percent of the surveyed felt the basic skills applied in the life areas should be tested. Those who supported the "pro basics" (thirty-six percent) believed the school skills of reading, writing, and computing were necessary for success in life and for testing. Miller (1978) indicates in her research that it is better to concentrate on a few skills and to do well those things the school can do best - teach reading, writing, arithmetic, and the other academic subjects.<sup>51</sup> She also believes that learning to transfer knowledge to everyday life situations may provide students with motivation to learn. While uncertain about what should be included in the life skills area, she believes that the process of learning is as important as the content. Miller's research supports the findings in this study concerning the teaching and testing of the school subject areas.

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<sup>51</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 13-14.

A majority of the respondents (seventy-two percent), felt a combination of performance tests, paper and pencil tests, and simulated job performances should be used to measure the competencies. A total of twenty-eight percent were undecided on how to measure the competencies.

The widest divergence of answers came on question number four which dealt with what grade(s) should the competency test be administered. The respondents felt grades 6, 9, and 12 should be the levels most frequently tested. The research by Brickell (1978) indicates that if a district supports the idea of competency testing from kindergarten through twelfth, they believe:

- 1- Students and their parents deserve a distinct early warning if there is possible academic trouble ahead for the student.
- 2- Parents want to measure competency for their child to move up from grade to grade.
- 3- Administrators need to make changes anytime students do not progress, changes in curriculum, course selection, and faculty in-service training.<sup>52</sup>

A high number of the respondents believed the twelfth grade should be tested most often. Brickell also indicated in his research that some school districts want to test only at the end of school. According to Brickell, the district supports testing at the end of school if they believe:

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<sup>52</sup>Brickell, op. cit. p. 6.

- 1- Students learn at different rates - they deserve enough time to reach the minimum.
- 2- Parents want to measure competency to move from one "level" to the next.
- 3- Teacher-made tests and daily classroom contact will identify students who are not making satisfactory progress during school.
- 4- Formal competency testing is not needed.<sup>53</sup>

For a compromise, this researcher feels the district could measure school skills to decide grade-to-grade promotion and life skills at the end of school to determine graduation.

The respondents indicated negotiated standards worked out by the student, the parents, and the teachers were the best concerning the number of levels of performance by thirty-six percent. The research by Airasian (1979) indicated a single standard may demand nothing from a bright student and too much from a slow student. Airasian's research seems to support the survey results on a separate standard for each student which would consider: (1) his or her ability, (2) special talents, and (3) background.<sup>54</sup> There were thirty percent of the respondents who were undecided about this question.

In question six, as was stated earlier, the respondents had their highest level of agreement with sixty-five percent supporting the levels of performance being determined by teachers, administrators, recent graduates, employers, parents, and other informed adults of the community. Traditionally,

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<sup>53</sup>Brickell, op. cit. p. 7.

<sup>54</sup>Airasian, op. cit., p. 97 - 98.

levels of performance have been determined by the schools. However, state-wide requirements for schools to identify minimum basic academic and life skills have become highly visible in the political area. Miller (1978) states that legislators have reminded educators that state-imposed requirements constitute a response to their constituencies' legitimate interest in improving literacy.<sup>55</sup> Miller points out that parents are concerned about their children who have passed through the system without developing skills necessary for success in life. Taxpayers are talking accountability when costs are going up and declines are reported in enrollment and some test scores. Employers are disappointed because employees need training because they have difficulty in filling out forms, answering telephones, and doing simple computations. Colleges and universities are unhappy about the decline in test scores. Assuming the public concerns are legitimate, according to Miller, maybe all concerned should have a voice in determining levels of performance.<sup>56</sup>

The responses of the surveyed staff members were evenly distributed into two groups, between results applying to all equally and results should be used only in the evaluation of students. The research by Airasian (1979) indicates various publics hold different educational groups responsible for student achievement. Many will hold students to blame, others

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<sup>55</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 5 - 6.

