

A COMPARISON OF MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS
AND POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS
FOR SCHOOL BOND ISSUES
IN KANSAS

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
July, 1991

Thesis
1991D
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Gerald Bass for his guidance and expert advice on this research project. His knowledge and expertise in educational finance proved to be invaluable to the success of the study. A special thank you goes to Dr. Kenneth St. Clair for sharing his wisdom and insight into the field of education while serving as my academic adviser. Thanks also to Dr. Kenneth Stern and Dr. William Segall for serving on my dissertation committee and for providing helpful suggestions and support during this endeavor.

To the Board of Education, administration, faculty, staff, and students of U.S.D. #394 in Rose Hill, Kansas, I extend a sincere thank you for their encouragement during the entire doctoral process. I sincerely appreciate the opportunity given to me by the Board of Education to continue my education, in part on "school time." A great big thanks goes to Steve Wyckoff, Wes Dreyer, and Wayne Myers for sharing their knowledge of computers and helping me learn more about modern technology while writing this dissertation.

A special thank you goes to my wife Debbie for her love and moral support during this sometimes trying ordeal. Without her confidence in my abilities and words of encouragement, I may not have made it. To my children,

Jennifer, Dustin, Kristen, and Keith, I give many hugs and kisses and thank them for trying to understand why Dad had to spend so much time studying at the office. I wish to express sincere appreciation to my parents, Gordon and Sina Dunbar for instilling in me the value of bettering oneself through the continuation of formal education. They have also ingrained in me a strong work ethic that has contributed greatly to my success and for that, I am grateful. To all of these people, I extend a heartfelt thank you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School buildings are the cornerstone of any school system and the financing of their construction or renovation is a vital function of educational administrators and boards of education. The financing of school facilities usually involves voter input of community residents. In fact, over 75% of capital outlay costs are funded through bond sales, each of which must be approved by a referendum (Wood, 1986). During the last 30 years, the approval rate of school bond issues has been declining (Guthrie, Garms, & Pierce, 1988). Coupled with the increasing cost of school construction during the last three decades, it has thus become increasingly difficult for many school districts to construct or remodel school buildings.

Although most school bond issue elections follow the tradition of voters going to polling places to cast their ballots, seven states provide for the option of allowing voters to participate in mail ballot elections (Hamilton, 1988). In a mail ballot election, the voter receives a ballot in the mail, marks the ballot, and returns it to the county election officer or other responsible party, either through the mail or in person. This innovative approach to

voting has been shown to increase voter turnout (Magleby, 1987). However, it has not been determined whether or not mail ballot elections offer a distinct advantage over polling place elections. By studying data comparing mail ballot elections and polling place elections for school bond issues in the State of Kansas, one may discover information which will help school officials decide which type of election may be more advantageous for their jurisdictions.

Background

Historically, the construction of school facilities has been the local community's responsibility. Originally, schools were built by local volunteers with no thought being given to tax rates, bond issues, or bond referenda (Alexander & Wood, 1983). In the late 1800s, state legislatures began passing laws allowing local school districts to issue bonds, the proceeds from which could be used by public school districts for the construction of new schools. Although some states provide state aid for capital outlay, more than 75% of all capital outlay revenues are generated through the sale of bonds that must be approved by voters (Wood, 1986).

The voter approval rate for school bond issues has been declining since the early 1960s (National Center for Education Statistics, 1981). Various factors have been blamed for the defeat of such issues. Barr and Wilkerson (1973) speculated that high property tax rates, inflation, and other economic factors contributed to the demise of

proposed issues along with voters who "expressed dissatisfaction with the school board and administrative staff" (p. 24). A school bond issue election is also one of the few opportunities voters have to say "no" to higher taxes. Voters rarely can vote against federal, state, or other local government financial issues and, unfortunately, voters vent their frustrations against increasing federal and state budgets when they cast their ballots in a school bond issue election (Barr & Lindley, 1970).

At the same time that the rate by which bond issues have been approved has decreased, voter participation in elections has been decreasing (Sparrow, 1985). In 1960, 63% of the adult population in the United States voted in the presidential election. Since then, the percentage has constantly declined, reaching only 53% in 1980 (Albertson & Aldrich, 1982). By 1988, the percentage of voting-age people in America casting ballots in the presidential election had dropped to 50% (Rubenstein, 1990). Participation in special elections on single issues, which is the way many school bond issue elections are conducted, has been even worse. In the State of Kansas, the Secretary of State reported that, historically, a voter turnout of 15% to 25% often has decided an issue in a special election (Graves, 1988).

The low rate of voter turnout was one of the factors that has prompted seven states (Kansas, Oregon, California, Montana, Washington, Missouri, and Nebraska) to offer the option of allowing people to vote with ballots through the

mail (Hamilton, 1988). One desired outcome of such an election is an increase in voter participation. The first mail ballot election for anything other than a very small, special purpose district election occurred in 1977 in Monterey County, California (Magleby, 1987).

In a mail ballot election, registered voters receive their ballots in the mail along with a return envelope. Voters mark their ballots and mail them to the county election official where they are counted and certified as to results (Hamilton, 1988). This procedure seems to require less effort by voters to participate in an election. As a result, the turnout rates in mail ballot elections have usually exceeded those for polling place elections.

In 1983, the Kansas legislature authorized the experimental use of mail ballot elections for non-partisan elections in which there were no candidates on the ballot. The first eight mail ballot elections had such high voter turnout rates (between 70% and 89%) that the authorization of mail ballot elections became permanent in 1984 (Sims & Kimberling, 1987). Between 1983 and 1989, there were 42 mail ballot elections for school bond issues in the State of Kansas, 25 of those issues passed and 17 were defeated.

Statement of the Problem

Schools districts in the 1990s will continue to be faced with the need to provide facilities for new educational programs and to replace aging facilities that no longer meet

the educational needs of the students. The need for new facilities may be created by population shifts within and between school districts, changing enrollment patterns among grade levels, buildings that no longer comply with safety and health standards, new educational programs, and demands for reduced energy consumption (Wilkerson, 1973).

School districts with low property values have an even greater difficulty in financing educational facilities. The amount of a school bond issue, or the aggregate sum of outstanding bonds, is customarily limited to a fixed percentage of the local assessed property value (Wood, 1986). In Kansas, that percentage is 14% of the assessed property valuation, although the percentage may be increased upon approval by the State Board of Education. School districts with low assessed property valuations thus have lower limitations on the total dollars of school bond issues that can be passed and, coupled with the spiraling costs of construction, financing new educational facilities can therefore be a very difficult task.

In the early 1960s, voter approval of school bond issues was frequently viewed as a mere formality. Today however, voter approval is "often the most significant hurdle facing school officials attempting to meet specific educational demands and needs" (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 2). Consequently, school administrators and boards of education must use any and all strategies that will give them the best chance at passing a bond issue. The response of the various

electorates across the nation to proposed bond issues for construction of educational buildings is also of great interest to educators in assessing the general view of the citizenry in relation to education. The success or failure of school bond issues is often interpreted as providing some indication of citizen approval of educational proposals, activities, and fiscal procedures (Johns & Morphet, 1975). The continued defeat of bond issues in a school district often leads to the departure of the central office administration, and the superintendent of schools in particular. Any information that may assist in the passage of a school bond issue will be beneficial in contributing to the professional success of a school superintendent and to the political success of the board of education. One of the most important functions of school administrators and school boards therefore is the provision of first-rate school facilities which enhance the quality of the educational program for students and meets the instructional needs of the faculty.

Purpose of the Study

This study was conducted to determine if there is a greater likelihood of passing a school bond issue with a mail ballot election than with a polling place election. Many school administrators believe that the larger the turnout in a school bond issue referendum, the greater the chance for approval of the bond issue. Research has shown that mail

ballot elections do result in a larger rate of participation among eligible voters in all demographic groups (Magleby, 1987). If that is the case, does it then hold true that there is a better chance of passing a school bond issue in a mail ballot election where a larger voter turnout is more likely?

This study addressed the following three research questions:

1. Has the use of mail ballot elections in the State of Kansas increased voter participation?
2. Does a larger voter turnout increase the likelihood of passing a school bond issue?
3. Will the use of a mail ballot election improve the chances of passing a school bond issue?

In addition, a null hypothesis was formulated as the basis for a determination if there is a significant difference between the success rate of mail ballot elections and of polling place elections. The null hypothesis was stated as: There is no significant difference in the success rates of mail ballot elections for school bond issues as compared to polling place elections.

Significance of the Study

The successful passage of a school bond issue is of the utmost importance in providing financing for the construction of new school facilities. With the increase in concern on the part of citizens because of the reappraisal of property

values in the State of Kansas and the deteriorating condition of many school buildings in the state, passing a bond issue has become a difficult, yet necessary, task since a school bond issue must be approved by a majority of the voters before the funds can be made available for the construction of new school buildings. School administrators and boards of education, who are charged with the responsibility of planning the strategy for leading a successful campaign for the passage of a bond issue referendum, must consider a number of factors in preparing for a bond issue campaign. In Kansas, one of those decisions is whether or not to utilize a mail ballot election rather than the traditional polling place election.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the State of Kansas. The data regarding mail ballot elections were gathered only from school districts in that state and no data were collected from the other six states in the United States which also offer the option of mail ballot elections in school bond elections. Consequently, the results can only be generalized to school districts in Kansas.

The data concerning school bond elections were collected only for years 1983 through 1989. The use of mail ballot elections was only authorized beginning in 1983. Also, it should be kept in mind that the school districts which have participated in such elections vary widely in many

dimensions. Since many factors come into play in the passage or defeat of a school bond issue, the type of election that is used may or may not have any significant bearing on the outcome of the issue in a specific situation.

Definitions of Terms

Capital Outlay refers to the money expended for the construction and maintenance of schools and other facilities in school districts.

The County Election Commissioner, in Kansas, is appointed by the Secretary of State and holds office for a term of four years. The County Election Commissioner carries out the official duties of the office according to the election laws of the State of Kansas, including the administration of all elections in the county.

A Mail Ballot Election is an election in which a ballot is mailed to each registered voter whose residence is in the affected jurisdiction. The voters are instructed to mark their ballots and then return them, either by mail or in person, to the County Election Commissioner.

A School Bond Issue is a process of selling bonds to raise money for capital outlay for a school district. School bonds are a debt obligation of the school district and, as such, are paid through property taxes levied against local property owners. A referendum of registered voters in a school district must be held and a majority of the voters must approve of the issue before the bonds can be sold.

A Unified School District is a school district in the State of Kansas that has been organized in accordance with the laws of the state and is recognized by the state Superintendent of Instruction as a unified school district. Each school district is given a unique number by the state superintendent as a means of identification.

Summary

School district administrators and school boards in the United States are finding it increasingly difficult to pass bond issues for the purpose of financing capital outlay projects. Before schools can issue bonds to raise the revenue necessary for a building or remodeling program, the bond issue must generally be approved by a vote of the people residing in that school district. As federal, state, and other local taxes have increased, taxpayers have begun to "revolt" against higher taxes. Since a school bond issue is one of the few ways in which taxpayers can directly prevent an increase in their taxes, voting against a school bond issue is one way people can say "no" to higher tax rates. Often this occurs regardless of the need for additional classroom space or for the renovation of aging school buildings. School district administrators and boards of education thus find themselves caught between an electorate that is reluctant to increase their taxes and school facilities that are inadequate for meeting the educational needs of their students. Consequently, school district

leaders are constantly searching for solutions to this problem. Anything that will enhance the chances of passing a school bond issue may well be welcome information to the people who are charged with the responsibility of providing educational facilities for children. The use of mail ballot elections, an alternative in seven states, is an option that school district officials may consider when conducting a school bond issue election. But what are the advantages and disadvantages of mail ballot elections for school bond issues? Do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? What other factors must be considered when contemplating having a bond issue election? These and other questions may be addressed in light of the information provided in this study.

The next chapter contains a review of the professional and research literature which has been published relative to mail ballot elections and voter participation. In Chapter III, details are provided regarding the design of the study, including the population and the sample, the instrument, data collection procedures, and data analysis. The findings of the research study, the actual results, are reported in Chapter IV, while Chapter V provides a summary, the conclusions, recommendations for further research, and a commentary on the issue of mail ballot elections for school bond issues.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Providing adequate educational facilities for students is one of the most important functions of educational administrators and securing financial support for the construction of those facilities is the first step in any building program. More than 75% of capital outlay costs, which provide for the construction and maintenance of school facilities, are funded through the sale of general obligation bonds (Alexander & Wood, 1983). The issuance and sale of these bonds must usually be approved by school district patrons in a referendum election. The majority of such elections involve citizens going to designated precinct polling places on a specified election day and casting their ballots either for or against the issue. However, seven states allow the conduct of mail ballot elections whereby registered voters receive their ballots through the mail, mark their ballots, and return them either by mail or in person to county election officials.

This chapter will trace the historical development of school bond issues and the purpose they serve in providing money for the construction and remodeling of school facilities. The voting patterns of school district patrons

across the country have changed in the past several years and have impacted the passage of school bond issues. Mail ballot elections provide an alternative to traditional polling place elections. Some school districts are turning to mail ballot elections as a way to increase voter participation and, ideally, to help pass a bond issue. However, other factors must be taken into consideration in working toward the successful passage of a school bond issue.

Providing funds for constructing new schools was not a major problem in the early 1800's. Schools were constructed by volunteers. There was little or no consideration given to tax rates, bonds, or referenda (Alexander & Wood, 1983). It was not until the mid-nineteenth century that borrowing by municipal governments, including school districts, became prevalent. States soon after developed constitutional and statutory requirements regarding such local debt. Among these were limits on the amount of debt, establishment of mandatory tax levies, requirements for voter approval, and limits on length of maturity (Studensky, 1930). These limitations were considered to have been implemented in the public interest, since they were meant to safeguard against abuses, reduce interest costs, and protect the investors. By the turn of the century, local school districts, through specific authority delegated by state legislative bodies, were authorized to issue bonds for school construction; were able to utilize the bonding power of towns, cities, or counties; or could pay cash--an option feasible only in a

few large and affluent school districts (Barr & Wilkerson, 1973). While Cubberley, Strayer, Haig, Mort, and others developed theories of state support for the operation of public schools, little or no concern was shown for such state involvement in the financing of school construction (Barr & Wilkerson, 1973). Legislatures were left to deal with the regulation of bond issues without a theory or research base to guide their deliberations.

The "Roaring Twenties" was a decade characterized by major construction of public school facilities, locally financed by property owners through their local property taxes. Construction slowed in the "Great Depression" of the 1930s, except for W.P.A. construction projects which were subsidized by the federal government. Another major construction boom occurred during the post-World War II baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s, with voters often routinely approving the increases in local property taxes to pay for the new schools and classrooms.

