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ARE COMMUNITY VALUES TOWARD EDUCATION REFLECTIVE OF A  
DISTRICT'S REPUTATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION:  
A CASE STUDY APPROACH

by

Sheldon Marc DeVeaux

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University

Approved by

Joseph Basso

Date Approved

9/27/07

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## ABSTRACT

Sheldon Marc DeVaux  
ARE COMMUNITY VALUES TOWARD EDUCATION REFLECTIVE OF A  
DISTRICT'S REPUTATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY  
APPROACH

2007

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An increasing number of parents across the nation are seeking alternatives to educate their children. School progress is being documented because of the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Because America's education system is enthralled with academic reforms, research about this thesis topic is significant and timely.

This case study approach addresses the question whether public school districts successfully meet the education standards of parents in the community? Also, the author compares and contrasts the benefits between private and home schooling. Finally, the author addresses specific educational issues that motivate parents to remove their children from the public school system in their respective districts.

The researcher conducted a focus group with parents in southern New Jersey communities who currently have children enrolled in private and home school environments. Group participants answered questions posed by the researcher with the purpose of drawing a consensus on what are shared and unshared values among public, private and home schools.

The focus group results indicate that parents of private and home school students believe

academic values are not being met, which is severely affecting the learning process. Further more, parents who have children enrolled in private or home school express that a Christ and family centered foundation significantly improves education. Research also concluded that respondents perceive public school education as ineffectual at providing a quality education for children.

## Acknowledgements

All thanks go to God, without Him I would never have found the strength and fortitude to persevere. And special thanks to my mother Clementine who believes in my character and encourages me to complete my goals.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

For the past several years, public education has come under intense scrutiny. School superintendents around the nation are seeking different methods to reorganize school curriculum with the hope of improving academic standards and school image within the community. This is not an easy task for superintendents considering the ideological differences that often separate school administrators and their communities. Currently, there are two ideological views about public education.

Smith (2003) states:

At the heart of these controversies is a conflict between two camps. The first is a loose coalition of market theorists, business groups, religious groups, conservative think tanks, and policy advocates who see public education as seriously in trouble. They are united by a common perception that public education is rigid and bureaucratic, rule-bound and unaccountable, and mired in mediocrity. (p. 1)

Conservative market theorists consider school choice options such as vouchers, charter programs, and complete privatization of public school as a viable solution to an increasing problem in academic standards and values.

However, the second camp, also referred to as the establishment, and made up of teacher's unions, school administrators, school boards, and progressive academics, share the opinion, that "market based reforms misperceive the problems of education and



threaten the democratic values that justify its existence (p.1)” . Essentially, traditional educators believe that school reform must come from within the academic system.

Many school districts throughout the nation are in crisis. Hence, community values appear absent in the curriculum, and community needs are largely not being met.

The concern about substandard education across the nation has prompted the federal government to monitor school and student progress. Hence, a nationwide assessment program was developed and implemented. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 seeks accountability from schools and students. No Child Left Behind’s ultimate goal is to identify schools that are in need of improvement and correct discrepancies in administrations’ oversight of their district or reform of their curriculum. With the reputations of many public school systems called into question, a school district may lose patronage from families in the surrounding community. It is crucial that schools strive to promote the positive values of their communities.

#### Statement of the Problem

A potential disconnect may exist between district schools and their community with respect to forging values. If this occurs, parents in the district may seek other educational alternatives. Members of the community may collect vouchers and use those funds at other academic institutions or choose home schooling. Koetzsch (1997) points out:

While the public school system is still, for the most part, bureaucratic, hierarchic, authoritarian, and conservative, a great deal of experimentation, reform, and restructuring has gone on and continues to go on within it. The number and variety of educational alternatives outside the public school have greatly

increased and continue to do so. Thus, within and outside the mainstream public school system today there are many alternatives. (p. 6)

A growing trend among families in communities is seeking alternatives to traditional education. This supports the view that public schools are overlooking community values on education and not delivering optimal standards in academics.

### Choices in Education

Parents are showing concern with certain questionable values some schools have adopted. Because a majority of public institutions fail to clearly express certain core values of a community, parents in some districts are seeking vouchers (a government issued coupon used to fund a child's education) so their children can attend either a better public, charter or private school in neighboring districts.

