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FOURTH GRADE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
NEBRASKA'S STATE STANDARDS PROCESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Richard J. Beran, Jr.

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Martha Bruckner

Omaha, Nebraska

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DISSERTATION TITLE

FOURTH GRADE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF NEBRASKA'S STATE

STANDARDS PROCESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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FOURTH-GRADE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF NEBRASKA'S STATE STANDARDS PROCESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

by

Richard J. Beran, Jr., Ed.D.

Advisor: Dr. Martha Bruckner

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process. Specifically, research questions sought to determine fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of the possible effects of state standards on schools, students, teachers, and administrators. The questions also explored any differences between subgroups based on teachers' gender, teachers' years of experience, schools' socio-economic status, school enrollment, and percentage of students that have met the state standards.

The survey used to complete the study was adapted from the work done by Weichel (2002). A review panel provided evidence of the survey's validity. After a pilot study was done, an e-mail message was sent to 463 fourth-grade teachers in the state of Nebraska asking them to complete an online survey. After three separate e-mails, 257 (56%) surveys were completed. Statistical tests utilized included descriptive statistics, analyses of variance (ANOVAS), and t-tests. No statistical differences were found among the various subgroups. This

consensus among the teachers did point to some strong issues that need to be addressed.

The results of this study show that the standards process has led to perceptions of low teacher morale, high stress, and increased workload. The strongest perception was that the record keeping involved in the process is a major time constraint for the teachers. The results demonstrate that the teachers perceive the implementation of the standards process has led to a narrowing of the curriculum. Finally, the study points out that teachers believe the measurement of standards does not accurately reflect what the students have learned. These findings have implications for state and local education leaders as well as university teacher preparatory programs.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As evidenced by hundreds of articles, studies, and news stories, setting standards is one of the hottest topics in education. Politicians, state leaders, education leaders, and even some business leaders are concerned with finding some way to prove that American students are learning. State and national standards are sweeping the nation (Jones, 2000). With President George W. Bush's education plan, *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, the end to the standards movement is nowhere in sight and, in fact, the standards movement is gaining momentum. President Bush's plan includes standardized testing for grades 3 through 8. In this sweeping movement the issue that is being swept under the rug is the effect standards have on teachers.

The modern standards movement's origins are debatable. Some trace it to the publishing of the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 (Bonstingl, 2001; Mahar, 2001; Meier, 2000). Others point to President George H. Bush's summit meeting of the nation's governors in which they established six broad educational goals that were to be reached by the year 2000 (Daggett, 2000; Hardy, 2000; Jennings, 1998; Meier, 2000; Mirel & Angus, 1994; Olson, 2001; Ravitch, 1995a; Stotsky, 2000).

Although the origins of standards are debatable, the real issues center on the benefits of standards. Are standards and standardized tests true indicators of student learning? Do standards improve education? Do standards raise student achievement? The arguments presented by the proponents and opponents of standards are confusing, but both sides agree that the standards

movement is and will continue to be a huge influence on the way teachers, students, and administrators operate in our schools (Abbott, 1997; Baumann, 1996; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bohn & Sleeter, 2000; Domenech, 2000; Eisner, 2001; Hardy, 2000; Hess & Brigham, 2000; Hoff, 2000; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Lemann, 2000; Main, 2000; Neill, 1998; Noddings, 1997; Ohanian, 2001; Popham, 1999, 2000; Reigeluth, 1997; Resnick & Nolan, 1995; Robinson & Brandon, 1994; Shanker, 1995; Sousa, 1998; Sylwester, 1995; Thernstrom, 2000; Umphrey, 1999; Wolfe & White, 2000; Zmuda & Tomaino, 1999).

Nebraska's role as the 49th state to adopt state standards has, ironically, been seen as one of leadership. Even though Nebraska is the second to last state to adopt statewide standards (Iowa is the only holdout), the approach the state has taken makes it a leader. Rather than give a statewide test like many of the other states have done, Nebraska has left it up to the local districts to determine how the standards will be assessed. The assessments must meet six quality criteria, but it is up to the local district to develop them. Although many educators like the idea of continuing to keep a degree of local control, the system has created a situation that is unique. Educators are spending time developing new assessments, making sure the assessments meet the six quality criteria, and taking on the task of keeping track of how students have done on all of these assessments (Roschewski, Gallagher, & Isernhagen, 2001). How these new responsibilities are affecting the teachers remains to be seen.

Although the research, books and articles about standards number in the hundreds, the amount of research about teacher perceptions of standards is minimal (Kohn, 2001; Page & Marlowe, 2000; Wallace, 2000). Furthermore, an extensive electronic search in ERIC, Academic Search Elite, and Dissertation

Abstracts found no studies about Nebraska teachers' perceptions of state standards. Because of the unique requirements of teachers in Nebraska's state standards model, there is a need for research in the area of teacher perceptions of Nebraska state standards. This study fills that void. This study presents information about the effects Nebraska's state standards are having on teachers, in particular, fourth-grade teachers. In Nebraska's state standards process results are reported in fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade. Fourth-grade teachers were chosen for this study because, unlike teachers in eighth and eleventh grade, most fourth-grade teachers teach all subject areas and therefore must report in four curriculum areas, language arts, math, social studies, and science.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process.

Research Questions

1. What are Nebraska's fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
2. Is there a relationship between school enrollment and how a teacher perceives Nebraska's state standards process?
3. Is there a relationship between a teacher's years of experience and his/her perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
4. Is there a relationship between the percentage of students who met the state standards in the teacher's school and the teacher's perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
5. Is there a relationship between a teacher's gender and his/her perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

6. Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of a school and a teacher's perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Assumptions

This study assumes that fourth-grade teachers were honest when reporting their perceptions of Nebraska's state standards and that fourth-grade teachers have a general knowledge about Nebraska state standards and the reporting process.

Limitations

Because participation was voluntary, the sample may not be truly representative of the fourth-grade teacher population in Nebraska. Those that are least concerned or too busy may not have taken the time to return the e-mailed survey.

Every attempt was made to ensure anonymity of the respondents in the hope that they would be honest and open. Still, there was a chance that the respondents may not have been trusting in this age of accountability and may have responded with politically correct answers.

In my position of assistant superintendent I am in charge of the state standards reporting for our district. Because of that I have both positive and negative perceptions of the state standards process that may have colored my selection of survey questions and my interpretations of responses. I made every effort to interpret the results without bias.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to fourth-grade teachers in Nebraska's public schools.

Significance of the Study

This study is of significance to several groups. First, Nebraska teachers can see if their colleagues throughout the state share their perceptions. Second, administrators throughout the state can use the information to determine what strategies to use to help teachers as they deal with the issues of state standards. Third, the Nebraska Department of Education can use the information as personnel make decisions on the implementation of standards in science and social studies. The information can also help representatives of the Nebraska Department of Education as they discuss the revision of the math, reading, speaking, listening, and writing standards. The Nebraska Department of Education can gain insights when they review the way the standards are reported. Fourth, university teacher preparatory programs can use the findings to develop programs to prepare teachers to deal with meeting and reporting state standards. Faculty members in university preparatory programs need to understand what teachers are faced with when meeting and reporting standards. Fifth, other states can use the information to help their teachers find the best ways to deal with state standards.

Definition of Terms

Accountability is defined as the concept of educators being held responsible for student achievement that meets a given set of standards. Achievement is demonstrated by showing mastery on a norm-referenced or criterion-referenced test (National Forum on Assessment, 1995).

Assessment is defined as the process of gathering information about student achievement at both the large-scale standardized and classroom levels to make instructionally relevant decisions (Stiggins, 1994).

Criterion-referenced tests are defined as assessments in which each student's score is compared to a preset level of acceptable performance rather than being compared to a norm group for interpretation (Nebraska Department of Education, 1998; Stiggins, 1994).

High stakes testing is defined as the use of a single test to determine whether a student will graduate or, in earlier grades, if a child will be retained or moved up to the next grade level. It can also determine pay raises or bonuses for staff members and, in some cases, job retention for both teachers and administrators (American Educational Research Association, 1999).

Nebraska's state standards process is defined as the procedures used to match local standards to state standards: writing assessments over those standards, giving the assessments, recording and reporting the results, and preparing a portfolio explaining the whole process for the state. The process is also known as School based, Teacher led, Assessment and Reporting System or S.T.A.R.S. (Nebraska Department of Education, 1999).

Norm-referenced tests are defined as assessments that are used to sort or rank students along a continuum of achievement. The students are compared to a norm group of students who took the test under the same conditions for interpretation (Nebraska Department of Education, 1998; Stiggins, 1994).

Rule 10 is a document written by the Nebraska Department of Education that lists the regulations and procedures that schools must follow in order to be accredited by the state (Nebraska Department of Education, 2001)

Socio-economic status for this study is determined by the percentage of students in a school who receive free and reduced meals.

