

A SURVEY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RURAL PRESS COVERAGE
AND THE VOTING ON SCHOOL UNIFICATION
IN SELECTED KANSAS COUNTIES

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

School unification in Kansas has been a controversial issue since the passage of Senate Bill 400 in 1961. The Kansas Supreme Court declared this piece of legislation unconstitutional and the Kansas Legislature in the next session rewrote the legislation as H.B. 377, and it successfully passed and became a statute regulation. The law required each county to appoint a planning committee to propose, for the voters of the districts with attendance centers within that county, a plan of school unification for the public schools of that county. Cities of the first and second class were exempted from the planning board actions. The plans were to be presented to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for approval or disapproval on or before March 1, 1964. If approved by the state superintendent these plans would be presented to the voters within each district on June 2, 1964, and if rejected were to be presented again in revised form, perhaps, on September 8, 1964. The voters had only to mark a "yes" or "no" on the ballots to establish approval or disapproval of the proposed plans. In a majority of the counties of Kansas the plans

were rejected by the voters in the June election, making it necessary to re-submit the plans again in September. The September election found many more counties, though not all, approving the plans. This study will include the results of the school unification elections on June 2, 1964, and on September 8, 1964, for the counties selected for the study.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study (1) to compare the extent of coverage on the topic of school unification by printed news media within six selected counties; (2) the editorial slant of the articles published; (3) the publication of information on unification as projected by the county planning boards and school administrative personnel within the counties; and (4) public reaction to the information as exhibited by contributory material to the news media, and responses as indicated by the actual vote on the proposed unification plans.

Hypothesis to be tested. The major hypothesis for this study was that there was no significant difference in

the outcome of the elections on school unification due to the influence of communications media in the counties studied.

A second hypothesis to be tested was that public school administrative support of the measure had no effect on the outcome.

Importance of the study. Quality education with equal educational opportunities for all school children has been a major concern of many educational groups within Kansas in recent years. In spite of efforts to promote these aims, as expressed by the legislature in enacting H.B. 377, the public has rejected these goals in many counties in Kansas. This study was a partial attempt to analyze the reaction of the public to ascertain whether the lack of adequate information or active opposition by news media was a determining factor in the rejection of what was designed for a forward step in the education of Kansas youth.

Limitations of the study. This study will make no attempt to determine the effect of deep-seated tradition as a fact of rural community attitudes in regards to the education of their children, although the existence of this

phenomena must be admitted. Nor will an attempt be made to determine the pressure of the present economic situation in rural America, except as it is referred to in editorial comment as a propaganda device. The effect of religious groups on community actions will also be excluded, except again as it is referred to in the editorial comments of the press.

II. DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Printed news media. For the purposes of this study the news media has referred to the local or rural press, mainly those media published locally on a weekly or semi-weekly basis. The exceptions were three daily papers that still fit the description of rural press in that they are published in the main for local readership, and that they have a limited circulation. The counties for this study were selected partly on the basis of being far enough removed from large population centers so as to be free of the influence of issues within the cities.

Editorial slant. The term editorial slant referred to the bias as exhibited by the publication in printing a predominance of news in favor of the proposal, or a

predominance of news presenting the proposal in an unfavorable light if such a situation should exist.

Information on unification. This included all news originating with the planning boards, letters to the editor, factual publication of the law itself, and editorial content reprinted from other sources.

School administrative personnel. This term included the actual school administrators, superintendents and principals, and the members of local school boards.

III. PROCEDURES FOLLOWED

Six counties were selected for this study. Two were chosen where the school unification plans were approved by the voters on June 2, 1964; two were chosen where the school unification plans were rejected on June 2, but approved on September 8, 1964; and two counties where unification plans were completely rejected. The counties were paired as closely as possible on the basis of population, school districts, income sources, and the presence of like communications media.

A survey was made of all rural press publications within the six counties covering the period of time from the

passage of the unification law to the elections of September 8, 1964, to determine the extent of news coverage pertaining to unification.

The data was then broken down into tables recording the information under five (5) categories. These were (1) articles highly unfavorable to unification which actively encourage a negative vote; (2) articles unfavorable to unification in which the news was slanted to present the issue in an unfavorable light; (3) articles of a more or less informative nature in which the facts of unification were presented strictly as facts with no attempt being made to color the facts; (4) articles favoring unification in which the news was slanted to present the issue in the best or more favorable light; and (5) articles which actively supported the unification plan and urged voters to approve the plans.

The percentage of the vote as favorable and unfavorable was determined in each county as was the percentage of news articles favoring and opposing unification were determined for each publication.

The percentage of circulation for the publications within each county was determined by comparing the total circulation within the local areas with the total population

within the county. Effective local circulation within the districts was determined when possible.