The vast majority of revenues for school district capital outlay are raised through general obligation bonds (Wood, 1986). A bond is simply an acknowledgement that money has been borrowed. A school bond is a debt obligation of the school district and usually must be approved by the school district patrons in a referendum. School districts issue a bond where the payment is guaranteed by the full faith and credit of the issuer. This means that the district is legally bound to tax its property owners a sufficient amount

to pay principal and interest on the bonds, and it can be compelled to do so through court action (Guthrie, Garms, & Pierce, 1988). The district promises to pay interest regularly at a stated rate and to repay the principal amount at a stated time.

Cost is one reason for long-term borrowing for the construction of school facilities. By borrowing, school district costs for expensive construction can be spread over a period of years, giving more stability to tax rates. Long-term borrowing is also defended as a reasonable way of spreading costs among generations. Since a school building will last from 30 to 60 years, it seems unfair to force the present generation to pay the entire cost of buildings that will also be used by future generations (Guthrie, Garms, & Pierce, 1988). With the mobility of American society, it is also more equitable to allow a school district's future residents to help pay part of the building's costs. As a result, bonds are the most common method of financing the construction of new school facilities.

However, school administrators are finding it more difficult to pass bond issues. From 1940 to 1960, over 80% of American school district bond elections passed with approval by the required majority. But since then, passage has become increasingly difficult (Wood, 1986). In the 1970s and early 1980s, fewer than half of these elections were approved by voters (Guthrie, Garms, & Pierce, 1988). Table I shows the decline in the percentage of school bond issues

TABLE I
RESULTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL BOND ELECTIONS: UNITED STATES

| Fiscal Year | Number of Elections | | |
|-------------|---------------------|----------|------------------|
| | Total | Approved | Percent Approved |
| 1961-62 | 1,432 | 1,034 | 72.2 |
| 1962-63 | 2,048 | 1,482 | 72.4 |
| 1963-64 | 2,071 | 1,501 | 72.5 |
| 1964-65 | 2,041 | 1,525 | 74.7 |
| 1965-66 | 1,745 | 1,265 | 72.5 |
| 1966-67 | 1,625 | 1,082 | 66.6 |
| 1967-68 | 1,750 | 1,183 | 67.6 |
| 1968-69 | 1,341 | 762 | 56.8 |
| 1969-70 | 1,216 | 647 | 53.2 |
| 1970-71 | 1,086 | 507 | 46.7 |
| 1971-72 | 1,153 | 542 | 47.0 |
| 1972-73 | 1,273 | 719 | 56.5 |
| 1973-74 | 1,386 | 779 | 56.2 |
| 1974-75 | 929 | 430 | 46.3 |
| 1975-76 | 770 | 391 | 50.8 |
| 1976-77 | 858 | 477 | 55.6 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 1981,
p. 72.

that have been approved since the early 1960s.

The change in voting patterns over the last 30 years has sometimes been attributed to a general revolt by taxpaying voters against ever-increasing taxes for all forms of governmental services (Piele & Hall, 1973). School financial elections may have received the brunt of this dissatisfaction simply because they represent one of the few opportunities which voters have to oppose a tax increase directly. Another factor contributing to the increasing difficulty in passing school bond issues is the growth in the proportion of older

people in the voting population (Piele & Hall, 1973). Senior citizens have a difficult time paying higher property taxes due to their relatively fixed incomes. They often have no direct ties to the school system because their children are no longer in school. This has a detrimental effect on the passage of a bond issue referendum since a larger proportion of older people is likely to vote on such issues (Piele & Hall, 1973). Controversial issues such as consolidation of school districts, forced busing, violence in schools, and poor performance of high school students on national achievement tests are also likely to have eroded the public's confidence in schools and thus their willingness to spend more for education (Guthrie, Garms, & Pierce, 1988).

American political scientists have long decried voter participation rates in the United States when compared to those in other nations in which free elections are conducted (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Participation in self-government, even by the simple act of voting, encourages citizens to become more informed than they would otherwise be and, as participants in the process, more likely to understand the government's choices and actions. When half of the electorate do not vote, what does this imply about the legitimacy of a government that "derives its just powers from the consent of the governed" (Allison & Smith, 1988, p. 43)? While voter turnout in America has been declining for the last 30 years, it had grown between 1948 and 1960, when 63% of the adult population voted for president. But since then,

the percentage has constantly declined, reaching only 53% in 1980 (Albertson & Aldrich, 1982). In the 1988 presidential election, that figure dropped to 50%. The percentage of voters voting for candidates seeking seats in the United States House of Representatives is even lower, as indicated in Table II. In 1986, these congressional races motivated only 33% of the voting age population to cast ballots and, in 1988, 45% of eligible voters voted in the congressional elections (Rubenstein, 1990). Voter participation in municipal elections is even lower than in national elections. Hamilton (1971, p. 1135) found that "turnout is relatively and consistently low" in local elections. The average turnout for municipal elections has been found to be about one third of the electorate (Alford & Lee, 1968). Kansas Secretary of State Bill Graves (1988) claimed that "special elections on a single issue, such as a hike in the sales tax, historically recorded a voter turnout of 15% to 25%" (p. 78).

In an effort to increase voter participation in referenda and to cut costs of elections, seven states (Kansas, Oregon, California, Montana, Washington, Missouri, and Nebraska) have approved the use of mail ballot elections. The State of New York sanctioned one mail ballot election, but only as an experiment (Hamilton, 1988). Mail ballot elections are best suited to the small, often special district elections which traditionally draw minimal public interest or attention. It is in these elections, officials agree, that increased participation and cost savings are most

TABLE II
 PERCENTAGE OF VOTING AGE POPULATION CASTING VOTES

| | <u>For President</u> | <u>For Representatives</u> |
|------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1974 | | 35.9 |
| 1976 | 53.5 | 48.9 |
| 1978 | | 34.9 |
| 1980 | 52.6 | 47.4 |
| 1982 | | 38.0 |
| 1984 | 53.1 | 47.7 |
| 1986 | | 33.4 |
| 1988 | 50.2 | 45.0 |

Source: Rubenstein (1990).

likely to accrue (Sims & Kimberling, 1987).

The first substantial all-mail ballot election was conducted under the authority of state law in 1977 for a Monterey County, California, flood control district whose boundaries encompassed some 45,000 voters. County election officials reported more than double the normal number of voters participated in that election as well as a savings of nearly \$10,000 when compared to previous referenda held in that district using normal polling places (Sims & Kimberling, 1987). The first school district to use a mail ballot election was Albany, Oregon, in 1982. School district levies were decided using mail ballots and the voter participation rate was higher than in similar previous referenda (Magleby, 1987). Over 1,000 mail ballot elections have been held in eight states since 1977 (Hamilton, 1988).

Proponents of mail ballot elections have pointed to the increased participation of voters as the main reason for

adopting the mail ballot election format. The impact of mail ballot elections has been assumed to be especially large among persons without cars, the elderly, handicapped, or those who live great distances from the polling places (Ortiz, 1981).

In a study of voter participation in mail ballot elections as opposed to polling place elections, Magleby (1987) found that the expected increase in turnout resulting from use of the mail ballot is 19%. The study was based on the experience with mail ballot elections that had been held in California, Oregon, and Washington since 1980. The design controlled a variety of variables, holding them constant. Based on detailed comparisons of elections in Berkeley and San Diego, California, and Vancouver, Washington, it was apparent that voting districts with low rates of participation in polling place elections also had low levels of participation in mail ballot elections. Similarly, city districts in which citizens had voted in large proportions in traditional elections also had the highest rates of response in mail ballot elections (Magleby, 1987).

A May 1988 report by Kansas Secretary of State Bill Graves stated that mail ballot elections had reversed the trend toward limited voter participation in special elections. Average turnout in the state's mail ballot elections had been more than 74%. Turnout had been as high as 100% and had never dropped below 50% for a mail ballot election (Graves, 1988).

The cost per vote in mail ballot elections, in general, is less than the cost per vote in polling place elections. As the cost varies directly with the size of the jurisdiction, mail balloting offers the potential for greater savings in the larger jurisdictions. Studies to-date of the costs of administering elections show them to be considerably lower for mail balloting (Hamilton, 1988). Of course the obligation to pay the return postage on mail ballot elections has had a definite impact on the cost of mail ballot elections. While some states, such as Kansas, require the jurisdiction conducting the mail ballot election to pay postage both ways, comparisons indicate that, while it is marginally more expensive, the practice seems to have no effect on voter participation (Sims & Kimberling, 1987).

In 1983, the Kansas legislature passed a law (K.S.A. 1983 Supp. 25-431 to 25-441) making it possible, on an experimental basis, for the County Election Commissioner to conduct special elections through the use of mailed ballots. The Mail Ballot Election Act was an attempt to increase voter participation while curtailing the costs of conducting certain elections. The eight all-mail elections which immediately followed yielded such a high voter turnout (between 70.2% and 89.4% of the registered voters) that the authorization of all-mail elections was made permanent in 1984 when the Kansas governor signed House Bill 2716. Subsequent elections of this type in Kansas have consistently yielded a high voter turnout, although the costs have not

always been lower than those for conventional elections (Sims & Kimberling, 1987).

The Kansas Mail Ballot Election Act limits the use of mail ballots to any election that is: (1) nonpartisan; (2) not one at which any candidate is elected, retained, or recalled; (3) a question-submitted election at which all of the qualified electors of one of the named governmental subdivisions listed in the act, and holding the election, are the only electors eligible to vote; and (4) not held on the same date as another election in which the qualified electors of that subdivision are eligible to cast ballots (K.S.A. 1983 Supp. 25-432). Any jurisdiction wishing to use a mail ballot election must secure permission to do so from the county election officer, who has the option of refusing to allow a mail ballot election. If permission is granted for a mail ballot election, the county election officer must prepare, and submit to the Secretary of State for approval, a written plan outlining certain measures and steps for the conduct of the election. The ballots are mailed by first class mail with a "return identification envelope" along with instructions describing the voting process for each elector. The official ballots must be distributed not sooner than the 20th day nor later than the 10th day before the date of the election. Upon receiving the ballot, the elector must mark it and sign the return identification envelope supplied with the ballot. The marked ballot may be returned in the postage paid envelope or may be delivered in person to the office of

the County Election Commissioner. The County Election Commissioner must receive the mailed ballot by the date of the election or, if delivered in person, by noon on the date of the election. Under the act, a ballot will be counted only if (1) it is returned in the return identification envelope, (2) the envelope is signed by the elector to whom the ballot is issued, and (3) the signature has been verified by the county election officer (K.S.A. 1983 Supp. 25-433 [e]).

Between 1983 and 1989, there were 90 mail ballot elections held in the State of Kansas. According to statistics compiled by the Kansas Association of School Boards, 45 of those referenda involved issues pertaining to unified school districts. The vast majority of the mail ballot elections involving Kansas school districts have been for bond issues, with only 3 deciding questions of a capital outlay levy, an increased per-pupil budget request, and a school closing. All three of those issues were defeated in mail ballot elections. Of the 42 mail ballot elections for school bond issues in the State of Kansas from 1983 to 1989, 25 were passed and 17 were defeated.

With a larger voter turnout in mail ballot elections in the State of Kansas, speculation abounds as to whether greater voter participation is an advantage or disadvantage for school districts. The research shows there is little doubt that mail ballot elections allow more people to participate in the democratic process. Graves (1988, p.78)

argued that "voting by mail also results in a more definitive election outcome, reduces the cost per vote and makes voting easier for the elderly, the handicapped and the harried."

But what does this mean for a school district that is desperately in need of additional classroom space and is therefore trying to pass a bond issue?

Research indicates that a larger voter turnout may not be in the best interest of a school district attempting to pass a school bond issue. Indeed, Piele and Hall (1973, p. 64) determined that "the findings from the research of the past decade (1960's and early 1970's) strongly support the proposition that the larger the turnout, the smaller the percentage of favorable votes cast in a school financial election." This assertion was based in large part on the research of Coleman (1957) who conducted studies on voting behavior in local referenda authorizing the flouridation of drinking water. Coleman found that higher turnout rates were positively related to the defeat of flouridation issues. His theory postulated that the rate of turnout was directly proportional to the amount of conflict and controversy surrounding the issue in the community.

The community conflict stimulates many citizens to vote who normally abstain because of negative (or at least neutral) predispositions toward community affairs. A greater percentage of these new voters tend to vote no (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 62).

It must be noted however, that flouridation issues and school financial elections are different and care should be

exercised in applying the findings of one to the other.

Two indicators of community conflict over school election proposals are the amount of individual criticism of the schools and the amount of organized group opposition to the election proposal (Piele & Hall, 1973, p. 63).

Both of those variables were found to be positively related to voter turnout in school financial elections (Carter & Ruggels, 1966; Jennings & Zeigler, 1970). This supports Coleman's major premise that conflict causes a greater voter turnout among some part of the "large passive group" that normally would not go to the polls (Coleman, 1957). Piele and Hall (1973) cited several studies that have produced evidence to indicate that new voters who are motivated to vote by the community conflict are more likely to vote against the issue. Thus, a number of researchers have found that the larger the turnout, the smaller the percentage of positive votes cast in a school financial election (Carter & Sutthoff, 1960; Carter & Savard, 1961; Carter and Ruggels, 1966; Dykstra, 1964; Wentzel, 1964; Barbour, 1966; Jordan, 1966; Minar, 1966; Spinner, 1967; Crider, 1967; Lieber, 1967; Willis, 1967; Marlowe, 1969; Goettel, 1971; Banach and Westley, 1972).

Two researchers (Wentzel, 1964; Spinner, 1967) reported a higher correlation between voter turnout and negative voting in first time school elections. However, Spinner (1967) found that the greater the turnout in subsequent elections in the same year, the more likely that the issue would eventually pass. There are some research studies that

have found no statistically significant relationship between voter turnout and success or failure in school financial elections (Beal, 1966; Murphy, 1966; Stone, 1965; Turner, 1968; Hahn, 1968). Piele and Hall thus suggested that for the school official, "at least for the first time an election is held, indiscriminate efforts to attract voters to the polls may in themselves produce undesirable results" (1973, p. 69).

A study by Alexander and Bass (1974) found that the core of positive voters was larger than the block of "no" voters for small tax increases. However, as the tax increases became larger, "the proportion of registered voters turning out to vote 'yes' declines somewhat, and the dissenting voters turn out at higher rates. Eventually, the 'no' voters dominate and the proposal fails" (p. 42). Alexander and Bass also found that the turnout rate was especially dependent on random forces such as whether the tax election was held concurrently with general elections, the weather conditions, and the presence or absence of community conflict.

Both types of marginal voters--predictable or random--are on balance dissenters. These results support the maxim of school administrators that the best way to win a tax election is to pray for rain (Alexander & Bass, 1974, p. 43).

A simple examination of voter turnout rates can not predict the success or failure of a school bond issue. There are many other factors which must be considered when discussing the possible passage or defeat of a school bond issue. The political climate of the school district, the

type of community support for the school system, the current level of taxation, and the health of the local economy are just a few of the factors that can mean the difference between a bond issue which is approved and one that is defeated. Some of these factors may be considered beyond the control of school administrators and boards of education. There may be little, if anything, school officials can do to influence some of these factors in order to minimize their negative impact on a bond issue election.