Stakeholders in this study are defined as students, parents, teachers, community members, taxpayers, legislators, and administrators because they all have a vested interest in the educational decisions (National Forum on Assessment, 1995).

Standards-based reform is defined as the concept of setting higher standards and using a uniform method to measure the achievement of those standards (Wolfe & White, 2000).

Standardized tests are defined as assessments in which large numbers of students respond to the same questions under the same circumstances of test administration. The exams are then scored and interpreted in a standardized fashion so that they can be compared across students and classrooms (Popham, 1999; Stiggins, 1994).

State standards are defined as a set of guidelines and benchmarks that describe what a student should know and be able to do in a given subject and grade level (Nebraska Department of Education, 1998).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertaining to the history of standards, implications of standards, and finally, the unique approach that Nebraska has taken towards standards. Chapter 3 describes both the procedures and methodology used to gather and analyze the data for the study. Chapter 4 reviews the results of the study. Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the results followed by recommendations and a summary statement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review about standards has four main sections. The first segment looks at the different types and definitions of standards. The second section covers the history of standards in education. The third part looks at the implications of standards. The final section looks at standards in the state of Nebraska.

Definitions of Standards

The definition of the term standard varies according to the purpose for which it is used (Ravitch, 1995b). Webster's New World Dictionary (Guralnik, 1974) has 10 definitions for the word "standard". The definitions of "standard" vary from "something established for use as a rule or basis of comparison in measuring or judging capacity, quantity, content, extent, value, quality, etc." to "a level of excellence, attainment, etc. regarded as a measure of adequacy." So a standard can be used as a comparison or a minimum that everyone must reach.

Standards are used in all walks of life. Practically everything we deal with has standards tied to it (Ravitch, 1995b). We have standards that govern and control the car we drive, the computers we use, and even the safety of the food we eat.

Standards are used and defined in many different ways in education (Ravitch, 1995b). The definition of standards used in the research depends on the term tied to it and the reasons people want standards (Reigeluth, 1997). The terms vary from as universal sounding as world class (Lewis, 1995) to as local as course standards (Bonstingl, 2001). Most of these terms can be associated with

three general categories: content, performance, and opportunity to learn (Lewis, 1995; Ravitch, 1995b).

Content standards are defined as what students should know and be able to do or the skills and knowledge that teachers should teach (Lewis, 1995; Marzano & Kendall, 1995; Popham, 2001; Zmuda & Tomaino, 1999). Content standards are fixed goals that should be measurable so that the students can demonstrate mastery. They should be easily understood by parents, teachers and students. Teachers need to understand them so that they can design lessons to help the students learn (Ravitch, 1995b).

Performance standards describe what level of learning would be considered as proof that the content has been learned (Lewis, 1995). In other words, performance standards describe the quality of work that students must demonstrate to show that they have mastered the content standards (Ravitch, 1995b).

Opportunity-to-learn standards deal with providing students an equal chance to learn by providing them the resources, programs, staff, and opportunity to reach the content and performance standards (Ravitch, 1995b).

All three areas are interrelated. Content standards are pointless unless a school sets up performance standards to demonstrate that students have reached a certain degree or level of mastery. Politically, opportunity-to-learn standards are usually tied to content and performance standards. If a school wants to continue to receive money to provide students with the facilities, programs, and staff to be successful, content and performance standards must be written and demonstrated as having been achieved (Lewis, 1995; Ravitch, 1995b).

In summary, although the types of standards can vary from the list discussed previously to many others not mentioned, the basic understanding of standards in education goes back to the original dictionary definition. A standard is a rule or goal that is established to judge or measure the level of success of a student.

History of Standards

The debate over standards has a long history. The argument could be made that as long as there have been teachers, there have been standards or expectations of achievement.

One of the reasons public schools were established in the late 1800s was to reach and teach new diverse immigrants a common language and values. The debate over what that education should include started then and will continue as long as people have differences of opinion (Mirel & Angus, 1994).

Horace Mann saw education as a way to provide equal opportunity to people. In order to do that a uniform system needed to be established in all schools. From that beginning a number of equal opportunity-to-learn standards have been established. Similar curricula, uniform textbooks, and teacher training have all played a role in creating that uniform system (Glickman, 2000/2001; Ravitch, 1995a). In their historical study of high schools in the United States, Mirel and Angus (1994) found that this uniform system and high academic standards had a positive effect in reducing the disparities between socio-economic and racial groups.

The debates over equal-opportunity standards and high academic standards began with a report from the Committee of Ten in 1893. This committee, comprised mainly of college professors and chaired by Harvard

President Charles W. Elliot, was set up by the National Education Association to investigate the state of high school education and make recommendations for improvement. The Committee members' recommendations included high curriculum standards for all students no matter what the students' future aspirations because they believed that a strong academic education would prepare the students for everything. They also recommended that all students be taught the same way (Lederman & Niess, 2000; Mirel & Angus, 1994).

Many of the criticisms of standardization were also first brought forward at that same time. Opponents of the committee, led by psychologist G. Stanley Hall, claimed that high standards favored the college bound students, ignored the different needs and abilities of students, would lessen spontaneity, and would lead to a higher dropout rate. They produced a report called the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education. The findings of Hall's committee supported a "comprehensive" school in which students would be provided equal access to a variety of programs. The debate between these two groups continues today (Mirel & Angus, 1994). The question has become, should we have a basic uniform curriculum that everyone is expected to master or should we allow for differences in expectations and subject matter offered?

Like most issues in education, the debate over standards has continued to move from one extreme to the other. From the post Sputnik push designed to improve math and science education to the current push for tests in grades 3 through 8 and one in high school, the issue subsides from time to time, but never goes away.

Currently, the stronger side seems to be the pro-standard supporters. The shift began with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of

1965. Along with the influx of government dollars, there were expectations to evaluate and report the effectiveness of the programs on which the money was being spent. No report meant no money the next year. Most schools turned to standardized achievement tests for their reporting because the tests were readily available and educators assumed the tests accurately reflected what the students had learned in the classroom (Popham, 2001).

Although criticism of public education grew in the 1970s, it wasn't until *A Nation at Risk* report was published in 1983 that the press really accepted the belief that our schools were failing and something needed to be done to correct the problems (Bonstingl, 2001; Mahar, 2001; Meier, 2000; Mirel & Angus, 1994; Popham, 2001). The federal government's power was again felt with the publication of Goals 2000 by President George H. Bush's governors summit in 1989. The belief as to which publication started the current standards movement is not as important as the purpose of both. Among other goals, both wanted the United States to become first in math and science, and wanted all our children to come to school ready to learn. Goals 2000 went on to say that national standards should be established in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. With the formation of standards, ways to measure them were seen as a necessary part of the process to hold teachers and administrators accountable (Eisner, 2001).

Because of the money provided by the federal government, the standards movement has spread to most subject areas. In 1989 the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics published *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics*. In the 1990s other curricular areas, including science, physical education, arts, health, foreign language, geography, economics,

language arts, civics, and history followed the mathematics teachers' lead in establishing standards for their subject areas (Marzano & Kendall, 1996; Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2002a).

State governments have also become involved in state standards. All of the states except Iowa now have some type of state educational standards. Most states have identified standards and benchmarks in the core subject areas. The quality of these standards has come under some criticism from the American Federation of Teachers, the Council for Basic Education and the Fordham Foundation. There is no consistency in the way the standards are written (Marzano & Kendall, 1996; Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2002b).

In summary, the issue of standards has been with us for over 100 years. The pendulum for and against has swung back and forth. The current chime for standards has led to the dramatic growth of standards in the 1990s and will continue to play a large role in the world of education.

Standards Today

The latest and biggest push for standards began with the passage of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, better known as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. The act insists that high standards for achievement in reading and math be established in every state. Math and reading were chosen because they are seen as the building blocks of all other learning. The act also requires testing every child in grades 3 through 8 to show that all students are making progress (United States Department of Education, 2002). For individual states, questions remain about what exactly the legislation will look like as it is carried

out by the National Department of Education. The biggest question seems to center around how much freedom individual states will be given to continue their current plans and standards. Will they be forced to abandon them or add to them to meet the federal government's demands? The issue is currently being resolved between the state and federal governments.

The modern push for standards has not been without its critics, resistance, and backlash. Parents, teachers, and students from different parts of the United States have protested against standardized assessments and the way they are being used. Their resistance has ranged from publishing copies of the test in the newspaper to absence in mass by students. The opposition can be found from New York to California. From Parents Across Virginia United to Reform SOLs to Parents United to Reform TAAS testing in Texas, groups of parents are organizing to change or stop the use of standardized tests. Parents of special education students are also suing over the unfairness of the tests for their students. Other parents and civil rights groups are challenging the tests on racial and equity grounds (Hardy, 2000; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). Teachers' and administrators' methods of protest to the tests have included, among other things, refusing to give the test, writing scathing editorials, and giving back the money for being a high performing school (Domenech, 2000; Hardy, 2000; Hess & Brigham, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Ohanian, 2001).

