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Administrative Perceptual Inquiry Into School Law Issues

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Administrative Perceptual Inquiry

Into School Law Issues

BY

Mary Heeren

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1997

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Abstract

The courts and constitutional law have had a significant impact on public schools and public school administrators. The purpose of this study was to examine administrative perceptions of particular school law issues and concerns. Via a questionnaire, administrators from west central Illinois overwhelmingly stated that school law information was necessary for effective performance in their jobs. They also named the superintendent as the school official who needs to have the highest level of school law knowledge.

When questioned about various issues of school law, respondents indicated an extreme importance in six topics: due process and student suspension/expulsion, student rights, liability, teacher evaluation, attendance/truancy, and special education. The most popular source of school law information for the respondents was seminars/meetings closely followed by three others: professional literature, other administrators, and the school's legal representative.

Data did not indicate any consensus that administrators experience difficulty in obtaining school law knowledge nor any specific problem surrounding the search for this knowledge. However, based on this study future research should continue into the area of difficulties administrators may experience when seeking school law knowledge.
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate administrative perceptions into school law issues. The specific objectives of this study were: (1) to investigate which district level school administrator needs the most knowledge of school law; (2) to explore which issues were of greatest concern; (3) to identify which school law information sources were used most often; (4) to ascertain the degree to which school officials seek school law information; and (5) to identify the problems surrounding school administrators obtaining school law information, specifically accessibility, time constraints, and readability. By better understanding these issues, those who provide legal information can improve the manner in which it is distributed to school administrators.

Background and Significance

Administrators face countless demands of their time. Faculties look toward their principals as their leaders, who should be well-versed in new educational ideas, trends, legislation, and law. The struggle facing building administrators is how to balance these roles and responsibilities. The day-to-day operations of a school/district can force administrators to lose sight of current trends and laws in education.

More specifically, Chapter 122, Article 10, Paragraph 21.4a in the Illinois School Code stated that the principal's "primary responsibility is the improvement of instruction, a majority of the time spent by a principal shall be spent on curriculum and staff development . . . establishing clear lines of communication regarding school . . . practices and policies with parents and
teachers (1994, p. 122)." The Illinois Legislature has been very clear to designate that at least 51% of the principal's day will be devoted to instructional improvement. Yet, principals, according to the Code, are also responsible for maintaining student and teacher safety and employment of all building personnel.

Statement of Problems

Determining priorities for all administrators can be a challenge in and of itself. Quite often administrative priorities are determined by the level of classroom or school disruption. This disruption may cause immediate or potential chaos for the administrator. Considering these, one can easily see why professional growth, including obtaining school law information for administrators, often takes a back seat to other issues perceived at the time to be more important (Hillman, 1988).

This is precisely the dilemma the researcher was faced with recently. Knowing that an expulsion hearing was three days away, the researcher considered not attending a one day seminar in school law at the Administrators' Academy. However, information gleaned from the seminar proved invaluable in the expulsion hearing. The net results of the researcher's new level of knowledge on juvenile rights were: the board of education expelled two students, and the researcher provided the county sheriff's department and the county juvenile department information on recent changes in the Illinois Juvenile Code. In retrospect, the decision to temporarily leave the school building to obtain an update on new legislative issues directly assisted the researcher in presenting a much stronger case during the expulsion hearing.
However, the researcher had difficulty justifying the time to attend the seminar because the researcher left behind several discipline and attendance concerns, details surrounding a state football playoff game which the school would host in two days, and needs of the winter sport coaches who had just begun their seasons.

This is not an atypical problem faced by principals. Administrators in the 1990's must juggle curriculum concerns, student discipline, student and teacher safety, building budgets, extracurricular activities for students, public relations, parental concerns, building policies and practices, employment of personnel and professional growth. By better understanding what, why, and how administrators obtain legal knowledge, those who supply legal knowledge to administrators will be able to meet administrators' needs in a more efficient manner (Hillman, 1988).