A study was made of a readership survey of rural Kansas publications to determine the extent to which rural people read and rely on information gained from the local press publications.

The final step established the relationship between the per cent of the vote, favorable or unfavorable; the category of the news coverage, as favorable or unfavorable; and the effective area coverage of the publication.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A considerable quantity of literature is available on the subject of school and community relations that relates in a general way to the issue of school unification. The problem of unifying the rural schools of Kansas is not alone one of merely complying with the law, but also is a problem of relating the change to the goals of education held by the public.

I. LITERATURE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION

The reasons for the failure of the public to support school programs are many and varied. It may well be that approaches to the public were ill-advised. The public no longer want their schools "sold" to them. They want to be a part in the planning and determination of the needs of their schools. Public support for the ever-expanding programs of education can be obtained only through a cooperative approach to planning school programs.¹

¹"How to Get Your Public's Support," School Management, 6:104, April, 1962, (A chapter from a Manual for School Board Members published by the University of Kentucky).

Lack of effective communications may be another key to the failure of many school reorganization plans. The issues must be fairly presented to the people.² Many times the approaches to school district reorganization devote too much attention to the factual phases of the program, i.e., the economic factors, expansion of facilities, improvement of services, specialization of curriculum offerings, and better teachers. While the facts about these phases are of utmost importance, even more important are the personal feelings of the citizens of the community. The approach should devote more attention to the social and psychological attitudes of the people affected, their habits, customs, points of view, and vested interests.³

It may also be that lack of adequate factual information made available to the public could be a key to lack of public support of a vital issue. Has information supplied to the public been adequate to keep them informed is a question that should frequently be analyzed by those responsible for gaining the support of the public on a school issue. When people are keenly interested in a topic,

²Roald F. Campbell, "Feelings Are Facts in School District Reorganization," Nation's Schools, 57:59, March, 1956.

³Ibid.

they turn to newspaper sources for a thorough report on the topic under discussion, and in a situation involving controversial issues people tend to do an increased amount of reading.⁴

II. PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

Foskett, in assessing the value of public relations programs in public schools, says that even though no two school communities are exactly alike, an active program to facilitate lay participation in public school affairs must include:⁵

1. A program for relating the various activities of the school to the "way of life" of the varied segments of the community population to give it significance.
2. Develop some means and channels of communication, both formal and informal, that reach diverse categories of the population. Schools are failing to communicate with many people because of restricted form and media in use.
3. Develop procedures in forming school policy to broaden channels of participation.
4. Administrators must make the necessary "inventions" in the means of relating the schools to the community.

⁴Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Radio and the Printed Page (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), p. 147.

⁵John M. Foskett, "New Facts About Lay Participation," Nation's Schools, 54:65, August, 1954.

The program of relating the schools to the community must be constantly evaluated according to Baughman, and the "appraisal of the progress and success of any going concern is the responsibility of its leaders."⁶

Kansas, as do most other comparable rural states, retains a high degree of traditionalism in its institutions. Change comes slowly in rural areas with stable populations. Also, most rural Kansas neighborhoods are predominantly homogeneous in nationality and religious backgrounds. In a Wisconsin survey, Krietlow found that rural neighborhoods of people with mixed nationality and religious backgrounds accept new educational methods more readily than do neighborhoods with a common nationality and religion. The heterogeneous neighborhoods set and attain higher educational goals than do homogeneous neighborhoods. They are more favorable to practices that break away from tradition.⁷

There is a possible correlation between the fate of Senate Bill 400 in the Kansas Supreme Court and the

⁶Dale Baughman, "Yardsticks for Measuring School-Community Relations," Educational Administration and Supervision, 43:22, February, 1957.

⁷Burton W. Krietlow and James A. Duncan, "Rural Attitudes Towards Schools," Nation's Schools, 54:45, September, 1954.

rejection of H.B. 377 in a majority of counties in Kansas. Many familiar sequences have about them the characteristic that prior events place constraints on the likelihood of later events occurring.⁸ It could be that the fact that the Supreme Court declared the first unification measure unconstitutional placed a stigma on the subsequent legislation.

III. SUMMARY

The available literature indicates that revolutionary changes may be due in school-community relations before the successful introduction of revolutionary changes in the structure of school organization in Kansas can become a reality. The criteria for establishing successful relations within the community could be:

1. Use citizens as much as possible in studies of school needs. Nothing will inspire more interest in a school than having a large number of citizens working for it.

⁸Jerome S. Bruner, and Renato Taguiri, The Perception of People (Handbook of Social Psychology, ed. Gardner Lindzey. Cambridge, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Company, 1954), p. 636.