However, school officials planning a school bond issue can do some things to enhance the chances for a successful bond issue campaign. One technique is to identify the most likely affirmative voter. Piele and Hall (1973) reported that the most likely such voters were parents of school-age children, people with high incomes and high education levels, individuals who are generally younger in age, people who are trusting, and individuals who have a high interest in schools and the community. They advocated taking advantage of normal low turnout rates by selectively recruiting more voters who are likely to be in favor of the issue while maintaining that the negative votes will remain constant. Studies have also found that only about 40% of the eligible voters will turn out for a bond election, and that these same 40% have cast 80% of all votes over the previous several years (Banach, 1971).

Good public relations plays an instrumental role in the passage of school bond issues. The patrons of the school

district must be kept informed concerning the financial needs in the operation of the school district. Educational administrators must build public trust in the local school district through the establishment of an ongoing public relations program.

People need to know that the school system is open and responsive to the community, and that means that the public relations program must be directed to everyone. The audience is not just teachers, not just parents, not just community leaders. The audience is everybody (Stanley, 1986, p. 82).

A school system cannot operate using a one-way propaganda system when it is time to have a school bond issue. A two-way communication system should be operating every day of the year. Honesty and sensitivity are two other important aspects of a school district's relationship with its patrons.

If school administrators are open and frank with citizens in the community as they speak with them about the financial and social problems within the school system, they will regain financial and moral support (Stanley, 1986, p.82)

Residents of communities in which numerous, consecutive bond issues have been approved have a genuine understanding of what their school district leaders are doing and why they are doing it. They accept that particular programs are practical and useful activities. People will support something they understand and of which they are a part (Stanley, 1986).

Summary

The passage of school bond issues is a necessity in the financing of school building construction and renovation. As citizens exercise their right to say "no" to higher taxes, securing the support of school district patrons in a bond issue election becomes an increasingly difficult task. School officials must use any and all options available to them in engineering a successful school bond issue campaign. One of the options that must be considered by Kansas school administrators and boards of education is the mail ballot election. Does it offer any advantages over a traditional polling place election? Or could it be a disadvantage? An examination of the data surrounding mail ballot elections and polling place elections for school bond issues in the state of Kansas since 1983 may help provide some information in planning for the passage of a school bond issue.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was undertaken in an attempt to determine if a mail ballot election is advantageous in passing a school bond issue. Since mail ballot elections have been shown to increase voter participation (Magleby, 1987) and many school administrators believe that a larger turnout increases the chances for passing a school bond issue, will a mail ballot election increase the likelihood of having a successful bond issue campaign?

The research questions that were addressed in this study were:

1. Has the use of mail ballot elections in the State of Kansas increased voter participation?
2. Does a larger voter turnout increase the likelihood of passing a school bond issue?
3. Will the use of a mail ballot election improve the chances of passing a school bond issue?

This chapter provides a review of the research design of this study. The population for the study will be described, as will the instrument that was designed for collecting the data. The procedures involved in the statistical analyses will also be explained.

Population

The population for this study consisted of the 82 unified school districts in the State of Kansas in each of which at least one bond issue referendum was held since the adoption of the mail ballot election act in Kansas (years 1983-1989). All districts in the population were included in the survey.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were gathered by use of a questionnaire that was sent to the superintendent of schools in each of the unified school districts in which a referendum on bond issues had been held during the years 1983-1989. The survey instrument was written by the researcher with input from the dissertation adviser and several school administrators.

A rough draft of the instrument was sent to five Kansas school districts as part of a pilot study. Four of the instruments were critiqued by the superintendents of schools and were returned. The suggestions for changes were incorporated in the final version of the survey instrument (Appendix A).

This instrument contained various questions about the numbers of full-time-equivalent (FTE) students enrolled in the district, its demographic composition, the assessed property valuation, and other pertinent questions that provided a description of the school district.

Information concerning each school district's bond

issues was collected. This information included the type of election(s); the percentage(s) of voter turnout; the size(s) of the bond issue; the estimated mill rate increase(s) to pay for the bonds; when the election was held; the purpose of the bond issue; and, of course, the outcome. Of those districts that did not use mail ballot elections, information was gathered as to why they used a polling place election. If the school district had conducted a mail ballot election and it failed, reasons for its failure were solicited. Another question addressed whether the city or county held a recent election for an additional tax prior to the school bond issue election. Finally, information on the desire of the school district to consider a bond issue in the future was gathered to see what intentions the district may have had in holding another bond issue election.

The survey was conducted by use of questionnaires that were mailed to the superintendents of the participating school districts. A cover letter (Appendix B) that explained the purpose of the research study was included with the instrument. Self-addressed stamped envelopes were included so the surveys could be returned at no cost to the respondents. Letters were sent to those superintendents who had not returned their survey forms within a four-week period (Appendix C). The second letter reminded the superintendents of the instrument they had received and urged them to fill it out and return it as soon as possible.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed to compare the type of election that was held with the size of the turnout and with the outcome. Various comparisons were made using the characteristics of the unified school districts in which bond issues had been passed as opposed to those districts in which the bond issues were defeated. The school districts that have used mail ballot elections were compared to determine what similarities and differences existed among them and to identify characteristics of school districts which commonly use mail ballot elections.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The mean, median, and modes were analyzed to see what conclusions may be drawn from the data which were collected. The t-test was utilized to compare the rates of voter participation in mail ballot elections and polling place elections to see if the difference between the means was significant. The Pearson R was used to determine if there was a correlation between the amount of voter turnout and the number of "yes" votes for each type of election. The Chi square test was used to determine if the success rate of school bond issues in mail ballot elections was significantly different than the success rate of school bond issues in polling place elections.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

According to statistics supplied by the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB), there were 82 school districts in the State of Kansas that held school bond issue elections in the years 1983 to 1989. This number was determined by an annual survey of county election officers by the KASB research department. The results of various school district elections were reported to KASB, including data such as the date of the election, the identity of the school district holding the election, the amount of the proposed bond issue, the purpose for the bonds, and, of course, the outcome of the election.

During the seven-year period from 1983 through 1989, there were 131 separate bond issue elections in the State of Kansas, according to the data compiled by the KASB. While 89 of these bond issues were voted upon in polling place elections, 42 involved mail ballot elections (see Figure 1). The 131 bond issues were conducted in 82 different school districts. The largest number of bond issues conducted in a single school district during that time period was five. Four school districts each conducted four bond issue elections during that seven-year period, five school

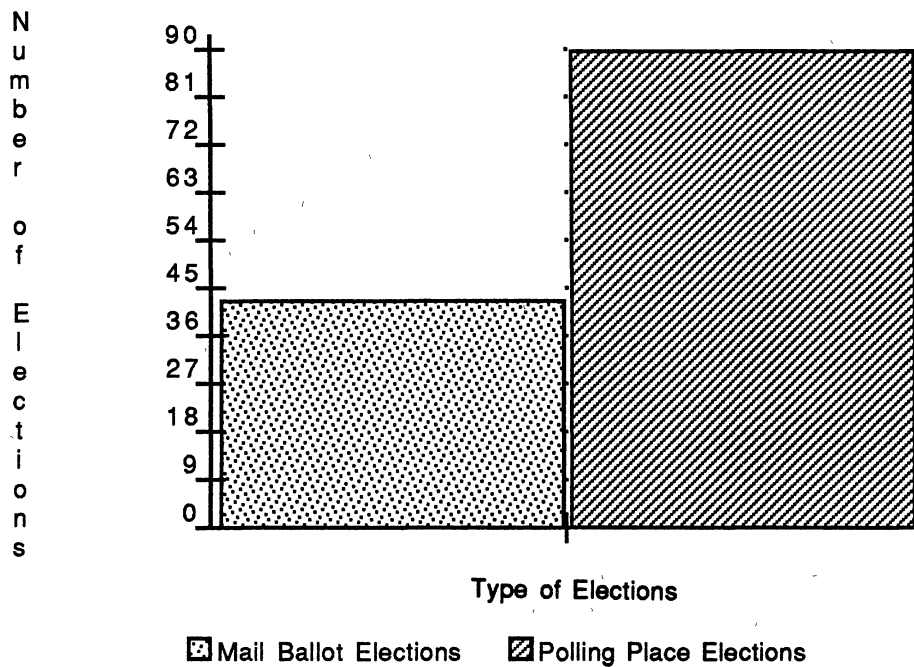


Figure 1. Kansas School Bond Elections, 1983-1989

districts each held three bond issue elections, and 13 school districts each had two bond issue elections. The remaining 59 school districts each had one bond issue election.

The 82 school districts which had bond issue elections between 1983 and 1989 formed the population for this research study. Each superintendent of schools in those districts received a copy of the survey instrument described in the previous chapter.

Of the 82 survey instruments which were distributed, 63 (77%) were returned. However, 2 respondents did not provide information on their bond issues. Both superintendents claimed that their school districts had not conducted any bond issues since 1983, even though the KASB data had

indicated otherwise. One other superintendent returned the cover letter with a note indicating that he was not in the district when the bond elections were held and thus did not feel qualified to answer the questions on the survey form. Information was therefore gathered on 38 (90%) of the 42 mail ballot elections and 57 (64%) of the 89 polling place elections between held between 1983 and 1989. Representatives of 19 school districts did not respond to the survey, even after a reminder was sent to encourage them to participate. The followup letter resulted in only one additional district returning a survey that had not yet been returned.

The 19 non-responding school districts held 35 elections between 1983 and 1989. Of those 35 elections, four were mail ballot elections (10% of the total mail ballot elections) and 32 were polling place elections (36% of the 89 polling place elections). In analyzing the results of the non-responding school district elections, two (50%) of the four mail ballot elections were approved by voters while two (50%) were defeated. In the polling place elections, 13 (41%) bond issues were successful while 19 (59%) were unsuccessful. In all, 15 (42%) of the elections for non-responding school districts were approved by voters and 21 (58%) were not approved.

By comparison, of the 38 mail ballot elections conducted by the school districts that responded to the survey, 23 (61%) were approved by voters while 15 (39%) were not

approved by voters. Of the 57 polling place elections that were held by the responding school districts, 34 (60%) passed and 23 (40%) were defeated. In all of the bond issue elections for the responding school districts, 57 (60%) were successful while 38 (40%) were unsuccessful. This information is presented in Table III.

TABLE III

COMPARISON OF RESPONDING AND NON-RESPONDING SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND BOND ISSUE RESULTS

| Election/ Results | <u>Respondents</u> | | <u>Non-respondents</u> | | <u>Totals</u> | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|---------------|-----|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Mail Ballot: | | | | | | |
| Approved | 23 | 61% | 2 | 50% | 25 | 60% |
| Defeated | 15 | 39% | 2 | 50% | 17 | 40% |
| Polling Place: | | | | | | |
| Approved | 34 | 60% | 13 | 41% | 47 | 53% |
| Defeated | 23 | 40% | 19 | 59% | 42 | 47% |
| All Elections: | | | | | | |
| Approved | 57 | 60% | 15 | 42% | 72 | 55% |
| Defeated | 38 | 40% | 21 | 58% | 59 | 45% |

Of the 63 school districts that responded to the survey, five of the school districts had conducted both mail ballot elections and polling place elections. There were 27 school districts that held mail ballot elections and 41 districts that held polling place elections for bond issues.

Voter Participation

The first research question in this study was focused upon the degree to which the use of mail ballot elections in the State of Kansas may have increased voter participation. Data concerning the percentage of registered voters participating in the elections were gathered from 32 of the 42 mail ballot elections between 1983 and 1989. Figure 2 shows the comparison in mean turnout percentages for mail ballot elections and polling place elections. The average percentage of registered voters who participated in those elections was 74.2%. The median was 74% and the mode was 80%. The range for the percentage of voter participation in mail ballot elections was from 54% to 90% of registered voters casting ballots in the respective elections.

The average voter participation rate in polling place elections was 60.4%. The median was 68% and the mode was 70%. The range of voter participation in the polling place elections was from 19% to 94%.

A t-test was run to compare the turnout rates for mail ballot elections and polling place elections to see if there was a significant (beyond chance) difference between the means. The t value for the difference between the mean turnout rates for mail ballot elections (74.2%) and polling place elections (60.4%) was 3.58. This coefficient was found to be statistically significant at the .05 level of significance ($t=3.58$, $df=65$, $p<.05$).

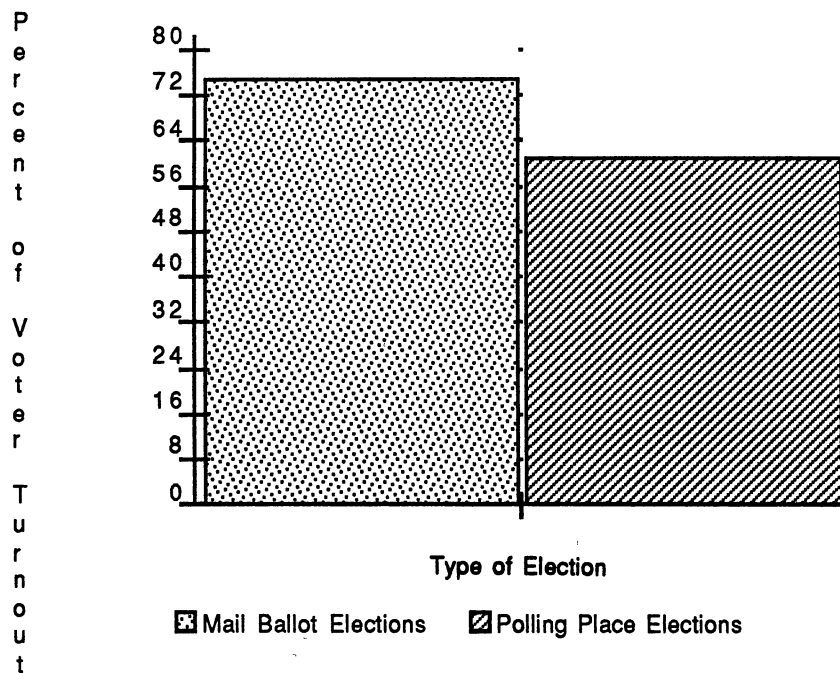


Figure 2. Comparison of Voter Turnout Rates for Mail Ballot Elections and Polling Place elections

Further analysis of mail ballot elections revealed that the voter turnout rate for those issues that received voter approval was lower than for those issues that were rejected by the voters. The voter turnout rate for successful school bond issues decided by the use of a mail ballot was 71.2%. The median was 72% and the mode was 66%. The range of voter participation in the successful mail ballot elections was from 54% to 85% participation. The mean voter turnout rate for school bond issues that were defeated in mail ballot elections was 80.4%. The median turnout rate for unsuccessful mail ballot elections was 80% while the mode was also 80%. Voter participation ranged from 70% to 90% in the

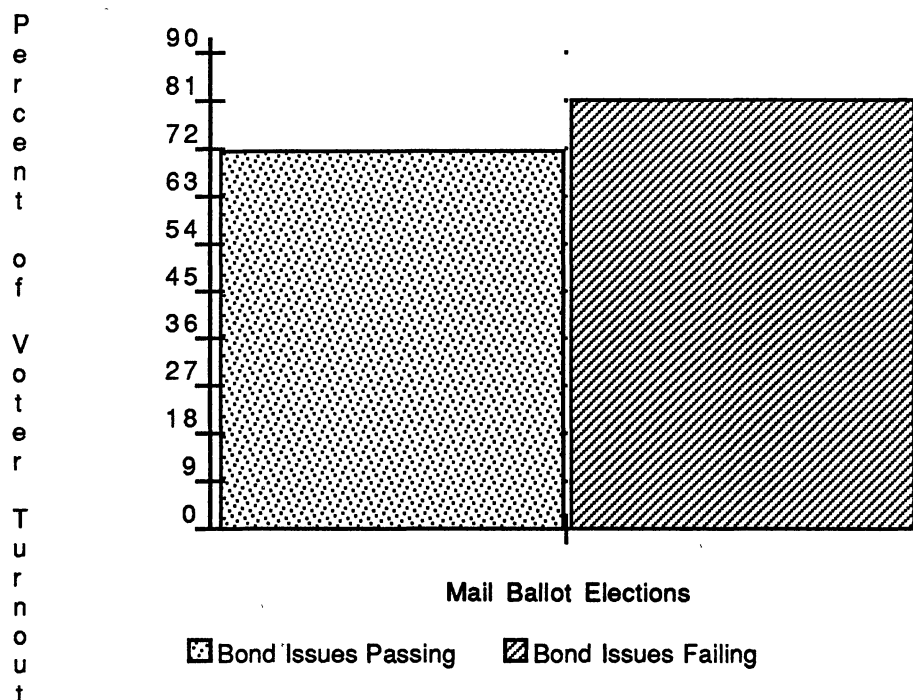


Figure 3. Comparison of Voter Participation Rates for Successful and Unsuccessful Mail Ballot Elections

mail ballot elections that were defeated. A comparison of the mean participation rates in successful and in unsuccessful mail ballot elections is depicted in Figure 3.