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the following research questions:

1. Which district level school administrator needs the most knowledge of school law?
2. Which legal issues are of greatest concern?
3. Which school law information sources are used most often?
4. What degree do school officials seek school law information?
5. What problems surround school administrators' obtaining school law information, specifically accessibility, time constraints, and readability?
Operational Definitions, Assumptions, Delimitations, Limitations

Operational Definitions

School official: A public school administrator who possesses an Illinois Type 75 certificate.

School law: Rules and regulations dealing with the Illinois School Code, specifically teacher evaluation, due process, student suspension, expulsion, student rights, student residency, attendance, truancy, liability, special education, and school finance.

Legal issues: Synonymous with components stated in the definition of school law.

Professional Growth: The knowledge administrators gain via professional literature, meetings and conversations with colleagues.

Level of Knowledge: Formal and informal training in school law via professional literature, classes, and meetings with other colleagues.

Assumptions

It was assumed that school officials have had formal training or a class in school law. It was also assumed that the level of school law knowledge was not uniform among school officials.

Limitations

The study limited its investigation to specific portions of school law, i.e. teacher evaluation, due process and student suspension and expulsion, student rights, student residency requirements, attendance and truancy, liability, special education and school finance.
Delimitations

1. The study did not attempt to predict the overall effectiveness of school officials in relationship to their perceived knowledge of school law.

2. The study did not identify nor evaluate the educational preparation of school officials.

3. The study was limited to public school officials who possess an Illinois Type 75 certificate.

4. The study did not attempt to validate school officials' perceptions through any other means, i.e. interviews or observations.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

As our society has become more educated and affluent in the 1990's, it also seems to have become more litigious in nature. All groups of people, commonly called societies, thrive, or cease to thrive, to some extent from common agreements or laws. Within this scope, schools are miniature societies. School administrators are assigned the task of enforcing laws within the walls of public education (Green & O Reilly, 1992; Frase & Streshly, 1992).

This marriage of legal considerations and public education was no more evident than in 1969 Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District. The role and responsibilities of the building principal transformed from one that advised teachers on instructional method, program, and delivery to one that entailed all these plus students' rights and legal issues (Cone & Doverspike, 1992).

Weeks (1992) stated three basic reasons why administrators must consider basic federal constitutional rights of students a vital area of expertise. The first reason is that all students have guaranteed constitutional rights. These inherent rights are very much present during students' formal education years. Secondly, schools are responsible for training youth to be future adult citizens. This responsibility of citizenry bestowed upon public education ensures the continuation of American society. The last reason for administrators' knowledge of legal considerations centers around the ever-possible law suit. On a pessimistic side of the law suit possibility, Splitt, an authority on school law, stated, "No matter how carefully you follow your
lawyer's advice, no matter how many preventive steps you take, you're going to get sued" (1994, p. 10).

As a clear response to the litigious nature in our arenas of public schools, administrators recognized that less energy and less money are consumed if school districts anticipate legal trends. Administrators served their constituents best by developing new strategies to safeguard their districts' assets (Meloy, 1993; Vanerlinden, 1993). Gaustad (1993) and Minor (1991), addressed this same issue. Their program of guiding school administrators away from legal entanglements is called risk management. Their publications provided an easy, time-saving method for officials to obtain legal facts concerning areas such as field trips, extracurricular activities, suggestions for school boards, and sexual harassment. No longer is it adequate for the school administrator to have personal knowledge of legal issues. Today's administrators are not only responsible for providing a curriculum to meet the needs of all students in the next millennium, but also for ensuring that these needs are met legally.

Schools have a moral and legal responsibility to provide children with a quality education in a safe, healthy environment. Administrators in the 1990's are very much cognizant that everyday decisions must be in tune with students' rights and legal concerns. To ignore or be uninformed of school law may certainly result in professional death for a public school administrator (Meloy, 1993).

The second portion of the review of the related literature concerned the level of legal knowledge of school administrators. The need for
administrators to possess a clear understanding of school laws has been previously presented. Documenting the level of legal knowledge of school administrators has been well researched. Recent studies, for the most part, confirm earlier studies that many administrators seem to lack essential legal knowledge. Karam, in a 1994 dissertation, concluded that Iowa school administrators did not have an adequate knowledge of the Bill of Rights. It also compared the knowledge level of various groups of people. Secondary teachers exhibited a higher level of knowledge of issues concerning students' rights as protected in the Bill of Rights than did school administrators, school board members, and twelfth grade students.