<sup>56</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 7.

find fault with the teachers, still others will hold administrators responsible, and some simply blame it on the system. Advocates of minimum competency testing believe the accountability is tied directly to the student. The reasons, according to Airasian, range from the failure of the state and local districts to consider in advance of program implementation just who they wish to hold accountable. Another reason for this is that accountability stems from political and logistical problems in trying to hold anyone accountable save the student.<sup>57</sup> It is not the purpose of this study to determine who is at fault, but it seems important that the question of accountability be explicitly considered "before" a minimal competency testing program is implemented.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents felt the curriculum should be evaluated if a high ratio of students within a school fail a competency test. Miller (1978) supports this result and suggests others:

- 1- The tests should be independently verified to insure the results.
- 2- The schools should be given more than one chance to pass the tests.
- 3- The testing level or standard could be adjusted.
- 4- The school curriculum could be redesigned to parallel successful programs of other schools.
- 5- The state could refuse to let the school operate until standards are met.

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<sup>57</sup>Airasian, op. cit., p. 88.

- 6- The state could let the school operate but refuse accreditation.<sup>58</sup>

Twenty-two percent of those surveyed who were undecided what should be done with the school that fails the competency test.

Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed felt the student should be retained and/or not receive a diploma, or test retakes should be given, or the student should be given remedial help if the student fails the examination. Miller believes similar opportunities should be given to the student who fails that was given to the school that fails:

- 1- Verify the test findings, independently if possible, before acting.
- 2- Give them more than one chance to pass the competency test(s).
- 3- The testing level or standard could be adjusted.
- 4- The student should be given remediation so he or she can pass.
- 5- The district could refuse to pass or graduate the student until the competency is mastered.
- 6- The district could give two diplomas, one for academics and one for attendance.<sup>59</sup>

This researcher believes certain parallels can be drawn from the above two lists that Miller composed: findings or results of the tests should be rechecked, second chances should be given, the educational program could be modified, insist those in question meet the standards before

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<sup>58</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>59</sup>Miller, op. cit., p. 56.

continuing, or let them continue but advise them on their shortcomings to outsiders.

The last question on the survey asked the respondents if educators should be held accountable for unsuccessful students. Of those surveyed, forty-eight percent felt educators should not be held responsible, only six percent thought they should be accountable. McCallon (1976) disagrees with the results of this question. He believes accountability in the broadest sense is so fundamental that it has always been a part of our society. In education, accountability developed when the education of children moved from the home to a school setting. Since that time public and private education has assumed more responsibility and hence more accountability. Only recently has a great deal of attention been placed on the concept of being accountable for what and how much a student learns.<sup>60</sup> Accountability for educators has meant the acceptance of responsibilities and performance of tasks designed to meet these responsibilities. The basic questions of accountability include: (1) who is to do what, (2) when is it going to be accomplished, and (3) what will be the degree of proficiency. The central issue for educators revolve around student performance, since all efforts are related to behavioral changes in students. Classroom accountability must encompass the educational goals and ideals of the

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<sup>60</sup>Earl L. McCallon, Understanding Educational Accountability (Austin, Texas: Learning Concepts, 1976) p. 5 - 6.



society it serves.<sup>61</sup>

This researcher believes students are accountable to teachers to perform according to the best of their abilities, teachers are accountable to students and the administration for the application of good instructional methology.

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In seeking to draw together the many diverse thoughts which have been presented throughout this research project, the following recommendations for educators, administrators, parents and concerned citizens who are confronted with the prospect of implementating competency testing in their school district are listed. It is recommended that:

1. The purpose of the minimum competency testing program be clearly specified.
2. The competencies should be clearly specified so that all involved will know what is to be tested.
3. Give careful consideration on how the test competencies are to be measured.
4. The program will hold the desired parties and only those parties accountable.
5. Levels of performance be clearly specified so there will be no question as to what is desired.
6. Alert all those concerned to whom the competency testing results will be applied.
7. All parties should know when the tests are to be administered, whether it be from grade to grade, from elementary to junior high or to high school, or some other time agreed upon.
8. Committees should be formed representing a broad cross-section of the community to determine the levels of performance.
9. A thorough study and plan should be made before the program implementation concerning the route that should be followed if a student fails the competency tests.
10. A thorough study and plan should be made before the program implementation concerning the route the school or district should follow if they fail the competency tests.