In polling place elections, the mean voter turnout rate for bond issues that were approved by voters was 63.5%. The median was 68.5% and the mode was 70%. The range of voter participation rates in successful polling place elections was from 25% to 94%. Bond issues that were defeated at the polls had a voter participation rate of 55.7%. The median for the failing bond issues was 56.5% while the mode was 74%. The range for unsuccessful bond issues was 19% to 80%. The mean

rates for voter participation in school bond issues that were decided at the polling places are compared in Figure 4.

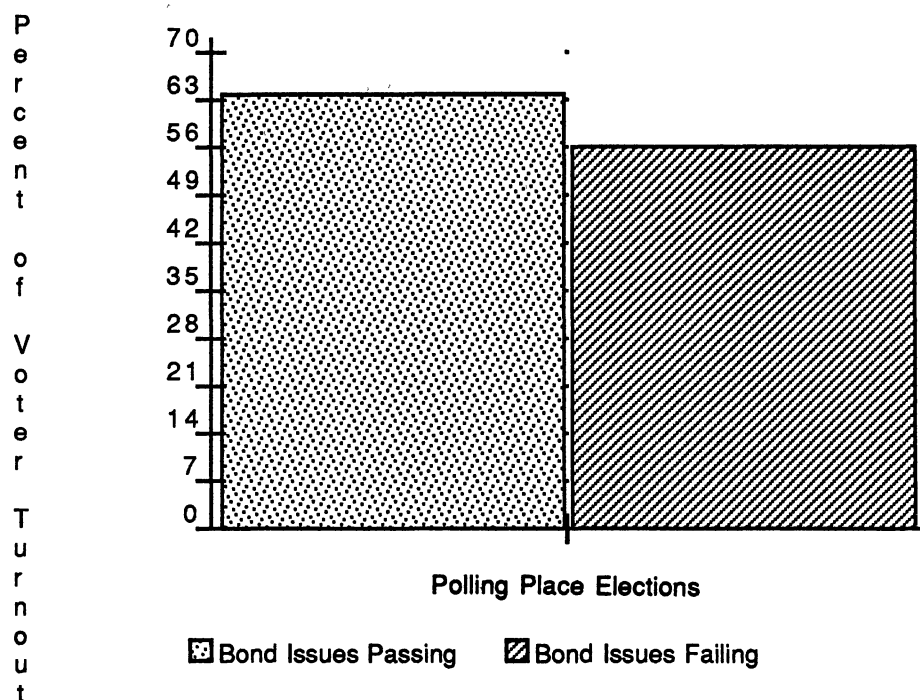


Figure 4. Comparison of Voter Participation Rate in Successful and Unsuccessful Polling Place Elections.

Participation and Passage

The second research question was used to determine if a larger voter turnout increased the likelihood of passing a school bond issue. The Pearson r correlation coefficient was calculated to see if there was a positive or negative relationship between the percentage of voters voting "yes" on

the bond issues and the percentage of voter turnout.

In the first calculation, the percentage of "yes" votes was compared with the percentage of registered voters participating in all elections, both mail ballot elections and polling place elections. Data were thus gathered on 67 elections, 31 mail ballot elections and 36 polling place elections. The correlation coefficient between the "x" variable (percentage of "yes" votes) and the "y" variable (percentage of registered voters participating in the election) was $-.1$. With degrees of freedom of 65, this correlation coefficient was not found to be statistically significant at the .05 level ($r=-.1$, $df=65$, $p>.05$). A scattergram showing the relationship of "yes" votes to voter participation is shown in Figure 5.

In the mail ballot elections, the correlation coefficient was $-.605$. The degrees of freedom in this sample were 29. The coefficient of $-.605$ was found to be significant ($r=-.605$, $df=29$, $p<.05$). A scattergram of the variables "Yes vs. Turnout" for mail ballot elections is shown in Figure 6.

Table IV shows the frequency distribution for the percent of voter participation in mail ballot elections. The mean percentage of "yes" votes and "no" votes is also given for each interval. The data indicated that in general, as the percent of voter participation increased, the average percentage of voters that voted in favor of a school bond issue declined.

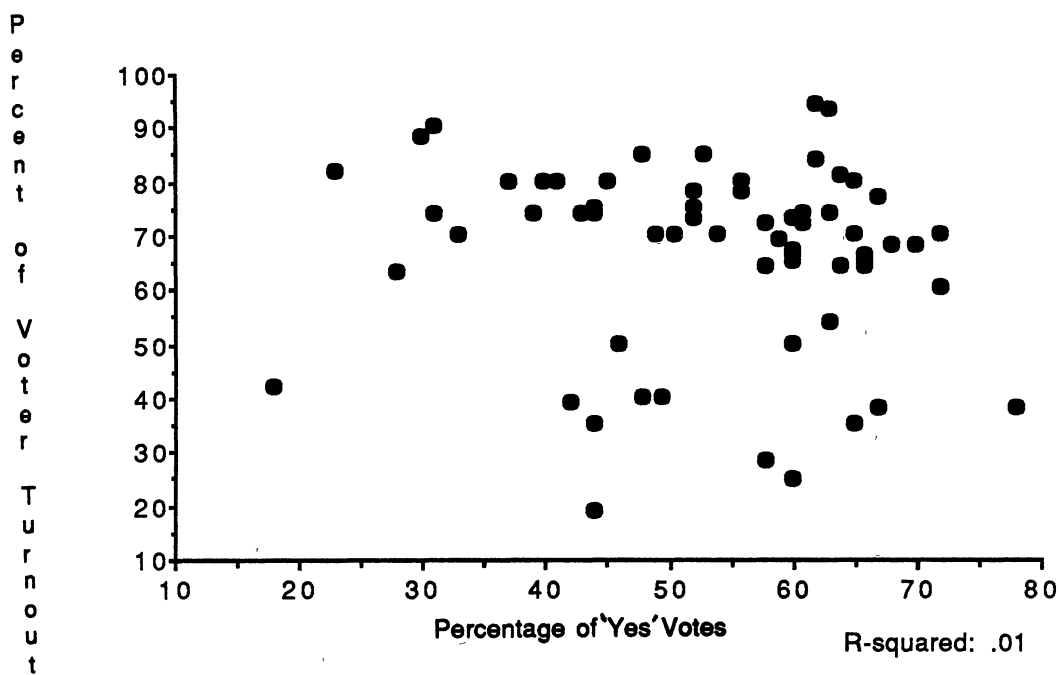


Figure 5. Scattergram of the Correlation of the Percentages of "Yes" Votes and Voter Participation in All Elections (Mail Ballot Elections and Polling Place Elections)

Table V shows the frequency distribution for the percentage of voter participation and the results of the mail ballot elections. As the rate of participation increased, the success rate of the bond issue elections declined. Those elections with lower rates of participation were generally more successful.

An analysis of the relationship between "yes" votes and voter participation in polling place elections yielded a correlation coefficient of .063. With the degrees of freedom being 34, this correlation coefficient was not found to be statistically significant at the .05 level ($r=.063$, $df=34$, $p>.05$). Figure 7 shows the scattergram for the relationship

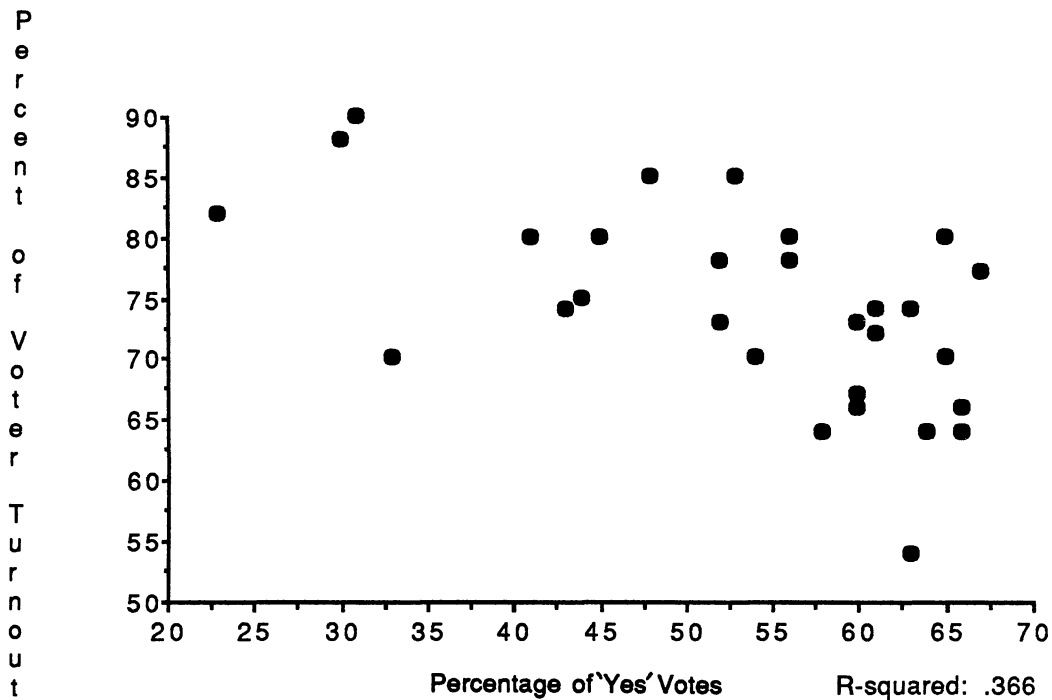


Figure 6. Scattergram of the Correlation of the Percentages of "Yes" Votes and Voter Turnout in Mail Ballot Elections

TABLE IV

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR PERCENTAGES OF VOTER PARTICIPATION AND MEAN PERCENTAGES OF "YES" AND "NO" VOTES FOR EACH INTERVAL IN MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS

| Percent of Participation | Number of Elections | Mean % Voting Yes | Mean % Voting No |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 90-100% | 1 | 31 | 68 |
| 80-89% | 9 | 44.6 | 55.4 |
| 70-79% | 13 | 58.1 | 41.9 |
| 60-69% | 7 | 62.9 | 37.1 |
| 50-59% | 1 | 63 | 37 |

TABLE V

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR PERCENTAGES OF VOTER PARTICIPATION
AND RESULTS OF MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS

| Percent of Participation | Number of Elections | Results of the Elections | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| | | Passed | Failed |
| 90-100% | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 80-89% | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| 70-79% | 13 | 10 | 3 |
| 60-69% | 7 | 7 | 0 |
| 50-59% | 1 | 1 | 0 |

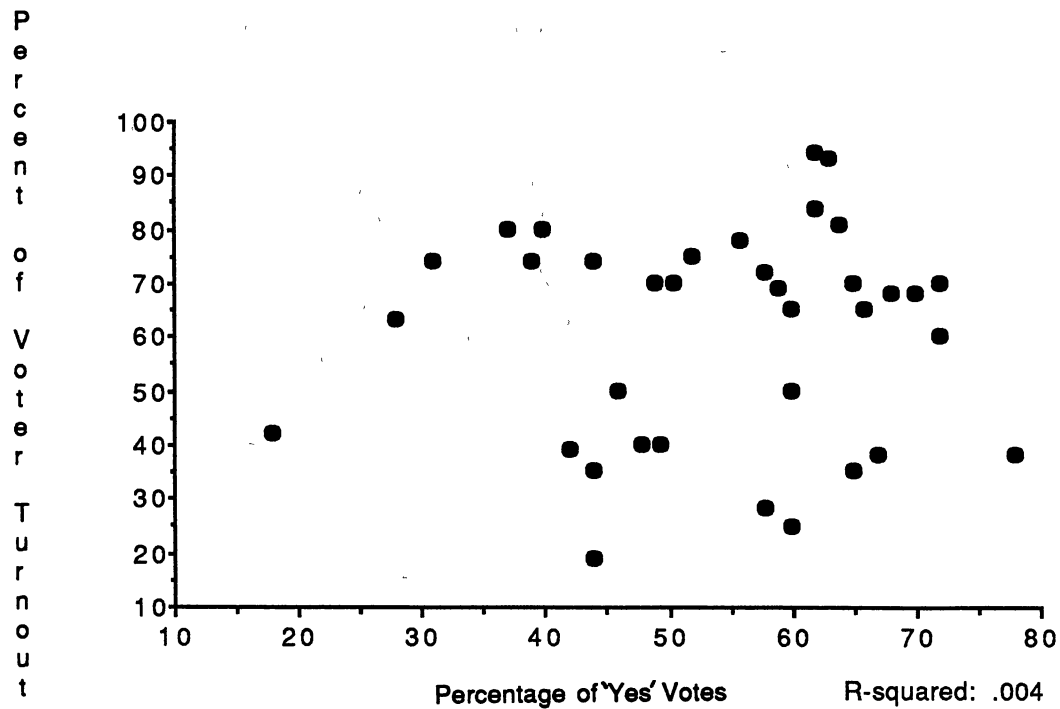


Figure 7. Scattergram of the Correlation of the Percentages of "Yes" Votes and Voter Turnout in Polling Place Elections

between "yes" votes and the turnout rate for polling place elections.