2. Board meetings should not be closed. Urge the public and the press to attend and give the press all the information it needs to adequately report on the board proceedings.⁹

3. Work within the social framework of the community.

4. Study the power structure of the community, and rely on local leaders to help gain the support of their followers.¹⁰

Interest in schools is a major predictor of activity in school affairs, and a well-informed, participating lay public will evince a major interest in its school and its program.

⁹Bureau of School Service, University of Kentucky, "How to Get Your Public's Support," School Management, 6:104-6, April, 1962.

¹⁰Campbell, op. cit., p. 60.

CHAPTER III

THE SURVEY METHODS USED AND COUNTIES STUDIED

Counties studied. Six counties located in North Central Kansas were selected for this study. The counties were Cloud, Ellsworth, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Russell. The selection of counties was made for three pertinent reasons. First, to adequately compare the effects of publicity it was desirable to select counties in as nearly a contiguous area as possible to offset as far as possible widely varying geographical, economic, and social pressures. Second, to gain as much information as possible, it was desirable to select counties for study where reactions to school unification were varied so as to make possible a comparison of voter reaction and publicity. For this reason the six counties selected were divided into three groups, two counties rejecting unification, two counties approving unification at the first election, and two counties rejecting unification at the first election but approving it at the second election. Third, it was desirable, if possible, to have the area selected as far removed as practical from the large population centers to remove or modify any influences from such centers that might be felt

in rural areas. The counties selected appeared to the investigator to meet all the criteria more adequately than any other such area available for study.

Rural press publications selected. The news publications in these areas also presented a fair cross-section of the rural press in Kansas. In each county selected there is published one or more of the weekly newspapers that comprise the true rural press. These papers have a somewhat limited and predominantly local circulation. Three daily newspapers are published in these counties, but the selection provided that one daily paper was produced in a county fitting into each of the three categories studied, i.e., one in a county rejecting the plan as proposed, one in a county approving unification at the first election, and one in a county rejecting unification at the first election but approving at the second. This factor should offset any undue influence a daily publication might exert in a rural area. The daily publications too fit the category of rural publications as the circulation again is limited and predominantly local. Table I (page 16) lists the publications by county and includes pertinent data on each.

TABLE I
PUBLICATIONS SURVEYED

<i>Publication.</i>	<i>Place of Publication</i>	<i>Frequency of Publication</i>	<i>Circulation</i>
<u>Cloud County</u> (Pop. 14,407)			
Concordia Blade Empire	Concordia	daily	3792
Clyde Republican	Clyde	weekly	1242
Concordia Kansan	Concordia	weekly	1925
Glasco Sun	Glasco	weekly	971
Jamestown Optimist	Jamestown	weekly	700
Miltonvale Record	Miltonvale	weekly	830
<u>Ellsworth County</u> (7,7677)			
Ellsworth Reporter	Ellsworth	weekly	3448
Holyrood Gazette	Holyrood	weekly	660
Wilson World	Wilson	weekly	1088
<u>Lincoln County</u> (5,556)			
Sentinel-Republican	Lincoln	weekly	2225
Sylvan Grove News	Sylvan Grove	weekly	440
<u>Mitchell County</u> (8,866)			
Beloit Daily Call	Beloit	daily	2568
Cawker City Ledger	Cawker City	weekly	1450
<u>Osborne County</u> (7,506)			
Downs News	Downs	weekly	1438
Natoma-Luray Independent	Natoma	weekly	1438
Osborne County Farmer	Osborne	weekly	2350
<u>Russell County</u> (11,348)			
Lucas Independent	Lucas	weekly	640
Russell Daily News	Russell	daily	3997
Russell Record	Russell	weekly	3769

The unification plans as presented to the public were studied to determine the relationship to existing facilities and the relationship to the publications studied. School news is a vital factor in rural press publications, and some publications devote as much as 25% of the front page to such news during the school year. (Lincoln Sentinel-Republican.) In publications originating in the larger towns, such as Concordia or Beloit for example, school news was not such a preminent front page item, but for the smaller centers the schools appear to be the prime news source. The counties studied all presented unification plans calling for two districts within each county. In some instances major attendance centers were paired with such facilities in adjoining counties to form such districts. Downs in Osborne County unifying with Cawker City and Tipton in Mitchell County is an example of such an arrangement.

However, the publicity accompanying the proposals as presented in the publications indicates that in some cases the plan as submitted by the planning board was of secondary importance to the issue of the concept of unification as outlined in the school unification law.

The publications originating in these counties were carefully surveyed for the years 1961 to 1964 to evaluate

and tabulate the extent of coverage devoted to the school unification issue. For evaluation the news coverage was divided into five (5) categories and tabulated simply as categories 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Under category 1 was tabulated by column inches of coverage all news and material that actively advocated opposition to the proposed plan and exemplified by exhorting the public to vote no on the issue. An example of category 1 publicity follows.