The students' main methods of protest have been three-fold. Some have chosen to be absent the day(s) of the tests. So many students were gone in New York in 2002 that the State Department of Education now requires school districts to give the test to the students immediately upon their arrival back in school. Other students have chosen to tank the test. In other words they have

purposely done poorly on the test. The third method of protest has been to get their parent's permission to option out of taking the test (Hartocollis, 2002; Ohanian, 2001). Protest by parents, teachers, administrators, and students is expected to grow as more high stakes tests are made mandatory.

Another issue that continues to plague the standards movement is cheating. As the pressure to do well on high stakes test grows, so will the pressure to cheat (Harrington-Lueker, 2000; Kantrowitz, McGinn, Pierce, & Check, 2000). Although there are no hard statistics, the problem has popped up across the United States. The issue is different from the past when it was mainly students who felt pressure to cheat. Both teachers and administrators are now feeling the pressure. As bonuses and, in some cases, the survival of a school are tied to scores on mandatory tests, the reports of cheating by adults have grown (Gratz, 2000; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000).

In summary, the future of standards centers around one word, increase. It is apparent with the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* that there will be an increase of support from the state and federal governments. Likewise there will be an increase in pressure to do well on the tests that assess these standards. Finally, that pressure will lead to an increase in protests against the tests and unfortunately, an increase in pressure to cheat. In fact, student, parent, and school protests, as well as perceived errors in scoring, have already led to the demise of one state test, the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (Aizeman, 2002). What will replace it has yet to be determined.

Implications of Standards

Most agree that the modern standards movement has had a major impact on schools (Abbott, 1997; Baumann, 1996; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bohn &

Sleeter, 2000; Domenech, 2000; Eisner, 2001; Hardy, 2000; Hess & Brigham, 2000; Hoff, 2000; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Lemann, 2000; Main, 2000; Neill, 1998; Noddings, 1997; Ohanian, 2001; Popham, 1999, 2000; Reigeluth, 1997; Resnick & Nolan, 1995; Robinson & Brandon, 1994; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999; Shanker, 1995; Sousa, 1998; Sylwester, 1995; Thernstrom, 2000; Umphrey, 1999; Wolfe & White, 2000; Zmuda & Tomaino, 1999). The issue becomes divided when looking at the implications of the standards movement.

Supporters of standards put forth many favorable arguments (Gandal & Vranek, 2001; Porter, 2000; Schmoker, 2000; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Standards provide an opportunity for schools to improve the curriculum in a systematic way (Bezy, 1999; Brandt, 1995).

Standards are like the goals of any organization. As such, if they are clear and commonly defined, they provide a well-articulated focus that can lead to improvement. Teachers know exactly what students need to learn, what to teach, where improvement is needed, and what to work on to get that improvement (Schmoker & Marzano, 1999). Standards, unlike the current curriculum guides that many schools have, are seen as a way to narrow the curriculum to a point so that it can be taught. The current information overload has led to the lack of consistency that we are experiencing currently. Teachers in the same district do not cover the material in the same way with the same emphasis. Often they are left alone to include or exclude whatever they want. In a standards environment the teacher is no longer free to pick the curriculum, but instead is still free to select the methodology to insure that the students are

prepared to meet the standards (Bezy, 1999). Standards have put inequity in the forefront and may help raise the achievement of all students.

Several studies and polls point to the strong support standards have received from all the groups involved. Teachers, parents, administrators, and even students support standards even if they don't always agree on the method used to implement them. In a national poll conducted in August 2000 for Business Roundtable (an association of chief executive officers of leading U.S. companies) 75% of both parents and non-parents approved of raising standards and having students pass a reading and math test to be promoted (Gandal & Vranek, 2001). In another survey of parents conducted by Public Agenda (2002) (a non-profit, non-partisan policy research organization) a majority of parents favored students passing basic skills tests for promotion and graduation even if it meant that their own child would fail. In the same survey teachers were also supportive of a basic skills test for graduation and one-quarter even supported a more challenging test. Also, only 1% of teachers favored quitting what they were currently doing and going back to the way it was. These surveys support the belief that standards are working and should be continued.

Other proponents of standards point to Texas and Chicago as proof that standards do work in improving achievement. In Texas, which is seen as one of the leading states in the standards movement, achievement has gone up on the high-stakes, statewide test known as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills or TAAS (Johnson, Treisman, & Fuller, 2000). In Chicago, test scores rose on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in reading and math 4 consecutive years from 1996 through 1999 for the elementary students (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). In both cases the studies found several keys to success. They started the bar low and

raised it as the students' scores improved. In Texas they made sure the curriculum matched the test. In Chicago the district insisted that when students do not pass they must be taught differently the second time. In Texas the system is set up so that all schools could potentially be rated as exemplary, so all have a chance for success. Texas provided funds and time for teachers to align their curriculum to the TAAS. A final key in both cases centered on providing the time and funding to remediate students who fail the first time. Proponents expect the controversy over standards and high stakes tests to fade as people get used to the idea and see concrete examples of increasing student achievement (Hardy, 2000).

Opponents of standards are just as adamant about the problems and lack of success as the proponents are with their claims of success. The opponents point to such issues as a narrowing curriculum, lost local control, inequity of tests, the fact that standardized tests do not test what is being taught, and the unfair pressure brought on students and staff.

The narrowing of the curriculum issue centers on the misguided use of a single test to determine student achievement. Even the test makers agree that the tests should not be the sole basis for making decisions on student promotion or achievement (Domenach, 2000; Kohn, 2001). A secondary issue that arises from a single test is that the curriculum focus becomes what is on the test at the expense of other material and subjects (Reigeluth, 1997; Thompson, 2001). Teachers tend to teach to the test or in some cases teach the test (Harrington-Lueker, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Wallace, 2000). This is seen as driving the system down towards mediocrity rather than the real intent, which is higher standards.

Students may do well based on these standards, but the consequence is a loss of depth and breadth of subject matter (Domenach, 2000).

American educational systems were founded on the belief in local control, and standards take away that control (Glickman, 2000/2001; Hardy, 2000; Lemann, 2000). Opponents of standards fear, in the worst extreme, that standards will eventually lead to a national curriculum with little or no local input into the system. Evidence of this can be seen in the development of national standards in almost all subject areas (Marzano & Kendall, 1996). The passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* with its demands for testing in grades 3 through 8 continues to add to the speculation. There also is no doubt that states are now exercising major control over all aspects of schools from assessments to curriculum (Glickman, 2000/2001).

With standards inevitably come accountability issues and assessments to demonstrate achievement (Domenech, 2000). Opponents to standards are opposed to the standardized tests that many districts are using (Glickman, 2000/2001; Kohn, 2001; Popham, 2001; Wallace, 2000). The biggest issue with standardized tests is inequity. The tests are not fair because they include questions not covered in the regular curriculum. Other questions discriminate against students based on their socio-economic status. Because the goal of these tests is to sort and separate, the tests makers throw out questions that too many students answer correctly when the tests are revised. Of course, the questions that many students get correct usually tend to be taught in the curriculum (Kohn, 2001; Popham, 2000).

Another criticism of these tests is that high stakes are tied to them. Decisions regarding retention and graduation are based on the test results in

about half of the states. These states ignored the statement by the National Research Council on Appropriate Test Use that an educational decision that will have a major impact on a student should not be based on one test. This is deemed to be unfair because of the aforementioned inequities in the tests. It is also unfair because some of these tests have very little relationship to the adopted standards (Gratz, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Popham, 2001; Thompson, 2001).

The increased pressure brought on students and staff by the standards and accountability movement has led to changes in schools that opponents believe are not good for the students and their education. As mentioned before, it has, in some instances, led to a shallow curriculum that can become narrowly focused on the standards. On the other hand, Marzano and Kendall (1996) said it would take 23 years of schooling to cover all the benchmarks that some states have. In either case the curriculum focus has changed from what teachers, parents, and administrators deem to be important to a curriculum that is forced on them from outside sources (Hardy, 2000; Kohn, 2001; Popham, 2001).

Most educators agree that children learn at different rates and have varying degrees of ability. To expect all children to be at a set level of achievement is unrealistic. For some students the standards are easy and for others the standards are unattainable. Therefore, to opponents, it is impossible to develop standards that are challenging enough to reach the proponents' goal of increasing student performance for all without guaranteeing failure for some students (Hardy, 2000; Reigeluth, 1997).