Table VI shows the frequency distribution for the percentages of voter participation and the mean percentages for "yes" and "no" votes in polling place elections. Even though the larger percentage of turnout usually yielded a higher average percentage of "yes" votes, the margin of difference between "yes" and "no" votes in the 70-79% and 80-89% intervals was fairly slim.

TABLE VI

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR PERCENTAGES OF VOTER PARTICIPATION AND MEAN PERCENTAGES OF "YES" AND "NO" VOTES FOR EACH INTERVAL FOR POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS

| Percent of Participation | Number of Elections | Mean % Voting Yes | Mean % Voting No |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 90-100% | 2 | 62.5 | 37.5 |
| 80-89% | 4 | 50.1 | 49.9 |
| 70-79% | 10 | 51.7 | 48.3 |
| 60-69% | 7 | 60.4 | 39.6 |
| 50-59% | 2 | 53 | 47 |
| 40-49% | 3 | 38.5 | 61.5 |
| 30-39% | 5 | 59.2 | 40.8 |
| 20-29% | 2 | 59 | 41 |
| 10-19% | 1 | 44 | 56 |

Table VII shows the frequency distribution of the percentage of voter participation and the results of the polling place elections. The 60-69% interval showed a higher rate of approval (6 passed, 1 defeated) than any other interval reflecting registered voter turnout. The 70-79%

interval, which had the largest number of elections (10), had a 6 to 4 split in bond issues that were passed and bond issues that failed. The results in the other intervals did not reveal any definite trends.

TABLE VII

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR PERCENTAGES OF VOTER PARTICIPATION
AND RESULTS OF POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS

| Percent of Participation | Number of Elections | Results of the Elections | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|--------|
| | | Passed | Failed |
| 90-100% | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 80-89% | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| 70-79% | 10 | 6 | 4 |
| 60-69% | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| 50-59% | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 40-49% | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 30-39% | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| 20-29% | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 10-19% | 1 | 0 | 1 |

Mail Ballot Elections and Success

The third research question was focused on whether the use of a mail ballot election improved the chances of passing a school bond issue. This question was addressed by an analysis of the success rates for mail ballot elections compared with the success rates for polling place elections. The null hypothesis was formulated as the basis for a determination if there is a significant difference between

the success rate of mail ballot elections and of polling place elections.

According to the statistics compiled by the research department of the KASB, of the 42 mail ballot elections for school bond issues held between 1983 and 1989, 25 (60%) passed and 17 (40%) failed. Of the 89 school bond issues decided in polling place elections between 1983 and 1989, 47 (53%) were approved by voters while 42 (45%) were rejected by voters. In all of the 131 school bond issues between 1983 and 1989 (mail ballot elections and polling place elections combined), 72 (55%) were approved by voters while 59 (45%) were not approved by voters.

To see if there is a non-chance difference in the approval rate for mail ballot elections as opposed to polling place elections, the Chi square test was used. The success rate for mail ballot elections and polling place elections was compared to the success rate of all school bond issues in the State of Kansas during the same time period to see if they were significantly different. These figures are shown in Figure 8. The calculations yielded a Chi square of 0.051 with degrees of freedom being one. This value is less than the $p=.05$ value of 3.84 ($\chi^2=.051$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the success rates of mail ballot elections for school bond issues as compared to polling place elections is therefore not rejected.

| | | Bond Issue Election Results | | |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|------|-------|
| | | Pass | Fail | Total |
| Mail Ballot Elections | (observed) | 25 | 17 | 42 |
| | (expected) | 23.1 | 18.9 | |
| Polling Place Elections | (observed) | 47 | 42 | 89 |
| | (expected) | 48.9 | 40.1 | |
| Total | | 72 | 59 | 131 |

Chi square value equals 0.051 ($\chi^2=0.051$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Figure 8. Chi Square Calculations Comparing Rates of Success for Mail Ballot Elections and Polling Place Elections

Demographics

School District Enrollment

The range of pupil enrollment for school districts that participated in this research study varied from 108 students in the smallest school district to 29,298 students in the largest school district. The 63 school districts that made up the study sample were comprised of four small school districts (0-299 FTE), 57 mid-sized school districts (300-11,999 FTE), and 2 large school districts (12,000+ FTE).

None of the small school districts conducted mail ballot elections. Of the 27 school districts that held mail ballot elections, 26 were mid-sized school districts and one was a large school district. The average FTE for school districts that held mail ballot elections was 2,487 students.

There were 4 small school districts which held polling place elections for their bond issues, while 36 of the mid-sized school districts and one large school district also conducted polling place elections. The average FTE for school districts having traditional polling place elections was 2,223 students.

Table VIII provides a frequency distribution for the success or failure of mail ballot elections and polling place elections based on school district size (FTE). The data show that a larger number of elections were held by smaller school districts, those districts with an FTE less than 1,000 students. Also, the smaller school districts held more polling place elections for their bond issues whereas the larger school districts held more mail ballot elections for their bond issues.

Enrollment Growth Trends

Another variable in which data were gathered dealt with the growth trend of each school district. According to the survey results, 46 school districts in the study were experiencing an increase in enrollment, 9 reported a decrease in enrollment, and one school district reported a steady

TABLE VIII

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF VOTER PREFERENCE IN MAIL
BALLOT ELECTIONS AND POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS
BY SCHOOL DISTRICT SIZE (FTE)

| School District Size (FTE) (No. of Elections) | Mail Ballot | | Polling Place | |
|---|-------------|------|---------------|------|
| | Pass | Fail | Pass | Fail |
| 0-499 (n=15) | 1 | 1 | 10 | 3 |
| 500-999 (n=21) | 6 | 3 | 10 | 2 |
| 1,000-1,499 (n=18) | 1 | 3 | 6 | 8 |
| 1,500-1,999 (n=14) | 2 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| 2,000-2,499 (n=5) | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 2,500 and up (n=19) | 9 | 2 | 5 | 3 |

enrollment pattern. Seven school districts did not indicate whether their enrollment was increasing or decreasing. The election results were compared with whether or not the school district's enrollment was increasing or decreasing.

In the mail ballot elections, of the school districts that were increasing in size, 20 (67%) of the elections passed while 10 (33%) failed. In the school districts where the enrollment was on a decline, one (25%) election was approved while three (75%) were defeated. These results were analyzed using the Chi square test of significance. The Chi square value was computed as 2.447. With degrees of freedom being one, this coefficient was not significant at the .05 level of significance ($\chi^2=2.447$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). The Chi square calculation for the growth trends in districts conducting mail ballot elections is shown in Figure 9.

In the polling place elections, of those school

| | | Mail Ballot Election Results | | |
|--------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------|-------|
| | | Pass | Fail | Total |
| Enrollment Increasing | (observed) | 20 | 10 | 30 |
| | (expected) | 18.3 | 11.7 | |
| Enrollment Decreasing | (observed) | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| | (expected) | 2.4 | 1.6 | |
| Total | | 21 | 13 | 34 |

Chi square value equals 2.447 ($\chi^2 = 2.447$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Figure 9. Chi Square Calculation Comparing Rates of Success for Mail Ballot Elections in School Districts with Increasing and Decreasing Enrollment

districts increasing in size, 28 (67%) of the school bond issues were successful, while 14 (33%) were unsuccessful. In the school districts where enrollment is declining, 6 (67%) of the bond issues passed, while three (33%) failed. The Chi square coefficient in this statistical analysis was .131, with degrees of freedom being one. This value was not significant at the .05 level of significance ($\chi^2=.131$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). Figure 10 shows the Chi square calculations for enrollment growth trends in districts conducting polling place elections.

| | | Polling Place Election Results | | |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|------|-------|
| | | Pass | Fail | Total |
| Enrollment Increasing | (observed) | 28 | 14 | 42 |
| | (expected) | 29 | 13 | |
| Enrollment Decreasing | (observed) | 6 | 3 | 9 |
| | (expected) | 6.2 | 2.8 | |
| Total | | 34 | 17 | 51 |

Chi square value equals .131 ($\chi^2 = .131$, $df=1$, $p>.05$)

Figure 10. Chi Square Calculation Comparing Rates of Success for Polling Place Elections in School Districts with Increasing and Decreasing Enrollment

School District Location

The vast majority (49) of the school districts in this study were considered to be rural in nature. Rural districts were defined as school districts located in a city with a population of less than 50,000 people more than 10 miles away from a city with a population of at least 50,000 people.

The other 14 districts were considered to be suburban school districts. Suburban school districts were districts located within 10 miles of a city that has a population of 50,000 or more. There were no urban school districts (cities

with a population of at least 50,000) in this study. However, some of the suburban Kansas City school districts included in this study did have populations exceeding 50,000, but for the purposes of this study, those districts were considered suburban.

Of the 38 mail ballot elections, 24 were conducted in rural school districts and 14 were conducted in suburban school districts. In the rural school districts, 12 (50%) of the bond issues passed, while 12 (50%) failed. In the suburban school districts, 11 (79%) of the proposed bond issues were approved by voters, while three (21%) were defeated. These success/failure rates were compared using the Chi square formula. The Chi square coefficient of 3.053 was found to not be significant at the .05 level of significance, with degrees of freedom being one ($\chi^2=3.053$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). This information is shown in Figure 11.

Of the 54 polling place elections, 40 were held in rural school districts, while 14 took place in suburban school districts. Of the 40 school bond issue elections in rural school districts, 30 (75%) received voter approval while 10 (25%) were rejected by voters. In the 14 suburban polling place elections for school bond issues, 7 (50%) passed and 7 (50%) failed. The Chi square formula resulted in a value of 3.128, with degrees of freedom being one. This value was also found to not be significant at the .05 level of significance ($\chi^2=3.128$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). Figure 12 shows the

Mail Ballot
Election Results

| | Pass | Fail | Total |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------|-------|
| Rural School Districts | 12 (observed) | 12 | 24 |
| | 14.6 (expected) | 9.4 | |
| Suburban School Districts | 11 | 3 | 14 |
| | 8.5 | 9.4 | |
| Total | 23 | 15 | 38 |

Chi square value equals 3.053 ($\chi^2 = 3.053$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Figure 11. Chi Square Calculation Comparing Rates of Success for Mail Ballot Elections in Rural and Suburban School Districts

comparison of success rates for polling place elections for rural and suburban school districts using the Chi square formula.

School District Wealth

The wealth of the school districts was measured by computing the net assessed property valuation on a per-pupil basis. The assessed valuation for each district was divided by the FTE to determine the "per-pupil property wealth" of each district. The range of per-pupil property wealth among school districts ranged from a low of \$12,672 of assessed

| | | Polling Place Election Results | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|------|-------|
| | | Pass | Fail | Total |
| Rural School Districts | (observed) | 30 | 10 | 40 |
| | (expected) | 27.6 | 12.4 | |
| Suburban School Districts | (observed) | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| | (expected) | 9.7 | 4.3 | |
| Total | | 37 | 17 | 54 |

Chi square value equals 3.128 ($\chi^2=3.128$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Figure 12. Chi Square Calculation Comparing Rates of Success for Polling Place Elections in Rural and Suburban School Districts

valuation per-pupil to a high of \$587,453 of assessed valuation per-pupil. A frequency distribution of the passage and failure records of mail ballot elections and polling place elections according to per-pupil property wealth categories is shown in Table IX. The majority of bond issue elections that were conducted were held by school districts that fell into the per-pupil property wealth categories between \$15,000 and \$33,000. A majority of polling place elections in the lower district wealth category were unsuccessful. This was also the case for the mail ballot elections in the second category of per-pupil property wealth.

TABLE IX

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF PER PUPIL PROPERTY WEALTH
FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS CONDUCTING MAIL BALLOT
ELECTIONS AND POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS

| Variable Per Pupil Property Wealth (No. of Elections) | Mail Ballot | | Polling Place | |
|--|-------------|------|---------------|------|
| | Pass | Fail | Pass | Fail |
| 0-\$15,000 (n=6) | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| \$15,001-\$21,000 (n=20) | 4 | 5 | 10 | 1 |
| \$21,001-\$27,000 (n=26) | 6 | 4 | 12 | 4 |
| \$27,001-\$33,000 (n=19) | 8 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| \$33,001-\$39,000 (n=5) | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| \$39,001-\$45,000 (n=0) | | | | |
| \$45,001-\$51,000 (n=3) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| \$51,001-\$57,000 (n=1) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| \$57,001-\$63,000 (n=6) | 3 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| \$63,001-\$69,000 (n=1) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| \$69,001 and up (n=5) | 1 | 0 | 3 | 1 |

Amounts of the Bond Issues and Millage Rates

The amounts of the bond issues included in the study varied from \$150,000 to \$76,830,000. An examination of the data in Table X shows that the vast majority of polling place elections (11 out of 12) in the smallest category were approved by voters. In the mail ballot elections, those in the smaller categories (up to \$2,500,000) usually passed while those above that amount had a more difficult time passing. Six out of the eight mail ballot elections for bond issues in excess of \$7,000,000 were successful while only one out of two polling place elections in that category was

TABLE X

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF BOND ISSUE AMOUNTS FOR
MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS AND
POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS

| Amount of Bond Issue (No. of Elections) | Mail Ballot | | Polling Place | |
|---|-------------|------|---------------|------|
| | Pass | Fail | Pass | Fail |
| 0-\$999,999 (n=14) | 1 | 1 | 11 | 1 |
| \$1,000,000-\$1,750,000 (n=13) | 4 | 1 | 5 | 3 |
| \$1,750,001-\$2,500,000 (n=12) | 5 | 0 | 6 | 1 |
| \$2,500,001-\$3,250,000 (n=7) | 1 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| \$3,250,001-\$4,000,000 (n=11) | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| \$4,000,001-\$4,750,000 (n=4) | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| \$4,750,001-\$5,500,000 (n=6) | 1 | 0 | 4 | 1 |
| \$5,500,001-\$6,250,000 (n=3) | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| \$6,250,001-\$7,000,000 (n=1) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| \$7,000,000 and up (n=10) | 6 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

approved by the voters.

The millage rates for school bond issues in both types of elections had a range from one mill to 35 mills. An analysis of the data in the frequency distribution for millage rates in Table XI shows that, in general, the lower the proposed millage increase, the higher the success rate for the bond issues. Most of the bond issues were for millage increases of ten mills or lower. As the millages increased, the percentage of issues passing decreased.