A no vote would show the educators from the metropolitan areas that the rural people in their school districts are not ready yet to accept what cities want to hand them. This is a tax bill in an educational bill, and the only reason it was passed was to get more state money to the metropolitan school districts. (Marvin Stark, letter to the editor, Natoma-Luray Independent, May 14, 1964.)

Category 2 included news that is less obviously opposed to unification than the active opposition, yet presents unification in a context unfavorable to the plan as presented to the public. The following example typifies the news assigned to category 2 in the publications.

No one can force you to buy it (unification) if you do not want it. Some planning boards are trying to scare you into voting yes by telling you that if you do not accept one of the propositions they offer you then the State Superintendent will do it for you or the next session of the Legislature will pass their own Unification Bill. I would like to know how they know what the session of the Legislature will do. I don't. (Kenneth Sharp, President of Rural School Board Association, Wilson World, May 14, 1964.)

Category 3 included publicity of strictly factual nature, that material showing no bias or editorial slant and which is presented wholly as an information service to the public. The presentation of the unification plan for the county would fall into news typical of this category.

Category 4 included news of a more or less factual nature but was presented in a manner that accentuated the good features or benefits to be derived from the plan. An example of category 4 follows.

The school unification law has two goals: to equalize educational opportunities among students and to equalize the tax burden among property owners.

Under unification, several schools could share in the services of teachers, such as a speech therapist, whereas each individual school now in its smaller separate district is not able to afford such facilities. (Beloit Daily Call, May 29, 1964.)

Category 5 was the material published, including advertisements, that actively and forcefully advocated acceptance of the plan as proposed to the voters. This category might be illustrated by an instance of the businessmen in one town who, favoring the proposal, purchased advertising space in the local paper and inserted ads urging the citizens to vote yes. A typical news item for this category would be:

Working cooperatively all schools can accomplish future goals that cannot be accomplished alone. This plan is the people's plan--determined by public hearings and designed to offer the best education in the future. Vote yes. (Cawker City Ledger, May 28, 1964.)

These then are the categories into which the publicity devoted to unification was divided. The results are tabulated in column inches of space devoted to unification and is broken down into county and individual publication in Tables II through VII.

A further breakdown is provided for Cloud and Ellsworth Counties where unification was rejected at the June 2, 1964, election, and approved at the election on September 8, 1964. To properly analyze the effects of publicity on the rural public in those counties it was deemed necessary to evaluate the news prior to the June 2 election separately from the news between June 2, and September 8, when the public sentiment shifted from an attitude unfavorable to unification to one in favor of the plans proposed by the county planning boards.

The press coverage has also been further analyzed as to the source of the items, whether it originated with the newspaper staff, the county planning board or county superintendent, or from other sources.

Cloud County

The unification election in Cloud County presents a somewhat different pattern from that in other counties. The total vote was favorable at the June 2 election, with 542 yes votes and 479 no votes, but the plan had to carry favorably in all areas city and rural. In this case the plan was defeated by the rural vote with 404 no votes and only 245 yes. Thus another election was set for September by the board.

TABLE II

TABULATION OF NEWS COVERAGE OF UNIFICATION
IN CLOUD COUNTY

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category prior to June 2, 1964					
	1	2	3	4	5	total
Concordia Kansan		19"	82"	15"		116"
Clyde Republican	24"	29"	62"	8"		123"
Glasco Sun		66"	80"	20"		166"
Kansas Optimist	5"	15"	59"			79"
Miltonvale Record		12"	21"			33"
Blade-Empire	15"	42"	161"			218"
Totals	54"	183"	464"	43"		735"

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category between June and September, 1964					
	1	2	3	4	5	total
Concordia Kansan			38"	7"		45"
Clyde Republican*						
Glasco Sun		5"	8"	25"		38"
Kansas Optimist			35"	40"	33"	108"
Miltonvale Record			41"	6"	10"	57"
Blade-Empire			59"	17"	16"	92"
Totals		5"	181"	95"	69"	340"

*The Clyde district was in plans approved in Washington County in June and the Clyde publication carried no further coverage.

The Clyde district was released by the Cloud County planning board to form a district with Clifton in Washington County. The Clyde vote was 82 per cent favorable despite a predominance of news opposing the plan.

For the remainder of the county the news coverage varied sharply after the June 2 defeat of the plan. Prior to June the coverage in the county had been mostly in the unfavorable category with 43 per cent in categories 1 and 2 compared to only 9 per cent in the favorable categories. The rural vote in the June election was 62 per cent against unification.

Following the June election the news coverage changed abruptly in tone. The planning board appealed to the voters through news media for a fair consideration of the plan. Many news stories carried hints of action by the state superintendent if the plans were again defeated. The general thesis of the news between June and September seemed to be to keep control in local hands even at the price of unification.