Cunningham, in a 1994 dissertation, ascertained similar results when he surveyed Pennsylvania administrators. The subject of this study assessed knowledge pertaining to the United States Supreme Court decision in *Lee v. Weisman*. The results of the initial survey conducted in early 1992 indicated administrators had little knowledge of school prayer and its implications. In Karam's and Cunningham's studies, the level of school law/students' rights knowledge of most school administrators was below acceptable standards. The interesting finding of these two dissertations was that knowledge level was not affected by laws that had recent origins or laws that were over two hundred years old.

The findings in two 1990 dissertations confirmed the previous studies mentioned; however, both considered another variable, professional preparation. Osborn (1990) surveyed principals' knowledge of school law in South Dakota. Once again their knowledge of legal issues concerning specific
aspects was deemed moderate. However, principals who had completed a course in school law were significantly more knowledgeable than those who had had no course. In another dissertation Clark (1990) studied administrators in Mississippi. His findings supported Osborn's study. Educators had a marginal knowledge level of various components of school law. A significant difference was noted between administrators who had previously completed a school law class and those who had not.

All four of the dissertations discussed overwhelmingly supported the finding that most school administrators do not exhibit a high knowledge base of school law. Conducted in different states, Osborn's (1990) and Clark's (1990) dissertations studied the impact of a school law class on practicing administrators' knowledge of school law. In both instances, significant differences of school law information existed between those administrators whose preparation included a school law course and those whose did not.

The third part of the review of the related studies centered around the method by which school officials gain access to school law information. Kramer (1942) surveyed high school and elementary teachers and administrators to determine the frequency of professional reading. Even though the participants admitted the value of professional reading, their actions did not match their beliefs. The most prominent reason for the lack of professional reading among teachers and administrators in this 1942 study was "too little time."

In a study by Latham (1993), the reading habits of four groups of differing professions were surveyed. Results indicated that educators read less
professional literature than did engineers, lawyers, and physicians. When educators were asked to explain this result, various reasons came to light: there is too little time, it is too technical, there are other alternatives, it is not regarded as potentially helpful, there is no incentive, and literature is not readily accessible. Principals did note that they read to keep abreast of what’s going on (particularly in legal matters) (p. 65).

A 1994 dissertation by Carroll measured the level of legal literacy of contemporary sports administrators in particular areas. The results of the study indicated that there is a deficiency in the level of literacy of sports administrators pertaining to legal issues. Furthermore, the results seemed to show the NCAA administrators resisted taking steps to improve their level of legal literacy.

The question of information sources for school administrators was studied by Smith in a 1989 dissertation. This study concluded that although the need for legal information is strongly supported, superintendents are not disseminating this information to building principals. Alvy and Coladarci (1985) reported the results of a study of beginning school administrators in Montana. Several performance problem areas were noted. New administrators noted that superintendents and other principals were their two primary sources for obtaining administrative information. Other significant groups identified who contributed to their knowledge level were secretaries, parents, and secondary students. It was interesting to note that higher education personnel (college professors) were not listed as information sources for newly initiated administrators.
Massachusetts school administrators were surveyed on knowledge of school legal issues in 1988 by Hillman. The findings indicated that administrators preferred to obtain legal information via other administrators from their own or nearby districts. Superintendents accessed school lawyers most frequently when they had a need to seek a legal answer. They also used professional organizations and conferences to supplement their legal knowledge. Building principals did not access these last two information sources.

In the last collection of studies, findings indicated that school administrators rarely use their professional literature to gain knowledge but do rely on other administrators to keep abreast of current trends in education. Moreover, Latham's and Hillman's study mentioned that literature in school law and other educational information was not accessed due to time constraints.
CHAPTER 3
DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate the following research questions:

1. Which district level school administrator needs the most knowledge of school law?
2. Which legal issues are of greatest concern?
3. Which school law information sources are used most often?
4. What degree do school officials seek school law information?
5. What problems surround school administrators' obtaining school law information, specifically accessibility, time constraints, and readability?