TABLE XI

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION FOR MILLAGE RATES IN BOND ISSUES
AND RECORD OF SUCCESS IN MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS
AND POLLING PLACE ELECTIONS

| Number of Mills In Bond Issue (No. of Elections) | Mail Ballot | | Polling Place | |
|--|-------------|------|---------------|------|
| | Pass | Fail | Pass | Fail |
| 1-4 mills (n=12) | 5 | 0 | 5 | 2 |
| 5-7 mills (n=14) | 5 | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| 8-10 mills (n=19) | 4 | 3 | 10 | 2 |
| 11-13 mills (n=7) | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14-16 mills (n=8) | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| 17-19 mills (n=3) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 20-22 mills (n=4) | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| 23-25 mills (n=2) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 25 or more mills (n=3) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Factors Contributing to Bond Issue Success

Data were also gathered on whether the board of education was unanimous in its support for the bond issue. This was determined by the official vote taken in a board of education meeting in which the bond issue was proposed. The results of the election were compared with the board of education's vote on the motion for the bond issue.

In the mail ballot elections, there were four elections in which the board of education was not unanimous in its vote on the issue. Of those four elections, one (25%) was approved by the voters while three (75%) were rejected by the voters. In the mail ballot elections in which the school board was unanimous in its vote on the motion for the issue, 19 (73%) were successful while 7 (27%) were unsuccessful.

The Chi square test of significance was utilized in analyzing the data and the Chi square value was computed to be 3.9. This coefficient was found to be significant at the .05 level of significance, with degrees of freedom being one ($\chi^2=3.9$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). This calculation is shown in Figure 13.

| | | Mail Ballot Election Results | | |
|---------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------|-------|
| B.O.E. Vote | | Pass | Fail | Total |
| Unanimous | (observed) | 19 | 7 | 26 |
| | (expected) | 15.6 | 10.4 | |
| Less than Unanimous | (observed) | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| | (expected) | 2.4 | 1.6 | |
| | | 20 | 10 | 30 |

Chi square value equals 3.9 ($\chi^2 = 3.9$, $df=1$, $p<.05$).

Figure 13. Chi Square Calculation Comparing the Rates of Success for Mail Ballot Elections with the Boards' of Education Votes in Proposing the School Bond Issues

Among polling place elections, 12 of the school bond issues went before the voters with a less than unanimous vote on the motion by the board of education. Of those 12

elections, 5 (42%) passed and 7 (58%) failed. Thirty-two polling place elections for school bond issues received unanimous approval by the board of education and of that number, 23 (72%) of the issues were approved by the voters while 9 (28%) were defeated at the polls. In calculating the Chi square value for polling place elections, it was determined to be 5.18. With degrees of freedom being one, this value was found to be significant at the .05 level of significance ($\chi^2=5.18$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). The Chi square calculations are depicted in Figure 14.

**Polling Place
Election Results**

| B.O.E. Vote | Pass | Fail | Total |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|-------|
| | Unanimous | 23 (observed) | 9 |
| | 17 (expected) | 15 | |
| Less than Unanimous | 5 | 7 | 12 |
| | 6.4 | 5.6 | |
| | 28 | 16 | 44 |

Chi square value equals 5.18 ($\chi^2 = 5.18$, $df=1$, $p<.05$).

Figure 14. Chi Square Calculation Comparing the Rates of Success for Polling Place Elections with the Boards' of Education Votes in Proposing the School Bond Issues

School superintendents in school districts in which bond issues utilizing mail ballot elections were passed were asked about the factors that contributed to the success of their bond issues. Twenty different responses were received from the 16 different school districts that had conducted successful mail ballot elections. A variety of different factors included: organizing a citizen committee to establish facility needs, simply being able to show that the needs truly existed, holding community planning meetings, having a good campaign organization, having a higher voter turnout, and using a mail ballot election which made it easier for people to vote. Each of those reasons was listed three times. Strong interest and strong local support of schools were each listed twice as a reason for having a successful mail ballot election.

When the superintendents were asked if a larger voter turnout increased the chances for passing a bond issue, 51 out of the 63 respondents answered "yes," 8 superintendents answered "no," one said it depended on the circumstances, and three did not answer the question. Thus 81% of the superintendents perceived that a bond issue has a better chance to pass if there is a larger percentage of registered voters participating in the election.

Factors Contributing to Failure

The school superintendents were asked to list the factors that they perceived to have contributed to the

failure of a mail ballot election. Of the 10 school districts from which surveys were received and which had been unsuccessful in passing a mail ballot election, 9 responses were received to this question. Two superintendents indicated that the tax increase itself seemed to be the major factor in the bond issue being defeated. Other factors that were listed included voters not believing enrollment projections, lack of unanimous support from the board of education for the bond issue, a previous mill levy increase, conflicting information put out by bond issue opponents, facility needs not being clearly defined, opposition to the proposed site for the new school building, and the fact that a mail ballot election allowed everyone to vote, even those people who were uninformed on the issues.

Reasons for Not Conducting

Mail Ballot Elections

Superintendents in those school districts which had not conducted mail ballot elections were asked for the reason(s) why they had not used that option for their bond issues. Thirty-four responses were received on that question with the most common reason (22 responses) being that the school district leaders simply preferred a polling place election. Six school superintendents reported that their school boards wanted to conduct mail ballot elections but that their county election officials had refused to allow such elections. One superintendent indicated that the cost of a mail ballot

election was too great and five other superintendents gave other reasons for not having a mail ballot election. Those reasons included responses such as "no apparent reason," "felt we would be likely to get more 'no' votes by mail from people who weren't interested enough to come to the polls," "ran election with the general election to keep costs down," and "have not had any elections lately."

Future Plans

Another question concerned the intentions of school district leaders regarding future bond issues, including whether their school districts were planning other bond issues and, if so, whether they were going to conduct mail ballot elections or polling place elections. Of the 16 school districts considering another bond issue, five superintendents were planning mail ballot elections, six were considering polling place elections, and five were undecided on which method they will use. Of the 8 such districts which had used mail ballot elections in the past, four are likely to have mail ballot elections, three school districts were going back to polling place elections (their mail ballot elections had failed), and one was undecided. Of the 8 districts which had previously held polling place elections, only one superintendent was considering having a mail ballot election, three were going to use polling place elections again, and the other four were undecided on the type of election for their next bond issues.

Summary

Of the 131 school bond issues in the State of Kansas during the years 1983-1989, 42 were conducted in mail ballot elections while 89 were held at traditional polling places. In the 42 mail ballot elections, 25 (60%) of the school bond issues passed while 17 (40%) failed. Of the 89 polling place elections for school bond issues, 47 (53%) were approved by voters and 42 (47%) were not approved by voters. The difference in the success rates for traditional polling place elections and mail ballot elections for school bond issues was found not to be statistically significant.

Mail ballot elections were found to increase voter participation significantly in school bond issue referenda. The average percentage of registered voters participating in mail ballot elections for school bond issues was 74.2%. This compared with 60.4% of registered voters that cast ballots in school bond issue elections held at precinct polling places.

A comparison of the relationship between affirmative votes and the percentage of registered voters voting in mail ballot elections showed that there was a negative correlation between those two variables. The findings indicated that as voter participation in mail ballot elections increased, the number of "yes" votes decreased. This finding was in contrast to the perceptions of Kansas school superintendents. A vast majority of superintendents (81%) reported that they felt a bond issue had a better chance to pass if there was a larger percentage of registered voters participating in the

election. No significant correlation was found between voter turnout and percentage of "yes" votes in polling place elections. However, bond issues that were approved in polling place elections had a larger mean turnout (63.5%) than those issues that were defeated at the polls (55.7%).

The official vote of a board of education in proposing a school bond issue was seen as a significant factor in the passage or failure of that bond issue. There was a significant difference in the success rates of both mail ballot elections and polling place elections that did or did not have a unanimous board vote when they were proposed. Those issues without a unanimous board vote were more likely to fail.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENTARY

As we enter the 21st Century, the need to replace aging school buildings and construct new facilities for growing school districts must continue to be met by local boards of education and their communities. Traditionally, the means for funding such major building projects by the local school district has been accomplished through the sale of bonds, the proceeds of which are then typically used to fund construction or remodeling projects. However, before the bonds can be sold, the voters of the local school district must, in nearly all instances, approve the issuance of the revenue bonds in a referendum. Since taxes must be levied on local property and thus be paid by the local property owners to retire those bonds, school district patrons are given that authority to approve an increase in their property taxes to pay for the construction of new schools.

As federal and state income taxes and state and local sales taxes continue to increase, there is typically little that individual citizens can do to stem the tide of rising taxes. But such is not the case in school bond issue elections. In fact, school bond issue elections that impact

local property tax rates are one of the few times voters have an opportunity to say "No!" to higher taxes. And, more and more, voters are taking advantage of that opportunity. The percentage of school bond issues that receive voter approval has been declining for the past several years according to the National Center for Education Statistics (1981).

Coupled with the taxpayer revolt movement in America is the increasing proportion of older people who are living on fixed incomes and who therefore may not be able to afford an increase in their property tax rates. These senior citizens often do not have any direct ties to the local schools because their children have grown. They thus see no direct benefit to them of increasing their taxes to pay for new schools. This formidable special interest group is a political force that must be reckoned with at the polls since older people are more likely to vote than younger people (Piele & Hall, 1973).

School administrators and boards of education are faced with the need to utilize every conceivable strategy that may enhance the chances of passing a school bond issue. One option that is available in the State of Kansas is the use of mail ballot elections, if the County Election Commissioner grants approval.

Research has shown that mail ballot elections do in fact increase the percentage of registered voters who participate in an election (Magleby, 1987). Many school administrators appear to subscribe to the theory that the larger the turnout

in a school bond issue, the greater the chance that the bond issue will be approved by voters. If that is the case, does this mean that the use of a mail ballot election will improve the chances of passing a school bond issue?

Three research questions were formulated to guide this study.

1. Has the use of mail ballot elections in the State of Kansas increased voter participation?

2. Does a larger voter turnout increase the likelihood of passing a school bond issue?

3. Will the use of a mail ballot election improve the chances of passing a school bond issue?

A null hypothesis was formulated as the basis for determining if there is a significant difference between the success rates of mail ballot elections and of polling place elections. The null hypothesis was stated as: There is no significant difference in the success rates of mail ballot elections for school bond issues as compared to polling place elections.

The population for this research study consisted of the 82 Kansas school districts in which school bond issue referenda were conducted during the years 1983 to 1989. The instrument was devised to solicit information describing the school districts and the types of elections (i.e., mail ballot elections or polling place elections). Information collected included the full-time-equivalent (FTE) student enrollment of the district, the enrollment growth trend for

the district (increasing or decreasing), the district's rural-urban location, and the assessed property valuation of the school district. The questions relating to the school bond issue elections dealt with the type of elections that were conducted, the perceived reasons for the success or failure of the mail ballot elections, the dates of the elections, the estimated mill rates to pay for the proposed bond issues, the percentage of "yes" and "no" votes in the elections, the percentages of registered voters participating in the elections, the official votes of the boards of education in proposing the bond issues, and the purposes for the bond issues. The superintendents were asked their opinions on whether a larger voter turnout for a bond issue will result in a better chance for passing the bond issue. They were also asked if their school districts were planning other bond issues and, if so, if they were considering mail ballot elections or polling place elections for those bond issues.

There were 82 survey instruments mailed to the superintendents of the school districts that held bond issue referendums between 1983 and 1989. A total of 63 were returned. This represents a participation rate of 72%. However, two of the responding school districts indicated that they had, in fact, not conducted a bond issue election since 1983, contrary to data compiled by the Kansas Association of School Boards. Consequently, 61 surveys were received which included data that were compiled and analyzed.

An analysis of the data shows that there is no

significant difference in the success rate of mail ballot elections as opposed to polling place elections. Even though a larger percentage of mail ballot elections were approved by voters (60%) compared to polling place elections (53%) during the seven-year period between 1983 and 1989, the difference between the percentages is not statistically significant.

The findings show that mail ballot elections significantly increased the percentage of participating registered voters casting ballots in elections. The mean turnout for mail ballot elections was 74.2% compared with the mean turnout for polling place elections of 60.4%. The t-test analysis indicated that this difference was significant at the .05 level of significance. The successful mail ballot elections had a mean turnout percentage of 71.2% while those mail ballot elections that were defeated had a greater percentage of voters (80.4%) participating in the election. This finding tended to substantiate the claim that the larger the turnout, the more difficult it is to pass a school bond issue. This is contrary to the opinions of the school superintendents who participated in this research study. A vast majority of superintendents (81%) reported the belief that the larger the voter turnout, the greater the chance of passing a bond issue. However, when analyzing the data on polling place elections, the bond issues which were approved in polling place elections had a larger mean turnout (63.5%) than those polling place elections in which the issue was defeated (55.7%). So, in polling place elections, the

superintendents' opinions coincided with the findings.

In comparing the percentage of voter turnout with the percentage of affirmative votes in both kinds of elections, there was a significant negative relationship between those two variables in mail ballot elections. That is, as the percentage of voter turnout increased in mail ballot elections, the percentage of affirmative votes decreased. In polling place elections, there was no significant correlation between percentages of voter turnout and affirmative votes. These findings seem to indicate that the larger the voter turnout in a mail ballot election, the less likely the issue will pass. However, in a polling place election, that assumption cannot be made.

Conclusions

1. The type of election (mail ballot or polling place) that is used for a school bond issue is just one of many factors that determine the success or failure of a school bond issue. School district leaders should therefore not blame the success or failure of a bond issue on the type of election that was held. The type of election is just one of many variables that impact the results of a school bond issue election. Other variables include such obvious factors as the general public sentiment on the issue, the perceptions of school district patrons as to the genuine need for the proposal, and the impact of the proposed mill levy on the current mill levy and the perceived ability of taxpayers to

afford the increase in taxes.

2. Another major factor in determining the success or failure of a school bond issue is the official vote of the board of education on the motion proposing the bond issue. A unanimous vote by the board of education is very important to the success of the bond issue. Data indicated, in both mail ballot elections and polling place elections, a significant difference in the success rates for issues which had the unanimous support of the school board and those which did not have such support. Those issues which did not have the full support of the board of education were more likely to be defeated by local voters, perhaps because a board of education which is not unanimous in its support for a bond issue sends a message to the community that the proposal may not be necessary. As a result, the district patrons may look upon the issue with skepticism and take sides with the opposing board members, creating a division in the community on the issue. The resulting increase in conflict over the issue also creates additional interest which prompts more voters to participate in the election and thus makes it more difficult for the issue to pass.

3. School districts with lower per-pupil property wealth (assessed valuation per pupil) have a harder time passing bond issues. These districts have a smaller tax base and lower assessed valuation which limit the amount of money that can be generated through the sale of general obligation bonds. This situation thus creates a greater hardship on

taxpayers who have to pay a higher mill levy to generate the same amount of tax revenue that would those in a district which has a larger tax base and higher assessed valuation.

4. The smaller the amount of a bond issue, the more likely it is to pass. It is easier for a community to approve an issue for remodeling of facilities, for example, than to approve a bond issue for the construction of a new school. This conclusion was substantiated in Table X which shows that only two of the 14 bond issues that totaled less than \$1,000,000 were defeated. However, other factors must also be taken into consideration, including the net assessed valuation, the per-pupil property wealth, and the growth trend of the district. In the data gathered in this study, 6 out of 8 bond issues that were in excess of \$7,000,000 were approved by voters in mail ballot elections. These successful bond issues were approved in large suburban school districts which had assessed valuations per pupil of approximately \$30,000 or more. The average mill rate for the proposed bond issues was approximately 6 mills. These school districts' large tax bases obviously allow them to generate larger amounts of money without using higher mill rates.