Of the news coverage between June and September, 45 per cent fell in categories 4 and 5, and less than 2 per cent came in the unfavorable category. The vote in the September election was 80 per cent favorable. The basic unification plan in Cloud County remained unchanged.

Ellsworth County

The Ellsworth County study had some similarities to Cloud County in that two elections were held. The June vote was unfavorable with 500 yes votes and 811 no votes. In the September election the vote was 1,276 yes and 1,059 no. The planning board revised the districting in Ellsworth County and the second plan was solidly supported by the publications in the two largest attendance centers, although vigorously opposed by the other publication which support the first plan.

TABLE III

TABULATION OF NEWS COVERAGE OF UNIFICATION
IN ELLSWORTH COUNTY

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category prior to June 2, 1964					
	1	2	3	4	5	total
Ellsworth Reporter	10"	48"	71"			129"
Ellsworth Messenger*		61"	73"			134"
Wilson World	30"	87"	135"	34"		286"
Holyrood Gazette		22"	91"	22"	24"	159"
Total	40"	218"	370"	56"	24"	708"

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category between June and September, 1964					
	1	2	3	4	5	total
Ellsworth Reporter			148"	244"		392"
Wilson World		24"	54"	42"		120"
Holyrood Gazette	47"	10"	7"			64"
Total	47"	34"	209"	286"		576"

*The Ellsworth Messenger ceased publication in December, 1963.

The news coverage over the county as a whole was unfavorable to the plan prior to the June 2 election with

36 per cent of the news in the unfavorable categories and only 12 per cent favorable. The voting in the June election showed 62 per cent of the voters opposed to the plan.

After the June election, the planning board revised the plans for the county and the overall publicity between June and September indicated that the two publications with the largest circulations favored the plan. Publicity between June and September was 48 per cent favorable as opposed to only 15 per cent in the unfavorable categories. The vote at the September 8 election revealed that 55 per cent of the voters approved the plan.

An interesting sidelight is the position of the Holyrood Gazette which favored the original plan with news coverage 28 per cent favorable contrasted with 14 per cent in the unfavorable categories. The vote in that area was 82 per cent favorable in the June election. The publication strongly opposed the revised plan and 89 per cent of the publicity between June and September was unfavorable. The September vote showed that 99 per cent of the voters of that area opposed the revised plan of unification. The total rural vote was favorable considering the other areas in the county, however, and the plan carried.

Lincoln County

Lincoln County could be cited as an example of a planned publicity program. The county superintendent and the planning board agreed early in the preliminary stages of formulating a plan for the county to attempt to avoid unwise and unfavorable publicity, but to strive to keep the public informed as to the status of the county plan. To that end the feature writer of the Lincoln Sentinel-Republican was invited to meet with the board for a thorough explanation of the law and the function of the planning board so as to properly have the plan presented to the readers. Subsequent to this meeting, the county superintendent kept the local writer well informed on progress of the plan and its desirable application.

TABLE IV

TABULATION OF NEWS COVERAGE OF UNIFICATION
IN LINCOLN COUNTY

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category					total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Sentinel-Republican			66"	89"	15"	170"
Sylvan Grove News			65"	23"	9"	97"
Total			131"	112"	24"	267"

As a result of this cooperation 51 per cent of the news in the county was favorable to the plan, and there was no

unfavorable publicity in the two county publications. The vote in Lincoln County at the June 2 election was 923 yes votes and 322 no votes, or 74 per cent favorable to the plan.

A factor of possible significance is that the Lincoln Sentinel-Republican devoted approximately 25 per cent of the front page to school news during the school year, and that this school news stressed the academic achievements of the school in sharp contrast to the usual sport news that is typical of school news coverage. The news releases on unification also stressed the academic benefits that could be derived from the unified districts. The possibility exists that a public conditioned to the academic aspects of education could view more favorably a plan proposed to augment those academic pursuits.

Mitchell County

The Mitchell County plan was approved on June 2, 1964, with 886 yes votes and 371 no votes; or a 71 per cent favorable vote for unification. The Downs district in Osborne County was included in the Mitchell County plan to form a unified district with Cawker City and Tipton. The Downs voters also gave the plan a favorable vote.

In Mitchell County the plan received no publicity that fell in either of the unfavorable categories. There was, on the other hand, 196 column inches of publicity

that came under category 5, or highly favorable. The news coverage for Mitchell County is tabulated in TABLE IV.