Further recommendations, not directly related to the results of the survey, include:

1. All parties should be aware that competency testing does not insure all desired results.
2. Cost estimates - both human and financial - for the program should be thoroughly studied.
3. School and district policies should be carefully designed so that a legal program capable of yielding the desired results can be implemented.
4. Careful consideration should be given to special students, e.g., physically handicapped students, mentally handicapped students, English as a second language students, etc.
5. Tests, to be used in the program, should be validated prior to the program implementation.
6. An in-service training program should be attended by all staff members when competency based testing is adapted by the district.

This researcher believes the competency testing program implemented in a school district could create an educational system that is capable of preparing students and satisfying the desires of the public.

## SUMMARY

Although different in intent and form from other educational movements in the past fifty years, the minimum competency test movement shares some similarities with its predecessors. Minimum competency testing has achieved national attention and some form of adoption in many states. Neither the worst fears of minimum competency testing nor the highest hopes of it have become reality. A major strength of competency testing appears to be the identifications of specific learning objectives for students, particularly in the elementary grades. However, critics claim competency based testing is basically unworkable because it exceeds the present measurement arts of the teaching profession and it could create more problems than it could conceivably solve.

In summary, the complexities of competency testing are many and real. Some states who have mandated competency testing are considering delaying the implementation of their programs in the face of technical and conceptual problems identified in this paper. Some of the momentum of the competency movement has slowed down as it applies to requiring the passing of competency tests to graduation. In spite of many dangers and uncertainties, the minimal competency testing movement does hold some promise. It can re-examine and redefine goals for education. By re-examining, redefining, and narrowing the goals of schools and by providing certification that students have attained

these goals, the competency movement may have potential to help restore public confidence in its educational institutions.

This researcher believes the results on the minimum competency testing survey can be inferred to the total population of the selected eastern Nebraska public school district teaching staff. The following is a summary of the results of the survey that was conducted to determine the attitudes and feelings of a selected eastern Nebraska public school district teaching staff concerning the use of competency based testing for their students in their district.

- 1- The respondents felt minimum competency testing should be used in their district.
- 2- Those surveyed wanted a combination of skills tested that apply in the life areas and the school subject areas.
- 3- Competencies should be measured through school performance tests, by paper and pencil tests administered in the classroom, and by the use of simulated performance situations.
- 4- The grade levels where competency testing should be administered most often include grades 6, 9, and 12.
- 5- The number of levels of performance should be negotiated by the student, the parents, and the teachers.
- 6- The levels of performance should be determined according to the judgements of teachers, administrators, recent graduates, employers, parents, and other informed adults of the community.
- 7- The respondents were about evenly split concerning whom should the minimum competency testing program results be applied, to all equally, or only the students.
- 8- The curriculum should be evaluated if a high ratio of students within a school fail.

- 9- The respondents believed if a student should fail, the student should be retained, not receive a diploma, test retakes should be possible, and the student should be given remedial help.
- 10- More study and research is needed concerning accountability of teachers for unsuccessful students.

Further research and study is needed to gather more information and data. A state-wide study could be useful to the state board of education, the state department of education, selected school districts, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The data received from a state-wide study could help those concerned by providing greater understanding about the subject and whether to implement a competency testing program.

This survey was conducted with a selected eastern Nebraska public school district and should "not" be interpreted to represent the feelings and attitudes of surrounding school districts or the State of Nebraska. The results were intended by the researcher to represent only the district in question and therefore, the data are not exportable to any other school district.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

## MINIMUM COMPETENCY TESTING

SURVEY

When completing this survey, answer each question only once (except question No. 4). Please answer questions two thru ten if minimum competency testing were to be used. Space is provided for comments at the end of the survey.

1. Should competency based testing be used in the school district for testing students?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Minimum competency testing should be used.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Minimum competency testing should not be used.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other means can be used to determine competencies.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ More study and research is needed.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.

Please answer questions two through ten if minimum testing were to be used in the district.