Sample and Population

The study was limited to all school officials in the Olympic Conference. Geographically these districts are located in the west central section of Illinois. The high school enrollments of these districts range from 350 to 650 students. All schools represented within this conference are unit districts (K-12). Participating schools of the Olympic Conference include Aledo, Farmington, Knoxville, Orion, Macomb, Monmouth, Rockridge, and Sherrard. All of the 47 school officials were sent questionnaires. Of these 47 administrators, eight were superintendents, two assistant superintendents, 34 principals, and three assistant principal-athletic directors. Some of the 47 school officials had dual duties including elementary and junior high principal.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire was designed by the researcher to obtain information
for the present study. The initial draft of the instrument was reviewed by an area junior high principal, teacher/technology director, secretary, and college professor. Based on their recommendations, the questionnaire was revised and expanded to encompass two basic sections: one for demographics of the respondent and the other for perceptions of the respondent (see Appendix A).

School demographics were the focus of the first part. Although Zirkel (1985) found that various demographic factors were not significantly related to the presence or absence of legal knowledge, it was felt that school law perceptions may be potentially influenced by the type of administration position of the respondent, years as an administrator, or student enrollment for which the respondent was directly responsible. The last item in the demographic section inquired as to which administrative position should have the highest level of school law knowledge. The majority of the demographic data were gathered via multiple choice responses.

The final section of the questionnaire involved the administrators' perceptions of school law. Respondents were asked to rate each topic from 1 (not important) to 5 (most important). A rating of 3 represented an uncertain response. Additional directions included that each question was to be responded to in terms of the respondents' perceptions and their administrative positions. The first two items which the respondents were asked to check concerned how necessary school law information was for effective job performance and how often it was assessed. In the next eight items respondents indicated how important particular school law topics were. The next four items on the questionnaire determined the significance of certain
information sources used by school officials to obtain legal knowledge. The last portion of the instrument assessed the possible problems respondents experienced when seeking school law information. The total number of questions was five on the first portion of the questionnaire, with seventeen items on the last portion.

The questionnaire was sent on July 2, 1996. The response deadline was July 17, 1996, and all respondents were given a stamped self-addressed return envelope. A cover letter explaining the project accompanied all questionnaires (see Appendix B). The questionnaires were sent to the respondents' home except for one district. The superintendent of this district instructed the researcher to send all questionnaires to the unit office. A follow up letter and questionnaire were sent to all respondents on July 20, 1996 (see Appendix C). A final deadline for responses was August 1, 1996.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. Percentages were utilized to compare all the respondents to various demographic groups, including the type of administrative position and years of experience. These statistics were pictorially represented by graphs.
Determining priorities for school officials is a delicate balance among personnel, finance, curriculum, staff development, professional growth, public relations, and day-to-day operational issues. Administrative attention to details may occasionally inhibit the attainment of overall school district goals. This study targeted the issue of administrators' professional growth, specifically concerning school law. A questionnaire was designed to gauge the study group’s perceptions of school law, who needs it, important issues, information sources used, and possible problems attaining school law knowledge.

Results from the questionnaire of these school law perceptions are covered in six major sections:

1. What are the demographics of the study group?

2. What are the perceptions as to the school administrator who needs to have the highest level of school law knowledge?

3. What are the perceptions on the importance of selected school legal issues?

4. What are the school law information sources?

5. What are the perceptions on the importance of school law knowledge in job performance and significance of accessing that information regularly?

6. What are the problems surrounding the search for school law knowledge?
Demographics

Six superintendents, two assistant superintendents, seven high school principals, five junior high/middle school principals, two high school/junior high assistant principals, and 13 elementary principals (some had multiple assignments) participated in the study which reflected a 74% return rate. The percentages that follow have been rounded; therefore, totals will not always equal one hundred.

Examination of experience as an administrator showed that 51% had ten or fewer years of experience, and 49% had eleven or more years of experience.

The most frequently chosen student enrollment for which a school official was directly responsible was between 200 and 500 students. This response level was 41% while the second most chosen student enrollment was over 800 students at 28.5%. The largest unit district (K-12) represented in the questionnaire had approximately 2,240 students, and the smallest had 1,130 students.