TABLE V

TABULATIONS OF NEWS COVERAGE OF UNIFICATION
IN MITCHELL COUNTY

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Beloit Daily Call			112"	86"	6"	204"
Cawker City Ledger			105"	52"	190"	347"
Total (within county)			217"	138"	196"	551"
Downs News* (Osborne County)	18"		86"	134"	18"	256"
Total	18"		303"	272"	214"	807"

*The Downs district in Osborne County was included in the plan for Mitchell County and the publicity has been totaled for the area in which the Downs residents voted.

No other county studied had this much space devoted to the highly favorable category. The Cawker City Ledger of all the publications studied gave more favorable publicity than did any other rural publication. This weekly paper carried 347 column inches of publicity, an amount equal to two-and-one-half full pages, of which 70 per cent was in the favorable categories with the remaining 30 per cent in category 3. The results of the election in Cawker City showed an 83 per cent yes vote. Only in Downs was there any publicity unfavorable to the plan, yet the publicity from Downs was predominantly favorable as was the vote.

Osborne County

In Osborne County the plan was convincingly rejected at the June 2 election with only 369 yes votes compared to 742 no votes, a 67 per cent negative vote. The planning board on viewing the results of the June election decided against any further planning for the county and the board, after filing a report with the state superintendent, disbanded.

Aside from the Downs News, the Downs district was included in the plans for Mitchell County and the news coverage was also shown in the Mitchell County tabulation, the publicity in Osborne County was unfavorable. For the areas voting in Osborne County the publicity was 39 per cent unfavorable with less than 1 per cent falling in the favorable category.

TABLE VI

TABULATION OF NEWS COVERAGE OF UNIFICATION
IN OSBORNE COUNTY

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category					
	1	2	3	4	5	total
Downs News	18"		86"	134"	18"	256"
Osborne County Farmer	67"	12"	114"	4"		197"
Natoma-Luray Independent	14"	117"	205"			336"
Total	99"	129"	405"	138"	18"	789"

Osborne County presented one of the new cases in the study in which a school superintendent actively and forcefully

opposed the unification plan. In this instance the superintendent wrote articles which were carried in all the county publications urging the citizens to vote no on the school unification plan. This person also organized protest meetings which were reported in the local press, the meetings being designed to urge rejection of the plan. Most of the unfavorable publicity within the county originated at this one source.

Russell County

Russell County is another example of a unification plan being rejected so strongly at the June 2 election that the planning board decided to submit no further plans. The vote in Russell County was 472 yes and 966 no, a 67 per cent unfavorable vote. The plan was approved in the Russell city district, but the rural vote was so overwhelmingly negative, 944 no votes and only 235 yes, that no further plans were made.

TABLE VII

TABULATION OF NEWS COVERAGE OF UNIFICATION
IN RUSSELL COUNTY

Publication	Column inches of publicity by category					total
	1	2	3	4	5	
Russell Daily News		42"	122"	25"		189"
Russell Record	12"	94"	153"			259"
Lucas Independent	47"	12"	43"			102"
Total	59"	148"	318"	25"		550"

Publicity in the county showed that the strictly rural publications were not in favor of unification and 38 per cent of the news was unfavorable compared to only 4 per cent in the favorable categories. Much of the unfavorable publicity in rural Russell County originated with the president of the Kansas Association of Rural School Boards who quite actively opposed the unification law.

An interesting development in Russell County has been that the schools have now unified by petition to the state superintendent with the exception of one small rural school. The unified districts that have been thus formed coincide closely with the original plans for the county as formulated by the county planning board.

Comparison of coverage

The news coverage was further analyzed by comparing between counties the percentage of the total news that was unfavorable (TABLE VIII), and the percentage of the total news that was in the favorable categories (TABLE IX). The significance of the differences between counties in the proportions of the news in these categories is shown at the .01 and .05 levels of confidence. The .10 level of confidence, for example, indicates that in only one case in one hundred could this difference be counted for by chance alone. At the .05 level five times out of one hundred the differences

could be due to chance. These levels of significance are used throughout TABLES VIII, IX, X, and XI.

TABLE VIII

SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTIES IN THE PROPORTION OF NEWS IN CATEGORIES 1 AND 2 SHOWN AS A PER CENT OF THE TOTAL NEWS COVERAGE IN THE COUNTIES

	Cloud	Ellsworth	Lincoln	Mitchell	Osborne	Russell	Inches in category	Per cent of total coverage
Cloud			.01	.05			232	22%
Ellsworth			.01	.05			339	26
Lincoln	.01	.01			.01	.01	0	0
Mitchell	.05	.05			.01	.01	18	2
Osborne			.01	.01			228	29
Russell			.01	.01			207	37

TABLE VIII shows the significance of differences in the percentage of total news coverage that falls in the unfavorable categories. The comparisons were made on the basis of the percentage these categories were of the total news coverage in the counties pertaining to unification.