School administrators and teachers know that they must continue to improve and maintain the positive values of their communities. Many parents feel that their school districts need to represent the community's values. If a school district displays an inability to reflect a community's values, parents will simply seek the attractive alternative of placing their child in another school. Smrekar (1999) writes about vouchers:

Proponents of public school choice maintain that it promotes racial balance voluntarily rather than through court-ordered busing of children to distant schools in unfamiliar neighborhoods. They argue that it enhances academic excellence by making individual schools more focused on providing quality instruction in order to attract students.

Finally, choice is seen as a way to counteract the effects of income level on educational opportunity, by establishing expanded options for lower-income families that are typically available only to wealthier families who are able to buy or rent

homes in neighborhoods with more desirable schools. (p. 6)

Exercising the option of school choice has become popular, particularly in urban districts.

Research shows that a number of districts are disconnected with their community's values or lack priority with community members.

### Charter Schools

In recent years, an increasing number of administrators, teachers and parents have continued to approve charter schools as an alternative to public schools. This is a new concept in public school reform. Sandra Vergari (2002) writes:

Charter schools are publicly funded entities that enjoy freedom from many of the regulations under which traditional public schools operate. Regardless of personal opinions on this controversial and multifaceted policy innovation, readers of this volume are likely to agree that various operational and political features of charter school policy are intriguing subjects for analysis. Operationally, charter schools have been characterized as "quasi-public schools" that straddle the boundary between the public and private realms. (p. 2)

Some supporters view charter schools as an interim step on the way to a full voucher system of education. Others view charter schools as the best means by which to preserve public education by provoking traditional public schools to reform and thereby head off the threat of a full voucher system. (p. 2)

As originally conceived, and as expressed in many charter school statutes, the charter school concept is aimed at responding to demands for greater choice and accountability in public education and at providing opportunities for innovation in school governance, administration, and pedagogy. (p. 2)

Vergari believes that the essential premise of charter schools is reinforcing the idea that charter schools are possibly more dedicated to values and standards than traditional

public schools.

### Private Institutions

Some parents choose to forgo applying for vouchers and shoulder their child's education costs for private schools. Several distinctive and important areas differentiate private schools from public schools. The four areas of regulation comparison are in school control, faculty hiring and firing, student selection and regulation, and curriculum.

In a study on private education Levy (1986) breaks down the terms of each area:

School control: State laws prescribe eligibility requirements for membership on the public school board, as well as whether the board must be elected or appointed, and whether parents, students or teachers must be involved in some decision-making processes. Public school boards are subject to varying degrees of state administrative control. In most states, private schools may remain unincorporated or need only comply with applicable incorporation statutes. (pp. 38-39)

Essentially, private schools are given the latitude to operate without an unnecessary bureaucracy. The role of the teacher is often overlooked in discussions about educational values.

Levy believes that the teacher disseminating the knowledge must be qualified, dedicated, and driven by incentives to maintain excellence. Levy writes the following about teacher hiring and firing:

State laws prescribe education requirements for public school teachers (teacher certification) and establish rules and procedures governing teacher dismissal, tenure, and retirement. Under the Constitution, public school teachers are also entitled to certain free speech and due process rights. (p. 39)

In private schools, the criteria for hiring is not as stringent and teachers are not protected by Constitutional rights. "For the most part, private schools may hire whomever

they wish (p. 39).” However, “The terms and conditions of teacher employment are governed by a private contract (p. 39).” In private schools, educators may not be represented by unions.

Public school teachers are protected by a number of mandates while private school teachers are not. This blanket of protection for public school teachers may be indicative of relaxed standards and values in public school classrooms.

Another contrast is standards for credentialing by district. A private school teacher may possess a bachelor’s degree in a particular academic discipline (math, social studies, history, or English) or have experience in some area of study (art, theatre, and dance). Earning an undergraduate degree for employment in a private institution is not mandatory.