The Effects of Standards on Teachers

A final area of implications focuses on the effects of standards on teachers. Both supporters and opponents agree that standards are having a

dramatic effect on teachers (Bezy, 1999; Gandal & Vranek, 2001; Kohn, 2001; Page & Marlowe, 2000). They differ on whether the effect has been positive or negative.

The supporters see standards as being a guide or roadmap for teachers to use to identify students' strengths and weaknesses (Johnson et al., 2000). The proponents agree that in order for standards to succeed, teachers must feel ownership (Gratz, 2000). Public Agenda's (2002) annual survey continues to find strong teacher support for the standards movement, as only 1% of teachers would return to the days before standards. The survey also found that a majority of teachers favor a basic skills test for student promotion. To proponents these are both seen as signs that teachers support standards. Even though proponents would like to see accountability tied to pay, the survey reported that, currently, only about one-quarter of the teaching force has its pay tied to student achievement. Supporters of standards believe teachers and schools should be held responsible for all students reaching the standards and pay would be a means to reach that goal (Glickman, 2000/2001).

The standards have also created new conversations among teachers. There is a renewed interest and focus by teachers on their curriculum. Remediation efforts, both intervention and prevention programs, are stressed more than ever before as teachers work to get all students to pass the standards (Thayer, 2000).

Opponents see standards as a detriment to the teaching profession (Kohn, 2001). Stress caused by the additional workload and the pressures to make sure the students do well on the standards are negative implications for teachers (Hatch, 2002; Kohn, 2001; O'Neil, 1995).

A loss of creativity and a feeling of top-down mandates are two other implications. As standards are passed down from national or state levels, teachers do not feel as if they have a say in the standards (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2000). The standards also dictate what must be covered, which takes away from the teacher's ability to create and explore topics that interest both the students and the teacher (Main, 2000). This leads to the belief that the curriculum is being narrowed from the top down without teacher input.

In summary, both sides agree the impact of standards is being felt throughout the United States. The implications of that impact are seen as negative by the opponents and positive by the proponents. Both sides agree that standards will increase the challenges that teachers face. The pressures of high-stakes tests and accountability issues are real for teachers, parents, and students. How teachers are dealing with those pressures is still debatable. Proponents claim it has been good for teachers and will actually improve what they do. Opponents feel the stress is too great.

Nebraska's State Standards

Nebraska was the 49th state to adopt educational standards (Roschewski et al., 2001). The standards adoption process began in 1989 when the Nebraska State Board of Education approved Rule 10, which deals with school accreditation. Part of the mandate from Rule 10 is that schools shall use criterion-referenced assessment instruments to determine competency in reading, writing, and math. During 1997 and 1998 the State Board of Education adopted standards for reading/writing, mathematics, science, and social studies/history, known as Nebraska L.E.A.R.N.S (Leading Educational Achievement through Rigorous Nebraska Standards). During that same time

the Nebraska Legislature passed a law requiring statewide assessment and reporting on those standards to the Nebraska Department of Education. In response to that law, the Nebraska State Board of Education, in March of 1999, approved the implementation policy for phasing in assessment and reporting of the state standards (Nebraska Department of Education, 1999).

What makes Nebraska's plan unique is that it allows for more local control than any other state that has standards. There is no mandated high-stakes single test (Roschewski et al., 2001). Each local school district can keep its local curriculum and assessments. The key is that the local curriculum and assessments must meet six quality criteria.

The six criteria are spelled out in a plan, known as STARS (School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System). STARS is a compromise between state and local control. It allows districts the ability to develop local standards, as long as they are as rigorous as the state standards. Districts can adapt their curriculum to meet the state standards. STARS also requires each district to report annually on the success of students in meeting the standards. The compromise with the state comes in the form of a statewide writing assessment, for grades 4, 8 and 11 (Roschewski et al., 2001).

The six quality criteria are the following: 1; The assessments reflect the state or local standards. 2; The students have had an opportunity to learn. 3; The assessments are free from bias or offensive language. 4; The assessment level is appropriate for students. 5; There is consistency of scoring. 6; The mastery levels are appropriate (Nebraska Department of Education, 2000). To show that the criteria have been met, districts must submit a portfolio each year. The portfolio includes documentation of both the process the district

went through and the assessments being used to meet the standards. The portfolios are sent to the state where a panel of experts rates each criterion as having been met, met/needs improvement or not met. District portfolios are then given an overall rating based on the number of criteria that are met. The rating ranges from unacceptable to exemplary.

A difference in Nebraska's standards plan, when compared to other states, is the teacher's role in the process. The state has provided grant money to pay teachers to develop the portfolio and the assessments to meet the standards (Nebraska Department of Education, 2000). Because these are developed at the local level, many Nebraska teachers have been involved, and they do feel an ownership in the product (Roschewski et al., 2001).

Another part of the process is making sure there is consistency of scoring and appropriate mastery levels for each assessment used to meet standards. Because of the way the state has mandated that the proof be provided, teachers are often responsible for keeping track of both scoring consistency and mastery levels. Both have added to the workload of teachers, as the process can be quite cumbersome. Richard Stiggins (1994) states that teachers spend one-third to one-half of their time involved in assessment. Keeping track of consistency of scoring and mastery levels has the potential to push Nebraska teachers to spend an inordinate amount of time on assessments.

In summary, Nebraska has developed a unique system of state standards. The system allows for local control and still has state checks to ensure rigor and reliability. The system also has created more teacher control and responsibility in keeping track of whether students are meeting the standards.

Summary

The research shows that the standards movement is more hotly debated today than at anytime in history. The issue is not going away anytime soon and will continue to grow as states develop plans to carry out President George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind Act*. The pressure to do well on the tests that assess standards and the protests against the standards will continue to increase. Proponents and opponents agree that standards and high-stakes tests will increase the challenges that teachers face as they try to get all students to master the standards. How teachers are dealing with the pressures is not well documented.

Nebraska's unique state standards system allows for more local control than other states. This local control means teachers are faced with issues and responsibilities that may not be found in other states. How standards are affecting them and their job performance is the core of this study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Research Design

This quantitative study used a cross-sectional survey to assess fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards and the measurements of assessment.

Sample

The population surveyed was fourth-grade public school teachers in the state of Nebraska. Demographic information obtained was teaching experience, gender, socio-economic status of the school, percentage of students who met standards and school enrollment. The breakdown for school enrollment was based on the primary high school that the elementary school feeds into, the number of fourth-grade sections in the building, and the actual elementary school enrollment. The Nebraska School Activities Association's (NSAA) classification system for the 2001-2002 school year was used to determine the class with which the primary high school is associated.

- Class A: 28 schools,
- Class B: 32 schools,
- Class C-1: 58 schools,
- Class C-2: 59 schools,
- Class D-1: 64 schools, and
- Class D-2: 65 schools, (NSAA, 2001).

Data Collection

During the fall of 2002, information was e-mailed to 463 randomly selected fourth-grade teachers in the state of Nebraska. The information included: (a) a

brief letter explaining the study and instructions for filling out the survey online, (b) the website address that contained the survey, and (c) a request to send a reply via e-mail when they had completed the survey (see Appendix B). Two follow-up e-mails were also sent (see Appendix D). The return e-mail was used to maintain anonymity. The survey completion e-mail response was completely separate from the online survey (see Appendix A and C).

Instruments

The Likert survey that was used in this study was a combination of questions from a previously administered survey and newly developed questions (see Appendix A). The previous study that utilized the survey included in this study was completed by Weichel (2002). Although that study was of Nebraska administrators' perceptions of the effects of state standards, a number of the questions were applicable to this study. Content validity and reliability tests were conducted on the survey prior to its distribution to the study sample.

Content validity. A review panel provided evidence of the survey's validity. The review panel consisted of 10 fourth grade teachers who met in June of 2002. After an explanation of the purpose of the survey, the group was asked to take the survey online and then provide feedback as to the appropriateness and clarity of each question.

Reliability. Cronbach's alpha was used to compute reliability of the data for each subscale of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha is a test used to measure internal consistency on surveys where the respondents use a Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha was .7822 for the teacher subscale, .7235 for the education subscale, .9164 for the teacher subscale, and .7435 for the administrator subscale.

Research Questions

1. What are Nebraska's fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
2. Is there a relationship between school enrollment and how a teacher perceives Nebraska's state standards process?
3. Is there a relationship between a teacher's years of experience and his/her perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
4. Is there a relationship between the percentage of students who met the state standards in the teacher's school and the teacher's perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
5. Is there a relationship between a teacher's gender and his/her perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?
6. Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of a school and a teacher's perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Data Analysis

Dependent variables. In each of the research questions, the dependent variables were fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska state standards in the following four areas: impact on teachers, impact on students, impact on administrators, and impact on education.