The questionnaire indicated that 97% of the administrators had taken at least one school law course. A lone respondent indicated that he or she had not taken a school law course and had been an administrator for over fifteen years. The year(s) in which a school law course had been taken ranged from 1965 to 1995. Forty percent of the respondents had completed a school law class within the last ten years.

Which Administrator Needs School Law

Respondents were asked to rank in order of priority the administrator
who should have the highest level of school law knowledge in the districts. This question would answer which administrator was perceived to be the one needing the highest knowledge level of school law. There were four positions listed: superintendent, assistant superintendent, building principal, and assistant building principal. In Table 1, superintendents were overwhelmingly named as administrators who needed to have the highest level of school law knowledge, (88.5%) and principals were second (11.5%). Those administrators needing the second highest level of school law knowledge tabbed by respondents were building principals (67%). There were 6% of the respondents who ranked the position of principal and superintendent equally as to which administrator should have the highest level of school law knowledge.

Table 1

The School Administrator Who Needs to Have the Most Knowledge of School Law

The Importance of School Law Issues

The study investigated which legal issues were most important as perceived by school officials. The researcher chose eight specific issues (due
process and student suspension/expulsion, student rights, attendance/truancy, liability, special education, teacher evaluation, residency requirements, and finance) of school law in which the respondents were to rate as being most important, important, uncertain, somewhat important, or not important. Questions pertaining to this section on the questionnaire were numbers 3-10. This would answer the question which issues are of the greatest concern.

Of those eight topics, due process and student suspension/expulsion had the highest response rate of all topics as being a most important school law issue. There were 66% who perceived due process as being most important while 28% judged it as being important. Student rights, at a 57% response rate, was the second highest rated topic in terms of being most important to administrators, while 34% rated student rights as important.

Table 2
Administrators' Perceptions of the Importance of Due Process and Student Suspension/Expulsion

In summary, there were 94% of the school officials who perceived due process and student suspension/expulsion as either most important or important, and 91% who perceived student rights as either most important or important.
There were four other school law topics covered on the questionnaire. These topics were attendance/truancy, liability, special education, and teacher evaluation. As to the issue of attendance/truancy, 20% perceived that as being a most important school law concern in their job, while 68.5% judged it as being an important issue.

Table 3

**Administrative Perceptions on the Importance of Attendance/Truancy**

Liability concerns are perceived by school officials as being most important in 54% of the responses and important in 34%.

Table 4

**Administrators' Perceptions on the Importance of Liability**

Perceptions of special education laws were deemed as being most important to
45% of the respondents and being important to 40%

Respondents deemed teacher evaluation as being a most important issue according to their administrative position at 40% and as being important at 45%.

Table 5

Administrators' Perceptions on the Importance of Special Education

The other two school law issues covered on the questionnaire were residency requirements and finance. There were 29% of the respondents who perceived that residency requirements as most important, 37% as important, 14% as uncertain, and 20% as somewhat important. Finance laws were deemed most important by 11%, important by 35%, uncertain by 8.5%, somewhat important by 37%, and not important by 8.5%.

It is interesting to note that superintendents perceived school finance as either most important or important at 83% as compared to the overall study group at 46%. However, superintendents rated residency requirements as either most important or important at 67% and the study group at 66%.
In summary, there were six out of eight school law topics in which at least 86% of the administrators perceived as either being most important or important in their job. They were due process and student suspension/expulsion, student rights, attendance/truancy, liability, special education, and teacher evaluation. There were two school law topics on the questionnaire that had more varied responses from the administrators concerning level of importance. These were finance and residency requirements.

Sources of School Law

The questionnaire had four items which dealt with how administrators obtained school law knowledge and the degree of importance of these sources. Items on the questionnaire concerning this topic were numbers 11, 12, 13, and 14. This would answer the question which school law information sources are used most often. The four sources that were listed were professional literature, the school's legal representative, other administrators, and seminars/meetings. Respondents felt that school law information gleaned from professional literature was most important at 14%, important at 48.5%, uncertain at 11%,
somewhat important at 23%, and not important at 3%.