5. As might be expected from the preceding section, the smaller the proposed mill levy to repay the bond issue, the more likely the issue is to be approved. The bond issues with a millage increase of 1 to 10 mills were much more likely to pass than were bond issues with higher mill rates. Only one of five bond issues for proposed mill rates of 23

mills or more were approved.

6. The school districts that have been unsuccessful in their attempts to pass a bond issue using a mail ballot election tend to want to go back to using the traditional polling place election for their next bond issues. The survey results showed that, of those districts that have failed to pass a bond issue while using a mail ballot election and are considering another bond issue in the near future, all three districts' superintendents do not plan to use a mail ballot election the next time they put the proposal before voters. The districts that were unsuccessful with their mail ballot elections seem to attribute the defeat, at least in part, to the use of mail ballots. Those school districts that have been successful in passing bond issues with mail ballot elections plan to continue using the newer approach to voting on their next bond issues. The school districts' superintendents seem to prefer the voting method which has been successful for them. They have a tendency to consider a change only if they have not been successful in passing their bond issues.

Recommendations

The use of alternative methods for conducting school bond issue elections may require additional research to be done to determine the effectiveness of the different types of elections. Recommendations for further research include the following.

1. Further studies should be conducted to gather similar data from the other six states that provide the option of mail ballot elections. This information could be compared with the data from Kansas in order to give educators some insight into the similarities and differences between states in the use of mail ballot elections for school bond issues.

2. A research study which is national in scope could be used to compare and contrast the procedures school districts must follow in conducting mail ballot elections. The advantages and disadvantages of the various methods could be determined and these data could then be used by policymakers in other states who may be considering passing a law allowing for the use of mail ballot elections.

3. A future study could specifically examine the rates of voter participation and compare them with the success rates of the bond issues. This should be done to ascertain if there is a relationship between voter participation and success of school bond issues. Does the number of voters in an election have an effect on the outcome or are there other factors that are more important?

4. A longitudinal study should be conducted to highlight the trends in the use of mail ballot elections. This study could help determine whether the use of mail ballot elections is a fad or an innovation which will increase in popularity. As time passes, more definitive

conclusions can be reached concerning the effects of mail ballot elections on the success rates of school bond issues.

5. Another study may focus on the participants in mail ballot elections and polling place elections. It would be advantageous for school district leaders to know the kinds of people that are most likely to vote in each particular election. This would assist them in designing advertising campaigns for their bond issues. Certain demographic groups could be targeted according to the type of election that is used. This might allow for a school district to devise more specific campaign strategies and could possibly help improve the prospects of passing a bond issue.

6. Additional research might be conducted on the attitudes of voters toward the use of mail ballot elections. The opinions that voters have on this different method of voting could have an impact on the effectiveness of mail ballot elections as an alternative to polling place elections. A qualitative study of this nature could provide useful information for researchers studying voter attitudes and perceptions and how these characteristics can affect voter behavior, in addition to the outcome of an election.

Mail ballot elections are still a relatively new phenomenon. In order for mail ballot elections to become more popular, school district officials and other governmental officials should push for more authority in using mail ballot elections for referenda. Governmental jurisdictions must also be aware of some advantages and disadvantages associated

with conducting elections that utilize mail ballots. The following are some recommendations for practice.

1. The option of using a mail ballot election should rest with the school district officials, not with the County Election Commissioner. In Kansas, school districts theoretically have the option of using mail ballot elections for school bond issues. However, the final decision on whether or not to conduct a mail ballot election rests not with the local board of education, but with the County Election Commissioner. A school board that is interested in having a mail ballot election must ask the County Election Commissioner for permission to hold a mail ballot election. The County Election Commissioner may deny such a request at the commissioner's discretion. As a result, a school district can be blocked from using the more innovative method of conducting a referendum.

In the State of Oregon, the procedure is somewhat different. The county election officer in Oregon counties determines whether or not a mail ballot election will be used for a referendum. The school district or other governmental jurisdiction has no say in whether or not a polling place election or mail ballot election will be used in a referendum. The county election officer makes that decision with no input from the governmental agency's officials.

Of the 34 school districts in Kansas which conducted polling place elections for bond issues from 1983-1989 and participated in this study, six districts indicated that the

County Election Commissioner had denied their district's requests for the option of using a mail ballot election for a bond issue. In those six school districts, 11 polling place elections have been held for school bond issues, four passing and seven failing.

During the last session of the state legislature, a bill was introduced to do away with the practice of requiring jurisdictions to gain the approval of the County Election Commissioner before using a mail ballot election. But the bill did not meet with much success. It failed to be approved by state lawmakers. KASB and local school district officials continue to lobby in support of the bill which will give school districts more control over the means by which they seek to conduct school bond issue referenda.

2. School districts which consider the use of mail ballot elections must closely examine the advantages and disadvantages to using mail ballot elections for school bond issues. A number of factors must be taken into consideration when making a decision on which type of election will be used for a bond issue.

Some of the advantages of mail ballot elections are a greater voter turnout and a more definitive outcome since more people express their opinions through the act of voting for or against the issue. It also makes the act of voting easier and more convenient while improving access for the elderly and disabled. It encourages more people to become involved in the democratic process and may motivate more

people to learn more about the issue. The cost per vote in the election is usually lower, although the total costs may be higher. Mail ballot elections also enable county election officials to update their registration rolls.

Among the disadvantages for mail ballot elections is that a larger voter turnout does not guarantee success in passing a bond issue. In fact, the data reported herein indicate that the greater the turnout in a mail ballot election, the smaller the proportion of "yes" votes an issue received. Mail ballot elections can also lead to increased campaign costs. Campaigning for the issue could continue at a stepped-up pace for the entire period in which voters are voting. This extended voting period can mean additional campaign costs, especially for hotly contested issues.

Despite the extra effort in informing voters of the facts involved in the bond issue, mail ballot elections allow more uninformed voters to participate in the elections. More voters who have not "done their homework" on the issues are more likely to cast ballots in a mail ballot election as opposed to a polling place election. Most uninformed voters will not take the time or make the effort to go to the polls to vote, but if they can vote in their own home in a mail ballot election, they will be more likely to participate in the election. This can lead to a segment of the electorate that is uninformed on the issue helping to decide the fate of the issue. If the issue to be decided is a possible tax increase, uninformed voters may be more likely to vote "no"

to higher taxes without taking the time to determine if, in fact, the bond issue and tax increase are necessary or warranted. This can severely hamper a campaign to raise money for school capital improvements that may be sorely needed.

Another disadvantage to the mail ballot election is the effort that is required to educate voters who are unfamiliar with the new voting process. Additional assistance may be required for people who cannot read the ballot or who are otherwise unable to vote on their own. With mail ballot elections, it is very difficult, and more expensive, to get precinct-by-precinct results. Exit polls cannot be held with mail ballot elections and the ability to gather similar information for each precinct is hampered. This can limit a school district's efforts to conduct research on voters' tendencies on a precinct-by-precinct basis.

Commentary

This study found that there is no significant difference in the success rates of mail ballot elections as opposed to polling place elections in the State of Kansas. From this, it may be concluded that the type of election which a school district uses has little, if any, bearing on the outcome of the referendum. There are too many other determining factors which impact the results of a school bond issue. The type of election which is used is just one of those many factors.

Politics

By its very nature, the American education system is a political system, and there is no way to separate politics from schools. The two are intertwined from their roots and cannot be extricated one from the other, in part because the governing boards of education are locally elected officials representing the patrons of the school districts. They set policy and hire and fire the chief executive school officer (superintendent), who administers the board's policies and oversees the day-to-day operation of the school district. As elected officials, school board members must remain responsive to the desires of the general public or else their tenure on the board of education will be limited.

The proposal of a school bond issue which may result in an increase in local property taxes is a political action which can either draw a community together while working for a common goal (the construction or renovation of a school building) or divide the community. If a community is divided on a school bond issue, the chance of passing that issue is severely limited. Gaining the approval of voters to increase their taxes is a difficult task indeed. There is a built-in opposition to increasing taxes that must be overcome in a school bond issue campaign. These factions of voters include those who will oppose any kind of tax increase regardless of the need and the senior citizens living on fixed incomes who simply cannot afford any additional taxes. Add to that the people who are dissatisfied with the school district for one

reason or another and "have an axe to grind" and you have an automatic coalition who is against any kind of bond issue. The divisiveness and conflict in a community can make a school bond issue much more difficult to pass.

Economics

Another major factor in the success or failure of a school bond issue consists of the economic variables surrounding the issue. A prevalent question comes down to a simple matter of economics: can we, as a community, afford this new school or these improvements? But, more often, the question is more personal: can we, as a family, afford the increase in taxes to pay for this new school or these improvements? These questions can only be answered by taking still other variables into consideration. What is the present mill levy and how will the proposed mill levy affect it? Is the city, or other governmental entity, planning any new tax levies for municipal projects? What if my property value was reassessed? All of these legitimate questions, as well as others, might be asked by local voters and the answers could have a negative impact on the school bond issue results.

Timing

Timing can also have an effect on the outcome of a bond issue. Certain events can occur which can harm a school district's chances at passing a bond issue. An example is

the reappraisal of property values in the State of Kansas in 1990. After reappraisal, many homeowners in Kansas had to pay higher property taxes since their property was reappraised at a higher value. A school district trying to pass a bond issue in 1990 faced an electorate already looking at an increase in their property taxes and not likely to approve another property tax increase for a school bond issue. Such a situation represents a major hurdle for a school district to overcome. Other types of tax increases which are beyond the control of voters such as income tax increases can also have a negative effect on a school bond issue. If people can have the opportunity to vote against a property tax increase to help hold the line on paying more taxes, they will often take advantage of the situation.

The length of the campaign is also important. A campaign that lasts too long can cause voters to lose interest. A campaign should last about three months and no longer (Stanley, 1986). Public meetings, forums, and meetings about the bond issue should not begin before the campaign officially opens. The initial announcement of the bond issue proposal is a crucial event in any bond issue campaign. Many people make up their mind on the issue the first time they hear about it, so the opening announcement must be well planned. Interest should then build during the campaign and peak at election time.

Organization

This research study has focused on a comparison of mail ballot elections and polling place elections for school bond issues. There has been no attempt made to disclose the "secret to success" in passing a school bond issue. That is because there is no one foolproof method of passing bond issues, just as there is no one best method of conducting an election (mail ballot election versus polling place election) that will insure the passage of a school bond issue. However, there are some key elements of successful bond issue campaigns that are shared by school districts who have a proven success rate in passing school bond issues. These key elements include the following.

A. A successful bond issue campaign for a school district must involve virtually everyone in the community. The new school building or other capital improvement project is not the school administration's project or the board of education's project, it is the community's project. From the very beginning of the planning stages to the actual opening of the facility, community members representing all factions and groups in the community should be given ample opportunities and encouragement to take part in the project. Students, parents, teachers, school district employees, business people, civic leaders, senior citizens, all school district patrons should perceive that they are represented by those who have studied the facility needs of the school district.

The need for additional facilities, or for remodeling of existing facilities, must be established beyond a reasonable doubt. Those involved must arrive at a consensus on the exact needs of the school district in terms of facilities and must also be in agreement on the means to satisfy those needs. If there is not consensus on the needs and the best solution to meet those needs, a potential conflict can arise which will divide the community on the issue and may doom the project to failure even before the ballots are printed. However, there will almost always be two sides to the issue in a bond issue campaign, since some people are likely to always vote against a tax increase, no matter what its purpose. That is why it is so important to ensure that all factions of the community perceive that they have been represented and that the leadership then presents a united front in support of the issue.

B. A successful bond issue campaign also has a solid organization of volunteers who work in favor of its passage. Again, this organization must involve representatives of the entire community in order to sell it to others. The campaign must have strong leadership from its steering committee to raise money for the campaign and to organize the day-to-day activities. Ideally, members of the community's "power structure" should occupy key positions as leaders or advisers to the campaign organization. Those organizing the volunteers for the campaign must identify with the leaders of the power structure in the community and have their support

throughout the campaign. Failure to do so can frequently mean certain defeat at the polls.

Planning for the campaign is crucial to its success. A plan of action should be devised by starting with the date of the election and working backward, setting dates for various phases or events in the campaign. Volunteers carry out such duties as raising campaign funds, working on publicity, making presentations to community groups, registering potential voters, and calling supporters who are likely to vote "yes" and encouraging them to vote on election day.

Anticipating the issues to be raised by the opponents of the issue will assist campaign officials in advance preparation of rebuttals. It is often easier and more effective to have rebuttals ready when opponents make allegations that can be potentially damaging to the campaign for the bond issue. It is also easier to get good ideas and to have positive responses when the campaign's publicity committee is not rushed into making reactive statements.

C. Leaders of school districts that have a successful record in passing bond issues keep the public informed on the issues and problems facing their districts. This is likely to be done through a proven public relations program that keeps community residents up-to-date on what is going on in the school district on a year-round basis rather than just before bond issue campaigns. Communication with the community must be viewed as a "two-way street" and not a one-way form of communication in which townspeople perceive the

infrequent messages from the school district as propaganda. School district officials must be honest and open with patrons and also be willing to listen to concerns that the people have with the school system.

People should feel welcome and be encouraged to visit the schools so that they can see, firsthand, some of the programs in operation and some of the facility problems that are facing students and teachers. Community education programs that bring patrons into the schools are an excellent way to give townspeople opportunities to experience a school's programs and facilities. They allow people to gain a better understanding of the facility needs of a school system and provide them with information they can later share with others when visiting about the need for a bond issue to help solve problems related to the district's school buildings.

These three elements (involving the entire community, solid campaign organization, and an ongoing public relations program) are crucial to passing a school bond issue. Leaving any one of these out can cause a bond issue to be defeated and all the hard work, money, and valuable time donated by many volunteers to have been in vain.

Mail Ballot Elections

There is no doubt that mail ballot elections do increase the number of voters participating in the election. The increase in voter participation in mail ballot elections may

be attributed to the fact that it takes less effort to vote in mail ballot elections. Voters simply mark their ballots, put the ballot in the envelope, sign the stamped envelope, and put it in the mailbox to be collected by the postal carrier. The voter does not have to go to the local precinct polling place to cast the ballot, which in some rural areas could involve a trip of several miles. If the election is held on a day with inclement weather, it takes even more effort to get to the polling place. However, weather does not affect mail ballot elections. Postal carriers perform their duties through rain, snow, and gloom of night. Since it takes considerably less effort to vote through the mail, as opposed to going to a precinct polling place, the number of people participating in mail ballot elections is significantly greater than the number of voters casting ballots in polling place elections.