Independent variables. The independent variables for the research questions included: school enrollment, teachers' years of experience, percentage of students who met the state standards, gender, and socio-economic status of a school.

Analysis.

- Research question one used descriptive statistics to determine fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process.
- Research question two used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine the relationship that school enrollment had on the dependent variables.
- Research question three used an ANOVA to determine the relationship that a teacher's years of experience had on the dependent variables.
- Research question four used an ANOVA to determine the relationship that the percentage of students who have met the state standards had on the dependent variable.
- Research question five used an independent t-test to determine the relationship that gender had on the dependent variables.
- Research question six used an ANOVA to determine the relationship that the socio-economic status of a school had on the dependent variables.

Because multiple statistical tests were conducted, an alpha level of .01 was used for each analysis to control for Type I errors.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process. The analysis of related research and literature found that standards do affect schools in several areas, teachers, students, administrators, and the entire education process from curriculum to cost. Data were collected through an online survey. An e-mail was sent to 463 Nebraska public school fourth-grade teachers requesting them to fill out the survey. The response rate was 56% (257). The survey questions were constructed using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale breakdown was: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, and 5 - strongly agree.

Some questions were written in a negative fashion that asked respondents to mark high scores for negative responses. For example, a positive response to question 1.3, "Teachers resigning or planning to retire early (citing standards as a reason)" actually indicates a negative viewpoint towards standards. Because of this format it was statistically necessary to recode several questions in order to make all the questions easy to compare. Recoding allowed all questions to be statistically interpreted in the same manner. After recoding the negatively worded questions all questions could be interpreted in the same manner. A positive response to any question was interpreted as being affirmative towards standards and a negative response was seen as a being adverse towards standards.

When performing statistical analysis of the data collected for each subscale, means were computed from the usable responses. The mean

substitution process was used for the purpose of being able to use a particular respondent's scores even if he/she left some of the items blank.

Research Question 1

What are Nebraska's fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Perceptions regarding implications for teachers. The overall mean score on the 22-item subscale (dealing with the perceptions regarding teachers) was 2.32 ($SD = .45$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 1.34 on question 1.11 to a high of 3.84 on question 1.14. Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.

Perceptions regarding implications for education. The overall mean score on the 10-item subscale was 2.05 ($SD = .58$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 1.68 on question 2.1 to a high of 2.47 on question 2.8. Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.

Perceptions regarding implications for students. The overall mean score on the 5-item subscale was 2.47 ($SD = .91$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 2.32 on question 3.4 to a high of 2.78 on question 3.5. Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.

Perceptions regarding implications for administrators. The overall mean score on the 6-item subscale was 2.18 ($SD = .72$). Recoded mean scores for each question ranged from a low of 2.32 on question 3.4 to a high of 2.78 on

question 3.5. Table 4 presents the mean and standard deviation scores for each survey item and the overall mean of the recoded value for the subscale.

Total recoded mean and standard deviation. The overall mean of all the survey items was 2.26 ($SD=.66$)

Table 1

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Implications for Teachers. (Continued on next page)

Item	n	M (recoded M)	SD
1.1 Teacher morale improving.	234	1.74	.84
1.2 The stress level among teachers decreasing.	235	1.43	.82
1.3 Teachers resigning or planning to retire early (citing standards as a reason).	232	3.62 (2.38)	1.15
1.4 Teachers spending more time collaborating with one another about teaching, learning, assessments, and curriculum.	234	3.35	1.15
1.5 Teachers engaging in more collaborative planning.	234	3.15	1.14
1.6 Teachers resisting any change to their current teaching styles and techniques.	230	2.93 (3.07)	1.11
1.7 Teachers having more committee work responsibilities.	234	4.41 (1.59)	.83
1.8 Teachers having more workshops to attend.	231	4.30 (1.70)	.89
1.9 Teachers spending less time teaching and more time on test preparation activities.	232	4.55 (1.45)	.74
1.10 Teachers becoming more accountable for their students' success.	231	3.73	1.16
1.11 Record keeping being a major time constraint for teachers.	233	4.66 (1.34)	.75

Table 1 (cont.)

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Implications for Teachers.

Item	n	M (recoded M)	SD
1.12 Teachers having less summer work.	231	1.77	1.09
1.13 Teachers improving the way they teach.	230	2.86	1.20
1.14 Teachers increasing their knowledge of assessments.	231	3.84	.91
1.15 Teachers having a better understanding of exactly what students should know.	229	3.33	1.14
1.16 Teachers teaching to the tests more often.	227	4.43 (1.57)	.86
1.17 Teachers trying to transfer out of fourth grade because of the state standards/assessment/accountability process.	231	4.13 (1.87)	1.04
1.18 Nebraska's state standards take too much time from regular classroom work.	231	4.37 (1.63)	.94
1.19 Teachers spending less time helping individual students.	233	3.36 (2.64)	1.28
1.20 Teachers moving more quickly through the curriculum in order to cover all of the material on which their students are evaluated.	232	4.36 (1.64)	.86
1.21 Course content that does not cover the state standards being seen as unimportant by teachers.	230	3.84 (2.16)	1.14
1.22 Subject areas with no state standards or testing requirements will still be seen as important by teachers.	230	2.91	1.35
Recoded M and SD		2.32	.45

Table 2

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding Implications for Education

Item	n	M (recoded M)	SD
2.1 Nebraska's state standards will improve education.	233	2.47	1.08
2.2 Nebraska's state standards being a good measure of a teacher's effectiveness.	233	1.82	.93
2.3 Nebraska's state standards motivating students to learn.	233	1.78	1.00
2.4 That the reporting of results on Nebraska's state standards will provide a good way to compare the quality of schools.	233	1.70	1.05
2.5 Nebraska's state standards being overemphasized by administrators.	233	3.75 (2.25)	1.13
2.6 Nebraska's state of the schools report accurately reflecting what students have learned in school during the past year.	232	1.91	.98
2.7 Nebraska's state standards leading to a narrowing of the curriculum.	233	4.06 (1.94)	1.00
2.8 The purchase of textbooks and materials being based on how well the content matches state standards.	233	4.32 (1.68)	.92
2.9 Costs associated with the standards/assessment/accountability movement such as testing and reporting will lead to lower expenditures for other educational supplies.	232	3.69 (2.31)	1.24
2.10 Costs associated with the standards/assessment/accountability movement such as testing and reporting will result in field trips being eliminated or curtailed.	233	3.71 (2.29)	1.05
Recoded M and SD		2.01	.58

Table 3

Perceptions Regarding Implications for Students.

Item	n	M (recoded M)	SD
3.1 A significant improvement in student achievement.	231	2.42	1.05
3.2 Students leaving school more equipped to be successful.	230	2.41	1.03
3.3 Students becoming more accountable for their own success.	231	2.43	1.09
3.4 Students learning more.	231	2.32	1.04
3.5 Students' standardized achievement scores increasing throughout the state.	231	2.78	1.03
Recoded M and SD		2.47	.91

Table 4

Perceptions Regarding Implications for Administrators.

Item	n	M (recoded M)	SD
4.1 School administrators being under greater pressure to increase student achievement.	217	4.45 (1.55)	.77
4.2 Administrator morale declining.	217	3.73 (2.27)	.93
4.3 Administrators retiring early (citing standards as a reason).	215	3.44 (2.56)	.96
4.4 Record keeping becoming a major time constraint for school administrators.	216	3.91 (2.09)	1.1
4.5 School administrators becoming more accountable for their school's success.	217	3.78	1.1
4.6 Administrators will spend more time overseeing test preparation and analysis.	217	3.52 (2.48)	1.2
Recoded M and SD		2.19	.72

Research Question 2

Is there a relationship between school enrollment and the way a teacher perceives Nebraska's state standards process?

Perceptions regarding implications for teachers. On the subscale dealing with the implications for teachers there were no statistically significant differences across the school enrollment groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the Nebraska School Activity Association classification of the primary high school into which the elementary feeds ($F(5,221)=2.282, p=.048$).

Perceptions regarding implications for education. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for education and the curriculum there were no statistically significant differences across the school enrollment groups in teacher perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the Nebraska School Activity Association classification of the primary high school into which the elementary feeds ($F(5,219)=.719, p=.610$).

Perceptions regarding implications for students. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for students there were no statistically significant differences across the school enrollment groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the Nebraska School Activity Association classification of the primary high school into which the elementary feeds ($F(5,216)=2.554, p=.029$).

Perceptions regarding implications for administrators. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for administrators there were no statistically significant differences across the school enrollment groups in teacher perceptions' of Nebraska's state standards process based on the Nebraska

School Activity Association classification of the primary high school into which the elementary feeds ($F(5,205) = 1.111, p = .356$).