Zubin's Nomographs* were employed to measure the significance of these differences. To illustrate the use

*Zubins, J. "Nomographs for Determining the Significance of the Differences Between the Frequencies of Events in Two Contrasted Series or Groups," Journal of American Statistical Association, 34:539-544, 1939. (This is a further clarification of N. Fattu's Nomograph.)

of the table, comparison of the percentages for Mitchell County and Russell County shows that the differences are significant at the .01 level. The direction of the differences is shown by the total percentages of the news, i.e., there is a significantly greater quantity of unfavorable news coverage in Russell County as contrasted to Mitchell County. To illustrate further, there was found to be no significant differences between the percentages of coverage for Cloud and Russell Counties.

The significances of the differences in the favorable categories between counties is shown in TABLE IX.

TABLE IX

SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTIES IN THE PROPORTION OF NEWS IN CATEGORIES 4 AND 5 SHOWN AS A PER CENT OF THE TOTAL NEWS COVERAGE IN THE COUNTIES

	Cloud	Ellsworth	Lincoln	Mitchell	Osborne	Russell	Inches in 197 category	Per cent of total coverage
Cloud			.01	.01				
Ellsworth				.05		.05	366	28
Lincoln	.01				.05	.01	136	51
Mitchell	.01	.05			.05	.01	486	60
Osborne			.05	.05		.05	156	20
Russell		.05	.01	.01	.05		25	4.5

The comparisons in TABLE IX were made on the basis of the percentage that categories 4 and 5 were of the total news coverage in the county pertaining to unification.

Again using Lincoln and Russell Counties to illustrate the table, comparison of the percentages of the total favorable coverage shows that the differences are significant at the .01 level. The direction of the difference is indicated by the percentages of the news in these categories, i.e., there is a significantly greater quantity of favorable news coverage in Lincoln County in contrast to the coverage of like news in Russell County.

A further breakdown of the news coverage in Cloud and Ellsworth Counties was necessary to determine if there were significant changes in news coverage after the defeat of the plans in June and their acceptance in September. The news therefore was tabulated in categories favorable and unfavorable for the period prior to the June election, and again for the period between June and the election in September. The unfavorable categories and the favorable categories are shown in separate tabulations, but the two opposing categories are combined into one table, TABLE X. Again the significance of the differences is computed at the .01 and .05 levels of confidence.

TABLE X

COMPARISON OF FAVORABLE AND UNFAVORABLE NEWS COVERAGE
IN CLOUD AND ELLSWORTH COUNTIES BEFORE
JUNE 1964, AND AFTER JUNE 1964

<u>Unfavorable categories 1 and 2</u>					
	Cloud (Before June)	Cloud (After June)	Ellsworth (Before June)	Ellsworth (After June)	% of total coverage in category
Cloud (Before June)		.01			32%
Cloud (After June)	.01		.01	.05	1.5
Ellsworth (Before June)		.01			36
Ellsworth (After June)		.05			14
<u>Favorable categories 4 and 5</u>					
	Cloud (Before June)	Cloud (After June)	Ellsworth (Before June)	Ellsworth (After June)	% of total coverage in category
Cloud (Before June)		.01		.01	6%
Cloud (After June)	.01		.05		48
Ellsworth (Before June)		.01		.01	11
Ellsworth (After June)	.01		.05		49

The significance of the differences can be illustrated by comparing the coverage in Cloud County in the unfavorable category contrasting the news prior to the June 2 election and

the news between June and September where the differences are significant at the .01 level. In this instance, 32 per cent of the news prior to the June election was unfavorable, while only 1.5 per cent of the news between June and September was unfavorable. Further analysis of the Cloud County news in the favorable categories shows that before the June election only 6 per cent of the news was favorable, while between June and September 48 per cent of the news was favorable. Again the differences are significant at the .01 level of confidence.

The significance of the differences between the yes and no votes as percentages of the total vote for each county was analyzed as was the news coverage for each county and the significance differences at the .01 and .05 levels of confidence are shown in TABLE XI.

TABLE XI

SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES
IN YES AND NO VOTES
BY COUNTIES

County	total vote	yes%	no%	significance
Cloud (June)	1,021	53%	47%	
Cloud (September)	1,394	80	20	.01
Ellsworth (June)	1,311	38	62	
Ellsworth (Sept.)	2,335	55	45	
Lincoln	1,245	74	26	.01
Mitchell	1,016	71	29	.05
Osborne	1,109	33	67	.05
Russell	1,438	33	67	.05

To interpret TABLE XI consider the Cloud County vote at the June election and again at the September election. No significant differences exist in the yes and no votes in Cloud County for the June election, but the differences at the September election are significant at the .01 level. In Ellsworth County there were no significant differences in the votes at either election. In Cloud County the favorable news was significantly greater between the June and September elections, while prior to the June election the unfavorable news in Cloud County had been significantly greater. The significance of the news coverage and the vote in Cloud County both changed significantly in the same direction between June and September.