Table 7

Administrative Perceptions on Obtaining School Law Information via Professional Literature

Administrators’ perceptions on the importance of obtaining school law information from the school’s legal representative indicated that 37% of the respondents perceived the information as most important, 20% as important, 17% uncertain, 20% as somewhat important, and 3% as not important. As for obtaining the information from other administrators, the results showed that 6% deemed it as most important, 54% as important, 23% as uncertain, and 14% as somewhat important.

The last source of school law information was seminars/meetings. Seventeen percent perceived this source as most important, 66% as important, 6% as uncertain, 8.5% as somewhat important, and 3% as not important.

In summary, the questionnaire inquired about four information sources of school law for school officials. Respondents perceived school law information obtained from seminars/meetings as either being most important
or important at 83%; professional literature at 62.5%; other administrators at 60%; the school’s legal representative at 57%.

Table 8

Administrators’ Perceptions on Obtaining School Law Information via Seminars/Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>MI</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>SI</th>
<th>NI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importance and Significance of Accessing of School Law Knowledge

Illinois requires that all administrators complete a course in school law to become certified. To expand on this fact, the study ascertained the degree to which school law information was necessary for effective job performance, which was covered on question number one on the questionnaire. This would answer the question what are the perceptions on the importance of school law knowledge in their job performance and significance of accessing that information regularly. There were 88.5% of the administrators who perceived school law knowledge was either most important or important for effective performance in their positions. The questionnaire also asked respondents to judge the significance of accessing school law information regularly in the performance of their job. The question on the survey which pertained to this
area was number two. There were 17% of the respondents who perceived this as most important, 60% as important, 11% as uncertain, 8.5% as somewhat important and 3% as not important.

Table 9
Administrators' Perceptions on the Significance of Accessing School Law Information Regularly

![Bar Chart]

Problems Surrounding the Search for School Law

Administrators were also asked if there were certain problems when accessing school law information. These problems were that the actual search for school law information was difficult, time constraints made accessing school law information difficult, and once school law information was obtained, it was too technical to understand. The questions pertaining to this section were numbers 15, 16, and 17 on the questionnaire. This answers the question what are the problems surrounding school administrators' obtaining school law information, specifically accessibility, time constraints, and readability.

First, the results of their perceptions on whether accessing school law information is very difficult indicated that 6% deemed it as most important,
28.5% as important, 20% as uncertain, 23% as somewhat important, and 20% as not important. Some respondents substituted in 'yes' for most important or important while others wrote 'not difficult' for not important. The second area probed was time constraints on accessing school law information. Of the respondents, 17% rated this as most important (some wrote in 'yes'), 31% as important (some wrote in 'yes'), 17% as uncertain, 20% as somewhat important, and 14% as not important (some wrote in 'not limited')

Table 10

**Administrators' Perceptions on the Difficulty in Assessing School Law Information**

The last area covered on accessing school law information was whether school law was too technical. There were 3% of the respondents who judged this as most important, 17% as important, 20% as uncertain, 34% as somewhat important, and 26% as not important (some wrote in 'disagree' or 'no').

The respondents definitely indicated that regularly accessing school law information was either most important or important in the performance of their job. However, respondents were largely split in their perceptions of what
may impede their search for information.

Table 11

Administrators' Perceptions on the Technicality of Accessing School Law Information
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The primary impetus of this study was to explore administrators’ perceptions of school law. Specifically, the study was designed to investigate the following research questions:

1. Which district level school administrator needs the most knowledge of school law?
2. Which issues are of greatest concern?
3. Which school law information sources are used most often?
4. What degree do school officials seek school law information?
5. What problems surround school administrators obtaining school law information, specifically accessibility, time constraints, and readability?

The demographics of the respondents were polled to determine any unique attributes of the study group. It was interesting to note that over one quarter of the respondents had less than five years of administrative experience. A possible explanation for this may have been the retirement incentive offered in Illinois for teachers and administrators four years ago. It was also expected that a vast majority of the respondents had taken at least one school law course because certification requirements for administrators in Illinois include a school law course. As for the lone respondent who had not taken a school law course, previous certification may have not required this course.