Research Question 3

Is there a relationship between a teacher's years of experience and his/her perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Perceptions regarding implications for teachers. On the subscale dealing with the implications for teachers there were no statistically significant differences across the teacher experience groups in teacher perceptions' of Nebraska's state standards process based on a teacher's years of experience ($F(4,230) = 2.234, p = .066$).

Perceptions regarding implications for education. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards on education and the curriculum there were no statistically significant differences across the teacher experience groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on a teacher's years of experience ($F(4,228) = 1.681, p = .155$).

Perceptions regarding implications for students. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for students there were no statistically significant differences across the teacher experience groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on a teacher's years of experience ($F(4,225) = 1.099, p = .358$).

Perceptions regarding implications for administrators. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for administrators there were no statistically significant differences across the teacher experience groups in teacher perceptions' of Nebraska's state standards process based on a teacher's years of experience ($F(4,212) = 1.617, p = .171$).

Research Question 4

Is there a relationship between the percentage of students who met the state standards in the teacher's school and the teacher's perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Perceptions regarding implications for teachers. On the subscale dealing with the implications for teachers there were no statistically significant differences across the proficiency of writing groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of fourth-graders that were proficient on the statewide writing assessment ($F(3,206) = .390, p = .760$).

Perceptions regarding implications for education. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for education and the curriculum there were no statistically significant differences across the proficiency of writing groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of fourth graders that were proficient on the statewide writing assessment ($F(3,205) = .138, p = .937$).

Perceptions regarding implications for students. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for students there were no statistically significant differences across the proficiency of writing groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of fourth graders that were proficient on the statewide writing assessment ($F(3,202) = .817, p = .486$).

Perceptions regarding implications for administrators. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards for administrators there were no statistically significant differences across the proficiency of writing groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the

percentage of fourth graders that were proficient on the statewide writing assessment ($F(3,196) = .758, p = .519$).

Research Question 5

Is there a relationship between a teacher's gender and his/her perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Perceptions regarding implications for teachers. There was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of male ($M=2.17, SD=.48$) and female ($M=2.34, SD=.44$) teachers on the subscale dealing with the implications for teachers ($t(232) = -1.740, p = .083$).

Perceptions regarding implications for education. There was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of male ($M=1.87, SD=.47$) and female ($M=2.07, SD=.59$) teachers on the subscale dealing with the implications of standards on education and the curriculum ($t(230) = -1.575, p = .117$).

Perceptions regarding implications for students. There was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of male ($M=2.17, SD=.73$) and female ($M=2.50, SD=.92$) teachers on the subscale dealing with the implications for students ($t(227) = -1.662, p = .098$).

Perceptions regarding implications for administrators. There was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of male ($M=2.00, SD=.67$) and female ($M=2.20, SD=.72$) teachers on the subscale dealing with the implications for administrators ($t(214) = -1.249, p = .213$).

Research Question 6

Is there a relationship between the socio-economic status of a school and a teacher's perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process?

Perceptions regarding implications for teachers. On the subscale dealing with the implications for teachers there were no statistically significant differences across the socio-economic groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of free and reduced students in a school lunch program ($F(5,147) = 1.266, p = .280$).

Perceptions regarding implication for education. On the subscale dealing with the implications of standards on education and the curriculum there were no statistically significant differences across the socio-economic groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of free and reduced students in a school lunch program ($F(5,191) = .544, p = .742$).

Perceptions regarding implications for students. On the subscale dealing with the implications for students there were no statistically significant differences across the socio-economic groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of free and reduced students in a school lunch program ($F(5,188) = .941, p = .456$).

Perceptions regarding implications for administrators. On the subscale dealing with the implications for administrators there were no statistically significant differences across the socio-economic groups in teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process based on the percentage of free and reduced students in a school lunch program ($F(5,184) = 1.397, p = .227$).

Summary

On the total survey there was no significant difference between subgroups on any of the research questions. Overall, the mean score for all the questions was relatively negative ($M = 2.26$). Lower mean scores for individual question

results point to some strong opinions, which will be discussed and interpreted in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations, and Summary

Discussion

This study examined Nebraska fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of how state standards have affected their schools. Data were gathered through an online survey modified from Weichel's (2002) instrument to better fit surveying fourth-grade teachers. An e-mail was sent to 463 Nebraska public school fourth-grade teachers requesting them to fill out the survey. The response rate was 56% (257). This survey used a 5-point Likert scale where mean scores of 3.0 were considered neutral. Questions that had an average mean score above 4.0 (agree) or below 2.0 (disagree) were considered to be significant because of the strong expression of thoughts and feelings. Of the 43 survey questions, 18 had mean scores that were over one point from the neutral score. Interestingly, all 18 were below 2.0, not one question was above 4.0.

The variables examined included school enrollment, the teacher's years of experience, the percentage of students proficient on state standards, the teacher's gender, and the socioeconomic status of the school. Although none of the variables revealed any significant statistical differences in any of the subscales, the overall mean was somewhat negative ($M=2.26$). The real significance was found in the questions that had averages below 2.0. These questions, according to the fourth-grade teachers surveyed, point to some disturbing perceptions concerning the effects of Nebraska's state standards process on education. These perceptions are:

1. Nebraska's state standards process has had a negative impact on fourth-grade teacher morale. ($M=1.74$)

2. Nebraska's state standards process has caused the stress level to rise among fourth-grade teachers and administrators. ($M=1.43$)
3. Nebraska's state standards process has increased the workload for fourth-grade teachers. ($M=1.45$)
4. Nebraska's state standards process has led to a narrowing of the curriculum. ($M=1.94$)
5. Nebraska's state standards process has not accurately reflected what students have learned. ($M=1.91$)
6. Nebraska's state standards process has not had a great impact on improving education. ($M=2.47$)
7. The record keeping involved in the process has become a major time constraint for teachers. ($M=1.34$)

What this means is that regardless of school enrollment, the teacher's years of experience, the percentage of students proficient on state standards, the teacher's gender, or the socioeconomic status of the school there is a consensus across all groups of fourth-grade teachers' perceptions regarding the effects of Nebraska's state standards process on education. This does make for a more powerful case when looking at the issues that need to be addressed.

According to the teachers surveyed in this study, Nebraska's state standards process is having a negative impact on teacher morale. This negative feeling does agree with the findings of several other studies regarding the impact of standards on teacher morale (Hatch, 2002; Kohn, 2001; O'Neil, 1995).

The low morale is related to the feelings of additional stress being placed on both teachers and administrators. This finding agrees with the literature (Hatch, 2002; Kohn, 2001; O'Neil, 1995). The stress is due to more committee

work, more workshops to attend, more time spent on test preparation activities, and less time spent teaching. This leads to the belief that Nebraska's state standards process takes too much time away from regular classroom work and preparation. Teachers also believe that they have to move too quickly through the curriculum in order to cover all the state standards material on which their students will be evaluated.

Although the increased workload is related to more committee work, more workshops to attend, and more time spent on test preparation, the strongest feelings were expressed about record keeping being a major time constraint for teachers ($M=1.34$, $SD=.75$). The amount of time needed to keep track of test scores and to determine the validity and reliability of the tests is a major issue. Several teachers not only filled out the survey, but also took the time to write lengthy e-mail replies. In this anecdotal evidence, several points supporting the time and stress issues were made. The teachers felt that having to keep track of all of the information was taking away from time that they would normally use to prepare for class or work with students. The pressure and time constraints are continuing to increase. They wish the standards were spread out among more grades. They feel fourth-grade teachers are stuck with all the standards. Finally, they feel that the state is trying to fix something that isn't broken.

In the survey the teachers felt strongly that the standards were leading to a narrowing of the curriculum. A narrowing of the curriculum is exactly what the Nebraska Department of Education hoped to avoid in setting up this process (Roschewski, et al., 2001). Nebraska's state standards process has the same problems that other state assessment systems have in that, the focus is on the

standards and no longer on the depth and breadth of the subject matter (Domenech, 2000).

The survey also pointed out the strong opinion of the teachers that the standards do not accurately reflect what the students have learned in school during the year ($M=1.94$, $SD=.98$). In a related sentiment, the participants were neutral towards the belief that Nebraska's state standards process has improved education ($M= 2.47$, $SD=1.08$). Teachers also do not believe that the reporting of results on Nebraska's state standards is a good way to compare the quality of schools ($M=1.70$, $SD=1.05$). Before the study, it was anticipated that teachers, even though they may not like the extra work, would have been more positive regarding the notion that the state standards process improves education.