Just as it is easier to vote in a mail ballot election, so too is it easier to vote "no" in a mail ballot election. As has been mentioned, most people are generally opposed to paying more taxes, whether it be sales tax, income tax, gasoline tax, or property tax. If they have a chance to say "no" to more taxes, those without a vested interest in the issue will be more likely to do so. The number of parents with children in the public schools are likely to be fewer in number compared to the people in a community who don't have any children of school age. People whose children have grown up and are no longer in school might have a tendency to feel

that their obligation to support the local schools financially has been met. They may think that the younger parents now need to do their part to pay for their own children's education. These older adults, coupled with the other senior citizens, make up a sizeable contingent of voters who may look very unfavorably on higher taxes, regardless of the need. Younger adults, those without school-age children are more likely to not vote and, if they do, would have a tendency to vote against a bond issue since they also do not have children in school.

A mail ballot election also makes it easier for the uninformed voter to take part in the electoral process. These people may do more harm than good. They express their opinion based on little or no information and may thus not even be aware of the facts surrounding a school building proposal. These voters may also be swayed by the propaganda put out by the loosely-knit citizen committees that can arise in opposition to a school bond issue. These committees often wait until shortly before the election to unleash a barrage of half-truths and innuendoes that can adversely influence uninformed citizens. It is this type of person the opposition targets and, in a mail ballot election which can cover a two-week period of time, these ad-hoc committees are provided plenty of opportunities to reach their target audience. Supporters of school bond issues are then put on the defensive to fend off these propaganda attacks and can be caught up in the sticky web of hurrying to help the general

public sort fact from fiction. Mail ballot elections thus make it much easier for the uninformed and perhaps disinterested voter to mark a ballot and thus participate in the decision regarding a bond issue.

It is important to note that mail ballot elections are not all bad. Even though half of the mail ballot elections conducted by rural communities were unsuccessful, 79% of the mail ballot elections conducted by suburban school districts were successful. Why are these school districts so successful at passing bond issues using mail ballot elections? They list such things as "ease of patron response" and "strong patron interest and support of schools" as factors contributing to the success of their mail ballot elections. A school superintendent of a suburban Kansas City school district stated that the district's "ability to show the need" for additional facilities and the "higher turnout" helped make mail ballot elections such a success. These suburban school districts are also growing faster than the average school district and their patrons are well aware of that growth. These districts are also perceived by their patrons as having high quality schools offering a top-notch education for their children. A fundamental part of the success of these suburban school districts consists of the public relations programs that keep the public informed of what is going on in the schools. The community is tied very closely to the schools through newsletters, activities, programs, and other public information vehicles that promote

citizen involvement in the school systems. This translates to public support for the schools and the building program. When it comes time for a referendum on a school bond issue, the community is aware of the needs of the growing school district and the voters pledge their financial support for the school system and its students.

The vast majority of school superintendents who responded to this survey (81%) reported the belief that a larger turnout in a school bond issue election would enhance the chances of passing the bond issue. Perhaps they perceive that, by working to get more supporters out to vote, they will outnumber the opposition voters. The people who are against taxes "no matter what" are more likely to make it to the polls to "vote with their pocketbook." That gives any school district a certain number of opposing voters to deal with. If the supporters can get more people out who will vote "yes," then the opposition will be outnumbered. Hence, the larger the overall turnout, the more likely the results will be favorable for the school district. School district leaders want to get a large proportion of their supporters to vote on election day, in an effort to outnumber the voters against the bond issue. Some concentrate on getting targeted populations, especially school employees and parents of school-age children, to the polls and do little to try to persuade older citizens or the marginal voters to support the bond issue. Some support the rationale that there is little you can do to change the mind of people dead set against

raising taxes while "fence sitters" are mostly apathetic about such topics as bond issues and probably will not vote anyway.

Is the use of mail ballot elections a fad or is it a viable alternative to polling place elections? For school districts that have been successful with the use of mail ballot elections, this new approach to conducting a referendum is very viable indeed. It allows more people to express themselves on an issue and gets more of the public involved in the democratic process. With national voting trends showing a decline in voter participation, anything that will increase the numbers of people helping to decide important issues should be a welcome addition to the electoral process. Of course, for school district officials, increased participation means that educating the electorate on the issues surrounding a capital improvement campaign will become a more crucial part of a successful bond issue. While the public will have to be informed of both the pros and the cons of the issue, school officials will have to present a convincing case for the public to decide in favor of the issue. In the end, it is the public that will be paying for the new school building or remodeling project and it is also the public that will be suffering if the proposed project is defeated and school children have to attend class in less than desirable conditions. The public will have to pay the price, one way or the other.

The Future

In casting an eye to the future, mail ballot elections may be considered the precursor to using existing or emerging technology in the operation of elections. Mail ballot elections allow people to vote in their homes without having to bother to go to the polling place. In the future, technology may make it possible for voters to cast their ballots on their two-way interactive television sets. People will not even have to bother with marking a ballot and mailing it. They will only have to push a button and their vote will be transmitted instantaneously to the county election office where it will be recorded by a computer. The results of the election will be available almost immediately after the voting period has ended. Of course, those without cable television systems may have to rely on the old paper-and-pencil ballots or other methods that have to be tabulated separately. However, the number of paper ballots will probably represent an increasingly less significant number of votes in the overall election results. Voting on two-way television systems, may further increase voter participation as it becomes even easier to participate in an election. But, of course, there will always be those people who will not participate because of apathy or some other reason.

School district officials may have to alter their campaign strategies to appeal to these high-tech voters. Instead of campaign brochures on the proposal, videotapes may be distributed showing the existing facility and the needs

for the new school building. Models of the proposed facility could be constructed to provide voters with a realistic view of what both the interior and exterior of the building would look like. These "guided tours" would enable the voters to see what they would be voting on and would give them a better idea of how the facility will meet the educational needs of their children. The future holds many possibilities for allowing more people to play an active role in determining the education program for a school district.

Summary

In politics, the only sure thing is that there will be winners and losers; everything else is conjecture. This is certainly true for school bond issues. There is almost no way to predict what will happen on election day. Whether the issue is decided in a mail ballot election or a polling place election, the result is unknown until the ballots are tabulated. During a campaign, school district officials and volunteer workers may get a feel for the public sentiments on the issue through their day-to-day contact with community residents or through polls or opinionaires. But when people step inside that voting booth or consider the mail ballot materials, there is no way of knowing how they will mark their ballots. All of the preparation for the campaign, all of the time, money, and hard work to educate the voters on what is best for the students and their education programs will either pay off or not, based on the collective vote of

each person who participates in the election. There are no magic formulas, no secrets to success, no panacea for passing a school bond issue. In many instances, only good old-fashioned, face-to-face campaigning will do the job. And even sometimes that is not enough. Trying to convince townsfolk of the importance of a new school to benefit the students and their educational program can be a monumental task, especially when it means increasing property taxes. Coupled with inflation and increases in other taxes, the obstacles can sometimes seem almost insurmountable. But when the alternative is holding classes in a building that is soon to be condemned because it is unsafe for students or increasing class sizes to the point where neither teachers can teach nor students can learn effectively, the price has to be paid. Our future and the future of our country cannot be determined by a few citizens who are unwilling to pay their fair share. We must realize that each generation has an obligation to provide not only for its own children, but also for its children's children. As one anonymous writer wrote, "It's simple son. One generation pays the last generation's debts by issuing bonds for the next generation to pay." That is how it works. The construction and maintenance of our schools is an ongoing process which must be funded by everyone, by all generations. It is our civic responsibility. We must all shoulder that responsibility so that our descendents will have ample educational opportunities for years to come.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

School Bond Issue Elections

This survey is intended to compare mail ballot elections and polling place elections for school bond issues. Your participation is crucial to the study and is greatly appreciated.

Section 1 - General Information

1. U. S. D. No. _____
2. Student Enrollment (F. T. E.) _____
3. Since 1983, has your district enrollment generally been increasing or decreasing? (Circle one.)
4. Is your school district considered rural, urban or suburban? (Circle one.) (A rural school district is considered to be more than 10 miles from a city which has a population of at least 50,000 people.)
5. Assessed Valuation of your school district \$ _____
6. Taxable Income \$ _____

Section 2 - General Questions

7. How many mail ballot elections has your district held? _____
8. If you have not had a mail ballot election for a bond issue, why not? (Check all that apply.)
 - _____ Cost is too great.
 - _____ County election officer refused to allow a mail ballot election.
 - _____ School district preferred traditional polling place election.
 - _____ Other (Please specify.) _____
9. Do you think that a larger voter turnout for a bond issue will result in a better chance for passing the bond issue?
 - _____ Yes _____ No
10. If your mail ballot election(s) passed, please list those factors which you believe contributed to that success.
11. If your mail ballot election(s) failed, please list the factors that you believe led to the issue(s) being defeated.

Section 3 - Bond Issues since 1983

Please provide the following information for each bond issue election your district has had since 1983. This supplements information already gathered by the Kansas Association of School Boards concerning your past bond issues.

Date of bond issue election #1: _____ Estimated mill rate to pay for bonds _____

This election was held in conjunction with (check one):

_____ a general election. _____ another special election

_____ a primary election. _____ no other election.

What were the election results? _____ % Yes _____ % No

What was the percentage of registered voters who voted in the election? _____ %

What was the board of education vote in proposing the bond issue? Aye _____ Nay _____

What was the purpose of the bond issue (check all that apply)?

_____ Addition of new building(s) to the district because of increasing enrollment.

_____ Replacement of existing facilities.

_____ Remodeling or expansion of existing facilities.

_____ Purchase of buses, furniture, equipment, etc.

_____ Other (Please specify.) _____

Did the city or county hold an election proposing additional taxes within a year prior to your bond issue?

_____ Yes _____ No

If so, please list the governmental agency which sponsored the election(s), and the kind of tax being proposed, and the results of such election(s).

Date of bond issue election #2: _____ Estimated mill rate to pay for bonds _____

This election was held in conjunction with (check one):

_____ a general election. _____ another special election

_____ a primary election. _____ no other election.

What were the election results? _____ % Yes _____ % No

What was the percentage of registered voters who voted in the election? _____ %

What was the board of education vote in proposing the bond issue? Aye _____ Nay _____

What was the purpose of the bond issue (check all that apply)?

_____ Addition of new building(s) to the district because of increasing enrollment.

_____ Replacement of existing facilities.

_____ Remodeling or expansion of existing facilities.

_____ Purchase of buses, furniture, equipment, etc.

_____ Other (Please specify.) _____

Did the city or county hold an election proposing additional taxes within a year prior to your bond issue?

_____ Yes _____ No

If so, please list the governmental agency which sponsored the election(s), and the kind of tax being proposed, and the results of such election(s).

Date of bond issue election #3: _____ Estimated mill rate to pay for bonds _____

This election was held in conjunction with (check one):

_____ a general election. _____ another special election

_____ a primary election. _____ no other election.

What were the election results? _____ % Yes _____ % No

What was the percentage of registered voters who voted in the election? _____ %

What was the board of education vote in proposing the bond issue? Aye _____ Nay _____

What was the purpose of the bond issue (check all that apply)?

_____ Addition of new building(s) to the district because of increasing enrollment.

_____ Replacement of existing facilities.

_____ Remodeling or expansion of existing facilities.

_____ Purchase of buses, furniture, equipment, etc.

_____ Other (Please specify.) _____

Did the city or county hold an election proposing additional taxes within a year prior to your bond issue?

_____ Yes _____ No

If so, please list the governmental agency which sponsored the election(s), and the kind of tax being proposed, and the results of such election(s).

Section 4 - Future Bond Issues

12. Is your school district presently considering another bond issue?

_____ Yes _____ No

13. If so, what is the purpose of this proposed bond issue? _____

14. If so, what is the amount of the bond issue? _____

15. If so, do you plan to utilize a mail ballot election or a polling place election? (Circle one.)
Why?

16. Please indicate the position of the person answering this questionnaire. _____

Thank you very much for your participation.

If you would like to receive the results of this survey, please send, under separate cover, a self-addressed envelope to:

Survey Results
c/o Dave Dunbar
108 South Cedarwood Drive
Rose Hill, KS 67133

APPENDIX B

COVER LETTER

David W. Dunbar
108 S. Cedarwood Dr.
Rose Hill, KS 67133

November 2, 1990

Dear Superintendent of Schools:

Enclosed you will find a survey instrument on school bond issue elections. This survey is designed to gather information on school bond issue elections for the purpose of comparing the effectiveness of mail ballot elections to traditional polling place elections for school bond issues.

Since your school district is one of about 80 districts that have had bond issue elections since the Mail Ballot Election Act was passed by the Kansas legislature in 1983, you are receiving a survey instrument to participate in this research study. Your active participation is crucial to the success of this study and the compilation of data by which all Kansas school districts can benefit. The results of this study should provide valuable information which can be used to assist a school district in planning a successful bond issue campaign.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in filling out this survey instrument. Your input will greatly improve the results of this research project.

Sincerely,



Dave Dunbar

Enclosures

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP LETTER

David W. Dunbar
108 S. Cedarwood
Rose Hill, KS 67133

December 2, 1990

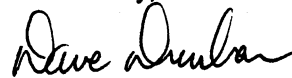
Dear Superintendent of Schools:

About a month ago, you received a survey questionnaire dealing with school bond issue elections. As of today, I have not yet received a completed survey from you. Could you please fill out the survey and mail it in the self-addressed stamped envelope which was enclosed with the survey?

Your participation in this survey is instrumental to the successful completion of this research study. The results of the research study will provide valuable information to school districts that are contemplating conducting bond issue elections. Since your district has held a bond issue election since the Mail Ballot Election Act became law in 1983, your input on the subject of mail ballot elections versus polling place elections is very important.

If you need another copy of the survey instrument, please call me at (316) 776-2142 and I will be glad to send you one. Thank you for your cooperation and assistance in providing data for this research project.

Sincerely,



Dave Dunbar

2
VITA

David W. Dunbar

Candidate for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Thesis: A COMPARISON OF MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS AND POLLING
PLACE ELECTIONS FOR SCHOOL BOND ISSUES IN KANSAS

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Cedar Falls, Iowa, September 23,
1953, the son of Gordon and Sina Dunbar; Wife:
Deborah Wilson Dunbar; Children: Jennifer,
Dustin, Kristen, Keith

Education: Graduated from U.S. Grant High School in
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in May, 1971; received
Bachelor of Science Degree in Broadcast Journalism
from Oklahoma State University in May, 1976;
received Bachelor of Science Degree from Oklahoma
State University in Elementary Education in May,
1981; received Master of Science Degree from
Oklahoma State University in July, 1985; completed
requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree
at Oklahoma State University in July, 1991.

Professional Experience: Elementary School Principal,
Rose Hill Elementary School, U.S.D.#394, Rose Hill,
Kansas, August, 1988 to present; Elementary School
Principal for Grades 4-6, Perry Elementary School,
Perry, Oklahoma, July, 1985 to June, 1988; Sixth
Grade Teacher and Coach, Perry Elementary School,
Perry, Oklahoma, August, 1981 to July, 1985.