Findings

Administrators consistently stated that school law information was
necessary for effective performance in their job. In recent years, legislation and litigation relating to education have increased dramatically. Consequently, there is a growing need for educators to understand legal mandates as they relate to the school setting. The vast majority of the administrators who participated in the study also reflected this trend of litigation and the need for school administrators to have school law knowledge.

Respondents overwhelmingly listed the superintendent as the administrator in the district who needs to have the highest knowledge level of school law. Traditionally in Illinois, the superintendent is the administrator who has the most influence on a school district. Therefore, this would seem to be a reasonable response to this question.

The respondents also indicated an extreme importance in six topics areas: due process and student suspension/expulsion, student rights, liability issues, teacher evaluation, attendance/truancy, and special education. These topics were rated by 86% of the administrators as either being most important or important in their jobs, which are the two highest ratings on the scale. These issues are encountered almost daily by building principals or assistant principals which composed 77% of the study group. In contrast, finance and residency requirements were not viewed by the study group as being as important as compared to the other topics discussed. In Illinois, finance and residency requirements may be viewed as a superintendent or local board of education matter. Administrators were questioned about four sources of school law information. They indicated that seminars/meetings was the source of choice for school law knowledge. Three other sources -- professional
Perceptions of School Law Issues

literature, other administrators, and the school's legal representative -- were accessed nearly equally, but at a lower rate than seminars/meetings.

However, it was hoped that from descriptive data, recommendations could be generated to understand the problems surrounding the school administrators' search for school law knowledge. The study indicated some very clear trends concerning administrative perceptions on school law. School administrators perceive school law knowledge a very essential component for effective job performance. Among the most important school law issues perceived by school administrators were due process and student suspension/explulsion, student rights, liability issues, teacher evaluation, attendance/truancy, and special education. Sources of school law sought by school administrators were seminars/meetings, professional literature, other administrators, and the school's legal representative. However, the study did not show any strong indications that administrators experience difficulty when seeking school law information. Nor did it identify any possible problems administrators may experience when seeking school law information.

Conclusions

Data did not indicate any consensus that administrators experience difficulty in obtaining school law knowledge nor any specific problems surrounding the search for this knowledge. There may be two possible explanations for this. One is the questionnaire may have been poorly designed in this area. Furthermore, the scale (not important to most important) did not seem to coincide with the questions as evidenced by the respondents' additional comments. This was the only section in the questionnaire in which
administrators added comments. A second explanation for nonconsensus was the possibility that administrators may indeed have differing perceptions concerning attainment of school law knowledge.

Recommendations

Based on this study, future research should continue into the area of difficulties administrators may experience when seeking school law knowledge. If, indeed, administrators do experience difficulty in accessing school law information, then work must be done toward making school law information more accessible. This study clearly indicated that administrators value school law information. However, it did not establish any problems administrators may have in the search surrounding it. If the researcher were to repeat this study, the questionnaire would be designed differently. The responses would be rephrased as not agree, somewhat agree, uncertain, agree, definitely agree. Additionally, it would ask what time of the year administrators preferred attending seminars/meetings on school law.

Since school administrators value and need school law information, it is important that providers of this information continue dissemination. Additionally, in this study, it was determined that there are particular legal issues which all administrators deem as most important or important. These were due process and student suspension/expulsion, student rights, liability, teacher evaluation, special education, and attendance/truancy. Resources, especially seminars and meetings, which address these issues will be of greater value. However, caution is needed in that different issues were of greater importance to particular groups of administrators.
Administrators are committed to the value and need for school law information. In conclusion, administrators will always face balancing numerous tasks, i.e., discipline, professional growth, curriculum, etc. However, it is apparent that one must continue addressing all administrative tasks. It is reassuring, that even though Illinois administrative certification requirements include school law, practicing administrators also value the need for school law knowledge.
References


Perceptions of School Law Issues

*A handbook* (pp. ix-xii). New York.