While it may seem that the responses were primarily negative, there were a number of items that received neutral responses. This neutrality can be interpreted in different ways. It could be looked at as being supportive of some aspects of the state standards process given the negative attitude towards other parts. It could also be interpreted as proof that nothing in this process has the resounding support of fourth-grade teachers. Responses to some questions are close enough to 4.0 that they at least point to some potential positive support from some teachers for parts of the process. The respondents were somewhat positive towards the idea that Nebraska's state standards process has made teachers more accountable for their students' success ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.16$). This is what supporters of standards state as one of the main goals of the whole standards movement (Domenech, 2000). Whether standards are seen as good or bad, teachers do see standards as making them more accountable.

Another positive result of this process is that teachers do somewhat agree that standards have helped increase their knowledge of assessments ($M=3.84$, $SD=.91$). Because of the way the process has been set up, most teachers have had to learn about test bias, validity, and reliability. Therefore, the positive response was not unexpected. In fact, it was probably lower than anticipated. These glimmers of hope do need to be studied further and built upon.

Recommendations

Stress Relief

Because of the stress and low morale that fourth-grade teachers feel with the additional work created by Nebraska's state standards process, both local and state administrators need to find ways to alleviate that stress. The Nebraska Department of Education is beginning to make changes that will help. The department is in the process of revising the portfolio requirement. They have announced in their latest update (Nebraska Department of Education, 2003) that schools with a very good or exemplary rating on their next portfolio will not have to produce a portfolio for that subject in the future. They have also stated that the writing standards will be met by completing the statewide writing assessment. These assessments are given on a rotating basis between fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades and are sent in to the state department to be scored. So, even though writing assessments are reported to the state only once every 3 years in fourth grade, the state is allowing that assessment to count as meeting the standards for all 3 years. This still does not change assessment requirements for the speaking, reading, and listening standards, but it is a move designed to lessen the intrusion of the standards.

In that same update, the Nebraska Department of Education announced that schools would now have the option to move the upcoming science and social studies standards to fifth grade. This will allow for the workload to be spread out and some of the original burden of all subjects being reported in fourth grade to be removed.

I would recommend that state officials continue to revise the state standards system to share the responsibility for assessments among the different grade levels.

State Funded Coordinators

Unfortunately, the update also included more work for the fourth-grade teachers. Because of the *No Child Left Behind Act* that the federal government has enacted, standards reporting for math and reading will be required every year instead of every other year as it is now being done. When science and social studies are added in 2006 and 2007 respectively, standards will be reported in three subjects every year. If schools do not move the reporting of science and social studies to fifth grade, this will put additional work on fourth-grade teachers. Regardless of when (fourth or fifth grade) the science and social studies standards are reported, I would recommend that the state provide money to each district or consortium of schools to hire a state standards coordinator and assistant to keep track of all of the data and take care of the reporting. Having someone other than the teachers handle all the record keeping and reporting would help in providing the teachers with some paperwork relief and perhaps even give them a chance to focus more on teaching and working with students. State standards coordinators could potentially provide expertise to the teachers as they continue to improve their state standards assessments.

Assessment and Standards Training

State and local policy-makers may want to work with university officials in developing an ongoing program to help teachers develop a better understanding of what good assessment is. Because fourth-grade teachers felt that Nebraska's state standards process has led to an increase in their knowledge of assessments, it would be a good time to capitalize on that growth by providing further training for them, and more importantly, better training for new teachers entering the profession.

Those same policy-makers and university officials should also develop a course for education undergraduates covering all the nuances of standards. This course needs to cover everything from the history of standards to the situation today. It should address both the pros and cons of standards. This will allow all new teachers to be better prepared for the job ahead of them.

Nebraska Department of Education Summit

A process that generates this much stress, negativity, and in some cases outright hostility needs to be seriously revisited and rethought to find out why. I would recommend that Nebraska Department of Education officials set up meetings throughout the state with fourth-grade teachers to discuss the issues brought forth in this survey. Some of the potential issues that need to be addressed are:

1. How can the process be revised to relieve the record-keeping burden?
2. Why isn't the time spent reporting standards better served working with students?
3. Have time and money spent on the whole standards process improved education enough to make it worthwhile?

4. How can this process be changed to gain the support of the fourth-grade teachers?
5. How can fourth-grade teachers' feelings of additional stress be relieved?
6. What can the state do to better inform teachers of the importance, necessity, and potential benefits of Nebraska's state standards process?

This is just the tip of the iceberg of potential issues. The main point is that the state needs to listen to the people who are in the classroom working with the students on a daily basis. The teachers must also be willing to listen and compromise with the state. Working together the teachers and state officials have the chance to take an idea that has the right intentions and potentially make it better than anyone has yet imagined.

Recommendations for Future Research

Hopefully, this study will lead to further dialogue among Nebraska's teachers, administrators, and state officials. Changes in Nebraska's state standards process should result from those conversations. If and when changes are made, more studies of the effects of Nebraska's state standards process on fourth-grade teachers should be conducted. Although this study focused on fourth grade, it is also recommended that studies of eighth and eleventh grade teachers be conducted to see if they have similar concerns. Finally, if testing is expanded as expected to grades 3 through 8 because of the requirements in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, studies should be conducted to see if the teachers in those grades have similar or perhaps greater concerns.

E-mail and On-line Surveys

Using e-mail to contact teachers had many pluses, but future researchers must be aware of some potential drawbacks. Lists of teachers are only as accurate as the people who make them. The fourth-grade teacher list from the Nebraska Department of Education contained several teachers from other grades and subject areas. The good thing about using e-mail to contact them was that they responded with a quick reply stating the fact they were not teaching fourth-grade. A postal mailing might have led to a lot of those same people throwing the survey away without a reply.

This process was a lot more work upfront, but much easier once the data were collected. The most time consuming part of the process was looking up all the e-mails. Several educational service unit web pages are set up with a database search engine. The database lists the e-mail addresses of all the teachers of the schools in that service unit. Even with those lists, it still took several hours to find them all.

It is recommended, as was done in this study that the letter sent out in the e-mail explaining how to complete the survey be given to several teachers who are not computer savvy on a trial basis. Giving it to these teachers allowed user-friendly improvements to be made to the point that only one teacher requested a paper copy to fill out. It is recommended that participants be given the option to request a paper copy.

It is also recommended that demographic information that teachers may not easily access be included in the e-mail. Thinking through what information will be difficult for the participants to find will save them time and increase the chances of them completing the survey. For example, including a listing of all of

Nebraska elementary schools' free and reduced lunch percentages saves the teachers from having to track the information down from their administration or look it up on the Internet.

Summary

This study looked at fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process and examined how the state standards process affects the way fourth-grade teachers teach. Although no significant differences were found across any of the variables that were explored, the survey did reveal a number of issues that need to be addressed.

The stress caused by Nebraska's state standards process is noticeable. Teachers see morale declining as the additional workload increases. Teachers do not believe that their students' achievement of Nebraska's state standards is an accurate reflection of what they have learned nor do standards motivate students to learn. Also, teachers do not see the standards movement as a good way to compare the quality of schools, which the general public is always tempted to do whenever standard achievement scores are published in the newspaper. Finally, the teachers see Nebraska's state standards leading to a narrowing of the curriculum.

These issues all need to be studied further and addressed at the Federal, state and local level. Nebraska's state standards process has the potential to be the best among all the methods being used by the various states, but without addressing the concerns of the people expected to carry it out, namely fourth-grade teachers, the process will not reach its goal of improving education. Instead, it will lead to a continuous influx of new inexperienced teachers and a demoralized staff in the one grade expected to do it all.

Finally, these issues will not go away with further testing in more grades. Instead it may expand the issues and feelings to more teachers. If the Federal government's plan does continue on its current course of testing in grades three through eight, then future research should be conducted to see if teachers feel that the additional assessments accurately reflect what the students have learned or if it is merely another process that leads to a narrowing of the curriculum without improving education. There is no doubt that these studies will need to be conducted and the issues addressed, or we could end up with an entire school of stressed teachers who do not believe that the assessment process improves education.

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Appendix A

Study Topic: Fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards.

Please enter your security code: 2002F4

Directions: From the drop down menus please select the most appropriate answer for the following profile information

1. Gender	Male
	Female

2. Years of teaching experience:
(include the current school year)

	16-20 years
	21+ years

	0 to 5 years
	6 to 10 years
	11-15 years

3. In which class does the high school most of your students eventually attend participate in basketball?

	Class A
	Class B
	Class C-1
	Class C-2
	Class D-1
	Class D-2

4. What percentage of students in your elementary school are on free and reduced meals?

	0-9%
	10-19%
	20-29%
	30-50%
	51-75%
	76-100%

5. What, according to the Nebraska Department of Education's state of the schools report, was the overall average percentage of fourth-grade students in your elementary who were designated proficient on the Nebraska statewide writing assessment?