2. What competencies should be tested?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Basic skills applied in the life areas (family, citizenship, work, etc.).  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Basic skills applied in the school subjects (reading, writing, math, social studies, science, etc.).  
 \_\_\_\_\_ All of the above.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ More study and research is needed.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.

3. How should the competencies be measured?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Through school performance tests (painting, essays, speeches, touchdowns, goals, awards, etc.).  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Paper and pencil tests administered in the classroom.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Simulated performance situations set up to resemble those that could be found on the job.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ All of the above.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.

4. At what grade(s) should the competency test be administered (more than one may be checked)?

<input type="checkbox"/>	1st Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	5th Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	9th Grade
<input type="checkbox"/>	2nd Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	6th Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	10th Grade
<input type="checkbox"/>	3rd Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	7th Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	11th Grade
<input type="checkbox"/>	4th Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	8th Grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	12th grade

5. What should be the number of levels of performance?

A single standard should be set for all.

A graduated standard should be set for all.

Differentiated standards should be set according to a student's talents and interests.

Negotiated standards should be worked out by the student, the parents, and the teachers (I.E.P.).

Undecided.

6. Who should determine the levels of performance?

Determined by national standards.

Determined by state legislatures and state board of education.

Determined according to actual test performance of successful adults (average score representative of cross-section of successful adults).

Determined according to judgements of teachers, administrators, recent graduates, employers, parents, and other informed adults of the community.

Determined according to an acceptable failure rate that the majority of examiners could agree upon.

7. To whom should the minimum competency testing program results be applied?

Results should be applied to all equally.

Results should be used only in the evaluation of the school.

Results should be used only in the evaluation of the student.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Results should be used only in the evaluation of the teacher.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.
8. What should happen to a school if a high ratio of students within that school fail?
- \_\_\_\_\_ The school should be put on accreditation probation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Test retakes should be possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The curriculum should be evaluated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All of the above.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.
9. What should happen if the student fails the examination?
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student should be retained and/or not receive a diploma.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Test retakes should be possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The student should be given remedial help.
- \_\_\_\_\_ All of the above.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.
10. Should educators be held accountable for unsuccessful students?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Educators should be held responsible?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Educators should not be held responsible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Test retakes should be possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ More study and research is needed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Undecided.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appendix B  
COVER LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

To: (Name of building principal...),

I request your cooperation in taking a few minutes for a task which may have significance in the improvement of instruction in our district. Your assistance in distributing this survey that I am conducting for my field project at the University of Nebraska at Omaha will be appreciated.

This survey may be used to determine the attitudes and feelings of the teaching staff in our district concerning the use of competency based testing for students. No teacher, school, or the district will be identified in the results of the study. It is not necessary the teachers sign their names.

Please distribute the survey forms to the enclosed list of designated teachers in your building. They have been chosen at random. Request the completed forms be returned to your office within one school week. Please return the completed forms through the school mail to Mr. Cook.

If you desire to see the results of the survey, they will be on file at the central office. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

David Cook  
Media Specialist

"I encourage your cooperation with Mr. Cook's research project".

Central Office

Appendix C  
COVER LETTER TO RESPONDENTS

To: (Name of respondent...),

I request your cooperation in taking a few minutes for a task which may have significance in the improvement of instruction in our district. Your assistance in completing this survey that I am conducting for my field project at the University of Nebraska at Omaha will be appreciated.

This survey may be used to determine the attitudes and feelings of the teaching staff in our district concerning the use of competency based testing for students. No teacher, school, or the district will be identified in the results of the study. It is not necessary that you sign your name.

When completed with the survey, within one school week, return it to your building principal. If you desire to see the results, it will be on file at the central office. Thank you for your assistance and cooperation.

David Cook  
Media Specialist

"I encourage your cooperation with Mr. Cook's research project".

Central Office



## Appendix D

## COMMENT SECTION OF SURVEY

The comment section of the survey was completed by twenty-four of the respondents. Most comments centered around teacher accountability and the need for further study. The following are their comments:

"I think we need testing done at every grade level. Iowa Basics covers 3 - 6. We need something for gr. 1 & 2 - not necessarily a standardized test but something a classroom teacher could give to determine where extreme weaknesses exists. These weak areas should then be supplied with remediation materials before child enters the next grade. It would even help if possible to have summer schools set-up for this so child could work on weak area before going to next grade in fall. At present, we seem to just push ahead without remediating."