In Lincoln County the differences were significant at the .01 level, the difference in the direction of the favorable vote. In the remaining counties in the study the significance of the difference in yes and no votes is at the .05 level, with direction in Russell and Osborne Counties being toward the negative vote, and Mitchell County being in the favorable direction. Comparing the significance of the vote and the significance of the news coverage in the unfavorable category, TABLE VIII, reveals a significantly greater coverage in the unfavorable category in Russell

County as compared to Lincoln County. The negative vote in Russell County was significantly greater in comparison to the yes vote. In contrast, the news coverage in Lincoln County that fell in the favorable category, TABLE IX, was significantly greater than the same category of news coverage in either Russell or Osborne Counties. The yes vote in Lincoln County was significantly greater, at the .01 level.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Kansas Legislature enacted H.B. 377, the school unification act, into law in 1963. The basic purpose of the law was to equalize, as far as possible, educational opportunities for the public school children of the state. Minimum standards were set pertaining to numbers of pupils, area, evaluation, and secondary course minimums. In each county planning boards were established to formulate unification plans for their counties and to present them to the state superintendent for approval. After such approval, the plans were then presented to the voters of the county at an election in June, 1964, and if the plans were rejected, the board could elect to present a plan at a September election.

Six counties were selected for this study, and all the rural publications within those counties were surveyed for the period covering the formulation of unification plans and the voting period. The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of the rural press on the opinions and attitudes of rural citizens as regarded the unification issue.

The nineteen publications in the six counties that

were studied published a total of 4,472 column inches of coverage relating to unification during the period covered by the survey. This included editorials, news stories, advertisements, letters to the editor, and feature stories. Of this total, 7 per cent was in category 1, the highly unfavorable news; 17 per cent was in category 2, the unfavorably slanted news; 54 per cent was in category 3, the news presented strictly as fact; 24 per cent was in category 4, the favorably slanted news; and 8 per cent was in category 5, the highly favorable news. For the whole area surveyed the news was fairly evenly divided in the contrasting categories; however, when analyzed by county, striking and significant differences were found in the amount of coverage in the different categories. The total volume of factual reporting, category 3, indicated that the plans were extensively reported to the voters of the area.

If public opinion was affected by the news coverage, the effects could be ascertained by an analysis of the categories that were favorable and those that were unfavorable and comparing them to public reactions in those areas as reflected in the vote as favorable or unfavorable. A significantly positive relationship was found between the categories of the news coverage and the vote as a yes or no percentage of the total vote in each county. Those counties with a

significantly greater percentage of favorable publicity approved unification at the June election, and those with a significantly greater percentage of unfavorable publicity rejected unification. Press reactions to the plans had a noticeable effect on public sentiment. This was particularly notable in Cloud and Ellsworth Counties where the plans were rejected in June but approved in September. Prior to the June election editorial support for the plans was largely lacking, but support was active and favorable between June and September.

The value of a planned public relations approach was exemplified by Lincoln County where a favorable campaign strategy was successfully carried out by the planning board and the county superintendent in cooperation with the rural press publications in the county.

The results of the survey of Osborne County demonstrated the effectiveness of participation by school administrators. The value of the results obtained in this case were outside the scope of this study, but the results obtained by the work of one active school administrator were evident. Timing was a factor of considerable importance, and the most effective results were obtained by the persistent approach that culminated with the most forceful appeals immediately preceding the election.

Conclusions

As a result of the survey and based on the findings thereof, the investigator has concluded that: .

1. Public opinion on the school unification issue was affected by rural press publicity in the area of the vote. Favorable publicity resulted in a favorable vote and unfavorable publicity obtained a negative vote.

2. School administrators can shape public opinion on school issues, and school administrators should give careful thought to their role in the community.

3. School programs can be successfully implemented by a planned public relations approach. Conversely, they can be stymied by the same type of approach.

The findings of this study proved the major hypothesis and the secondary hypothesis to be invalid.

Recommendations for further study

A study of the backgrounds of the editors of the various publications studied might reveal pertinent factors in the determination of their stand on the unification issue. Some of the editors are local citizens of the area covered by their publication. Has this local background been a predominant factor in determining their stand on the issue, or in other words, does public sentiment formulate the editorial

stand, especially if the editor is of local origin? If the factor of community tradition does affect their reasoning on public issues, then the question arises as to the value of the press as a tool of democracy? The presentation of an issue, fairly and factually, is the basis for the freedom enjoyed by the press. Issues should not become secondary to local sentiment in an effective publication.

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