	0-25%
	26-50%
	51-75%
	76-100%

6. How many fourth-grade teachers work in your elementary building?

	1-2
	3-5
	6-10
	10+

7. What is the current enrollment of your elementary building?

	0-50
	51-100
	101-200
	201-400
	401-750
	751+

Directions:

Please use the scale below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the effects of the Nebraska state standards process on your school.

SA=Strongly Agree
 A= Agree
 N=Neutral
 D=Disagree
 SD=Strongly Disagree

Teachers:

Now that the implementation of state standards, assessments , and accountability has begun in Nebraska, I anticipate....

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.1 Teacher morale improving.					
1.2 The stress level among teachers decreasing.					
1.3 Teachers resigning or planning to retire early (citing standards as a reason).					
1.4 Teachers spending more time collaborating with one another about teaching, learning, assessments, and curriculum.					
1.5 Teachers engaging in more collaborative planning.					
1.6 Teachers resisting any change to their current teaching styles and techniques.					
1.7 Teachers having more committee work responsibilities.					
1.8 Teachers having more workshops to attend.					
1.9 Teachers spending less time teaching and more time on test preparation activities.					

SA=Strongly Agree
 A= Agree
 N=Neutral
 D=Disagree
 SD=Strongly Disagree

Teachers:

Now that the implementation of state standards, assessments , and accountability has begun in Nebraska, I anticipate

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1.10 Teachers becoming more accountable for their students' success.					
1.11 Record keeping being a major time constraint for teachers.					
1.12 Teachers having less summer work.					
1.13 Teachers improving the way they teach.					
1.14 Teachers increasing their knowledge of assessments.					
1.15 Teachers having a better understanding of exactly what students should know.					
1.16 Teachers teaching to the tests more often.					
1.17 Teachers trying to transfer out of fourth grade because of the state standards/assessment/accountability process.					
1.18 Nebraska's state standards take too much time from regular classroom work.					
1.19 Teachers spending less time helping individual students.					
1.20 Teachers moving more quickly through the curriculum in order to cover all of the material on which their students are evaluated.					
1.21 Course content that does not cover the state standards being seen as unimportant by teachers.					
1.22 Subject areas with no state standards or testing requirements will still be seen as important by teachers.					

SA=Strongly Agree
 A= Agree
 N=Neutral
 D=Disagree
 SD=Strongly Disagree

Standards

Now that the implementation of state standards, assessments, and accountability has begun in Nebraska, I anticipate.....

	SA	A	N	D	SD
2.1 Nebraska's state standards will improve education.					
2.2 Nebraska's state standards being a good measure of a teacher's effectiveness.					
2.3 Nebraska's state standards motivating students to learn.					
2.4 That the reporting of results on Nebraska's state standards will provide a good way to compare the quality of schools.					
2.5 Nebraska's state standards being overemphasized by administrators.					
2.6 Nebraska's state of the schools report accurately reflecting what students have learned in school during the past year.					
2.7 Nebraska's state standards leading to a narrowing of the curriculum.					
2.8 The purchase of textbooks and materials being based on how well the content matches state standards.					
2.9 Costs associated with the standards/assessment/accountability movement such as testing and reporting will lead to lower expenditures for other educational supplies.					
2.10 Costs associated with the standards/assessment/accountability movement such as testing and reporting will result in field trips being eliminated or curtailed.					

SA=Strongly Agree
 A= Agree
 N=Neutral
 D=Disagree
 SD=Strongly Disagree

Students

Now that the state standards/assessment/accountability movement has begun to be implemented in Nebraska, I anticipate.....

	SA	A	N	D	SD
3.1 A significant improvement in student achievement.					
3.2 Students leaving school more equipped to be successful.					
3.3 Students becoming more accountable for their own success.					
3.4 Students learning more.					
3.5 Students' standardized achievement scores increasing throughout the state.					

SA=Strongly Agree
 A= Agree
 N=Neutral
 D=Disagree
 SD=Strongly Disagree

Administration

Now that the state standards/assessment/accountability movement has begun to be implemented in Nebraska, I anticipate.....

	SA	A	N	D	SD
4.1 School administrators being under greater pressure to increase student achievement.					
4.2 Administrator morale declining.					
4.3 Administrators retiring early (citing standards as a reason).					
4.4 Record keeping becoming a major time constraint for school administrators.					
4.5 School administrators becoming more accountable for their school's success.					
4.6 Administrators will spend more time overseeing test preparation and analysis.					

Appendix B

IRB #340-02-EX

Dear Fourth-Grade Teacher,

My name is Rich Beran. I am the assistant superintendent at Gretna Public Schools in Gretna, Nebraska. I'm conducting a study of fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process. I would like to ask for your help in determining those perceptions. As part of this process I am asking you to fill out an online survey. Your candid responses will be greatly appreciated. The survey should only take 8 to 12 minutes to complete. After you have completed the survey I would appreciate a reply via e-mail. This set up will ensure your anonymity.

You can access the survey in two ways. First, if your e-mail software is set up to access a browser directly, you should be able to just click on the web site listed below. It will then open either your Netscape or Internet Explorer browser. If that doesn't work you will have to highlight and copy the web site, open your web browser, and paste it into the address or URL box in your browser. Once on the web site just follow the directions. Your security code is 2002G4. To ensure anonymity everyone completing the survey has the same code. The security code is being used to keep others from accessing the web site and completing the survey. Please be sure to click the submit button on the final page. The web site URL is: <http://coedb.unomaha.edu/lshulte/rberan.htm>

Ultimately, I hope to share my findings with the Nebraska Department of Education. My goal is to present them with an accurate picture of how state standards are impacting fourth-grade teachers.

If you would like, I will also be glad to share my findings with you. After submitting the survey, just write a note in your e-mail reply that you would like to see the findings. If you have any questions or problems filling out the survey please e-mail me. Thank you for your participation and help!

Educationally Yours,

Rich Beran

IRB #340-02-EX

Dear Fourth-Grade Teacher,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your contribution to my research is greatly appreciated.

Survey Format: The first part of the survey asks for basic demographic data. In sections one through four, the survey will ask you to provide a response or rating on a 5-point Likert scale based on your experience with Nebraska's state standards process.

Please follow the instructions given on the survey. Please respond to every question. Your participation is voluntary, and your responses will be completely anonymous. There will be no way to link you to your responses.

Thanks again for participating!

Richard J. Beran

Doctoral Student

Appendix D

IRB #340-02-EX

Dear Fourth-Grade Teacher,

I am sending out a second request to fill out my online survey of your perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process. The instructions from the first mailing are listed below. If you have already filled the survey out, thank you, and please do not fill it out again. If you have not had the opportunity to do so or you thought it might be too difficult I can assure you from the response of others that the process is easier than a paper survey and can be done quickly. It is simply clicking a button telling whether you agree or disagree with each statement and then clicking the submit button when you are finished. But, if you would prefer a paper copy please e-mail me your postal mailing address as soon as possible and I will mail you one. Also, if there is any information about your school that you are not sure of please let me know and I can quickly look it up for you on the Nebraska Department of Education's website.

I am also sending out this second request because several of you correctly pointed out that I picked a bad time (right before Christmas) to send out a survey.

I would like to have everyone complete the survey by January 21, 2003. But, if you need more time please let me know. I believe that all of you deserve to be heard on this critical issue.

Again, I would like to say thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey and more importantly for all that you do for the children of Nebraska.

Rich

My name is Rich Beran. I am the assistant superintendent at Gretna Public Schools in Gretna, Nebraska. I'm conducting a study of fourth-grade teachers' perceptions of Nebraska's state standards process. I would like to ask for your help in determining those perceptions. As part of this process I am asking you to fill out an online survey. Your candid responses will be greatly appreciated. The survey should only take 8 to 12 minutes to complete. After you have completed the survey I would appreciate a reply via e-mail. This set up will ensure your anonymity.

You can access the survey in two ways. First, if your e-mail software is set up to access a browser directly, you should be able to just click on the web site listed below. It will then open either your Netscape or Internet Explorer browser. If that doesn't work you will have to highlight and copy the web site, open your web browser, and paste it into the address or URL box in your browser. Once on the web site just follow the directions. Your security code is 2002G4. To ensure anonymity everyone completing the survey has the same code. The security code is being used to keep others from accessing the web site and completing the survey. Please be sure to click the submit button on the final page. The web site URL is: <http://coedb.unomaha.edu/lshulte/rberan.htm>

Ultimately, I hope to share my findings with the Nebraska Department of Education. My goal is to present them with an accurate picture of how state standards are impacting fourth-grade teachers.

If you would like, I will also be glad to share my findings with you. After submitting the survey, just write a note in your e-mail reply that you would like to see the findings. If you have any questions or problems filling out the survey please e-mail me. Thank you for your participation and help!