Appendix A

INFORMATIONAL RESOURCE QUESTIONNAIRE
(please circle your response)

DEMOGRAPHICS

What is your primary position?
- a. Superintendent
- b. Assistant Superintendent
- c. High School Principal
- d. Junior High/Middle School Principal
- e. Elementary Principal
- f. Junior High/High School Assistant Principal
- g. Other

How many years have you served as a school administrator?
- a. Under 5 years
- b. 6-10 years
- c. 11-15 years
- d. over 15 years

What is the student enrollment over which you are directly responsible?
- a. under 200 students
- b. between 200 and 500 students
- c. between 500 and 800 students
- d. over 800 students

Have you ever taken a school law course(s)?
- yes
- no
If yes, approximately taken in what year?____

Please rank in order of priority (with 1 being the most important) the following administrative positions as to which one should have the highest level of school law knowledge in your district. Please use 0 for any position that does not exist in your district.

_______ Superintendent
_______ Assistant Superintendent
_______ Building Principal
_______ Assistant Building Principal (Disciplinarian)
The next portion of this survey will ascertain **YOUR PERCEPTIONS** concerning school law. Using the following scale, respond to the statements in terms of school law and **YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE POSITION**.

- NI= Not important
- SI= Somewhat important
- U = Uncertain
- I = Important
- MI= Most Important

1. It is my perception that school law information is necessary for effective performance in my position.

2. My perceptions on assessing school law information regularly in the performance of my job.

3. My perceptions on school law issues concerning teacher evaluation

4. My perceptions on school law issues concerning due process and student suspension/expulsion

5. My perceptions on school law issues concerning student rights

6. My perceptions on school law issues concerning residency requirements

7. My perceptions on school law issues concerning attendance/truancy

8. My perceptions on school law issues concerning liability issues

9. My perceptions on school law issues concerning special education
10. My perceptions on school law issues concerning school finance

1 2 3 4 5

11. My perceptions on obtaining school law information from professional literature.

1 2 3 4 5

12. My perceptions on obtaining school law information from the school's legal representative.

1 2 3 4 5

13. My perceptions on school law information from other administrators.

1 2 3 4 5

14. My perceptions on obtaining school law information from seminars/meetings.

1 2 3 4 5

15. It is my perception that accessing school law information is very difficult.

1 2 3 4 5

16. It is my perception that time constraints limit my access to school law information.

1 2 3 4 5

17. It is my perception that school law information is too technical to readily understand.

1 2 3 4 5

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. If the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope is misplaced, please return this survey to:

Mary Heeren
Rockridge High School
14110 134 Ave. W.
Taylor Ridge, IL 61284

Results of this survey will be compiled and sent to your District Superintendent with a routing sheet so that results may be viewed by the participants of each school district.
July 2, 1996

Dear Administrator:

I hope that summer vacation has enabled you some well deserved luxuries rarely afforded during the busy school year. I am asking you to take fifteen minutes of your precious summer vacation to complete my survey. I am seeking data on who, what, why, and how school administrators obtain school law information. This information will be used to fulfill the last requirement for my specialist degree from Eastern Illinois University. The questionnaire has been distributed to all administrators in the Olympic Conference (Aledo, Farmington, Knoxville, Macomb, Monmouth, Orion, Rockridge and Sherrard).

It is my intention that the results of my study will enable those sources who supply administrators with school law a better understanding of what is needed so we can become even more effective in the performance of our job.

Enclosed is a copy of the questionnaire. Please answer it in its entirety. I would appreciate a response as soon as your schedule will allow but no later than July 17. Thank you very much for your time and input.

Very sincerely yours,

Mary A. Heeren
Appendix C

July 20, 1996

Dear Administrator:

All of us are busier these days than we should be, and most of us have a hard time keeping abreast of family schedules and professional obligations. Hopefully, there was a questionnaire which reached you about three weeks ago. I have no way of knowing whether you have filled and sent your questionnaire back.

Realizing that I may have caught you at a very hectic time of the year, I am enclosing a second copy of the questionnaire for your perusal. If you have already done so, please disregard this request. However, if you have not completed the questionnaire, I would greatly appreciate it if you would and return it at your earliest convenience. I am hoping that all completed questionnaires will be returned by August 1, 1996.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. I do appreciate your input.

Very sincerely yours,

Mary Heeren