"There are too many other variables on the student and his progress (or lack of) to hold teachers totally responsible."

"All educators need to accept responsibility for success and failure. Test should never be used to measure teacher performance because our goal would then be to teach for the test. Competency test should show weak areas and strong points to aid the student in job placement and future plans."

"Answer to 10 is such because of the numerous factors affecting the child's success that are beyond control of the teacher."

"Numbers 8, 9, 10 are poorly designed questions. In #8 and 9 I would have included retakes. In #10 these could be instances where an educator could be held accountable. Retakes is not pertinent."

"If a teacher is doing his or her best to meet the needs of a student that teacher shouldn't be responsible for a child who does not progress as he or she should."

"It depends on the reason for failure."

"If many of a teacher's students were failing, the principal should do some observing and evaluating to determine his/her competence; however, I don't believe student test results should be used to evaluate teachers. We just don't have control of enough of the variables in a student's life to assume total credit or responsibility for his progress. I would place teacher evaluation of a student's competence ahead of written tests."

"Much more study and research is needed before programs such as this could be considered."

"I've worked with too many truly handicapped students to think that teachers should 'take the blame' for those students' failure. On the other hand, teachers of these students should be held responsible for covering most of the skill areas detailed on the IEP."

"If a student fails a competency test, it is impossible to hold any one person responsible."

"I feel some sort of defined standard such as competency testing is necessary to provide American education direction and purpose. The 'rub' comes in deciding how."

"Competency testing should benefit, not harm, the student."

See #7 - "If students can't pass a competency test we set up, then it is the school system's responsibility to evaluate what is being taught and change it to meet the needs of our students, if need be."

"I have a tendency to feel an attendance diploma and an academic diploma should be used in place of competency testing."

"By answering with but one answer, some of the possible answers are not listed. For instance, parents are not listed as 'being held responsible'. From my experience, you will have students that get 'check-itis' - others will not have had encouragement from the parent or parents and will not have been exposed to many fruitful learning situations. In others, not-readily-detectable disabilities will diminish the student's chances of scoring average or above, until the disability is discovered and made known."

"I have severe reservations about a teacher being held responsible for student achievement without some leverage by which the teacher could expect and to a large degree be assured of a sincere willingness on the part of the student to put forth the necessary effort to perform. By this I mean that the student should listen and assimilate the instruction given, then do the necessary work involved (which in many cases would include practice and homework) which would properly prepare them to be evaluated. When these conditions are met then I think a teacher should be held responsible."

"Good questions above - should not be rushed into without study."

"The evidence from Florida already proves the fallacy of accountability testing."

"The only use for tests of this type should be to evaluate which level classes a student should attend!"

"I can see no valid reason for competency testing. If prospective employers are concerned about a student's skills, a thorough check on that student's grades would give an adequate profile. Students cannot be likened to a mechanical 'product'. They have different abilities, different needs. A standardized test cannot really take differences into account. Finally, I believe in the education of the whole person. Many of the most important things that are learned in school can never be measured objectively. Spending money on in-service for staff and salaries to keep the best people in our profession would be a much better use of our district's time and money."

"On competency testing, prior to enrolling in a given class, the student's capacity for that area should be known. These tests could be very helpful in avoiding a situation where a student is put into a class where his or her prior performance indicates that difficulty is expected and possible failure. A low level competency in science should indicate that the sci.(ence) requirement should be met in 9th grade rather than waiting till high school where a higher level or ability may be required. Ex: student is identified as low achiever in science - in 9th grade, elects not to take science. In 10th grade, takes biol.(ology) - reading level & skills needed are not satisfactory and student fails. Now he is stuck - must pass bio.(ology) or pass alternatives of: chem.(istry), physics, or envir.(onment) education. These last three would be very difficult to pass for a low achiever in science."

"Educators can be held responsible for presenting material - they shouldn't be held responsible for student receptiveness."

"What about students who may never be able to pass these tests? How many retests would be allowed?"