It appears that values put on student achievement and placement in public school are based on ability and interests. This idea is supported by the existence of special education and special needs departments in public schools, while private schools put an emphasis on educating pupils through high expectations and ethics. Gnanarajah (2006) explains:

The core curriculum of the school should strive to exceed the standards of schools in parallel systems. The school will execute a quality curriculum with consistency. The total program will transform students and inspire them to become lifelong learners capable of providing ethical leadership to society. (pp. 30-33)

According to Levy (1986), private education has the luxury of admitting and teaching carefully selected pupils. This is advantageous for the entire education process starting with manageable classroom sizes. Pupils who are motivated by life goals will be

receptive to learning and this creates a positive classroom atmosphere. Educators find they are able to teach more effectively when students are engaged in the lesson. The results are competitive students with higher grades, and less time spent on issues of discipline.

Public schools, on the other hand, must admit and educate any student that resides in the geographical limits of that district. Because public schools are required to admit any child, some public school classrooms are inundated with students that are learning disabled or have behavior disorders. The results are teachers are not educating effectively, students have a poor grasp of the material, and grades ultimately suffer.

Public and private school curriculums are basically the same with respect to traditional academic studies. Levy (1986) states, "Historically, most states have allowed private schools to operate without extensive oversight, possibly in part because traditional private schools were regarded as sufficiently similar to public schools" (pp. 39-40). However, too much governmental regulations, possible job complacency by public school educators, and ineffective classroom instruction exercised in many public school districts creates concerns among community residents who fear their values on superior education are not reflected in their respective districts.

### Homeschooling

Evidence of increased enrollment around the nation demonstrates that private schools dedicate their existence to upholding parent's traditional academic, social, and religious core values. However, homeschooling is becoming an increasingly popular phenomenon. Farris (1997) explains, "Most home schooling families have chosen this

form of education because of the dangers of the public schools-academic failure, moral decay, and physical safety (p. 5).”

Other reasons were cited for families wanting to escape the public school system:

While promoting trendy or sentimental worldviews, our public schools-full of physical and moral danger-have given up on reading, writing and arithmetic. It is little wonder that parents have begun to look seriously at other alternatives for their children’s education.

More and more parents now choose home education because of its strengths, not merely because of the dangers and weaknesses of public education (p. 6).

Saba (2002) writes that religious convictions remain some of the most popular values associated with Homeschooling. Saba adds:

Many parents are concerned about their child’s religious development. For this reason, they may decide to send their kids to parochial school or to home school. They want the study of religion to be at the core of their children’s educational program and they are uncomfortable with the prospect of placing their children in the charge of teachers who may not share their faith. Homeschooling solves this problem. (p. 2)

Saba (2002) further adds:

Sometimes parents are frightened by the news coverage of violent incidents in our schools. They worry, too, about their children’s exposure to illegal drugs, alcohol, and teen sex. These parents feel that homeschooling gives them more opportunity to guide their teens in making wise decisions about issues that have such a big impact on their lives. They aren’t comfortable with having their teens in an environment in which some of their peers are troubled, coming from unhealthy, dysfunctional homes. (p. 2)

With respect to family values, Saba (2002) writes:

Homechooling families are able to spend a lot of time together. Families in which each member goes his or her separate way all day long don't have this opportunity. Many homeschoolers feel that this togetherness promotes a healthy, nurturing environment for children. They often feel that it is a natural function of parents to educate their children and don't wish to delegate this job to others (p. 2).

Feeling underserved is an important issue to minority families. "Some minority parents feel that their children are not well served by their local school. So, they have sought alternative means of educating their children, such as charter schools or home schooling". (p. 3)

Finally, Saba (2002) writes:

No matter how fine a job the local school does in educating children, it is still a large institution. Due to the sheer numbers of children in attendance, children cannot possibly get the individual attention they can with homeschooling. The homeschooling parent can capture their children's interest and run with it, allowing their children to learn more than is possible in a classroom setting. This helps keep the children's love of learning alive. If children excel in a particular subject, they can progress to higher levels of work as soon as they are ready (pp. 2-3).

More than a million families nationwide now use home schooling and the numbers increase every year. If certain public schools plan to survive there must be concerted effort between school districts and communities to reform and create a value system that reflects the community's values and fosters academic excellence.

#### Privatization

If certain districts are unable to adopt values that residents in the community want, and academic progress continues to decline, state governments may be forced to privatize



educational system for that district. Murphy (1998) cites Elmore (1996) who explains there is a growing lack of support from ideological and commercial entities regarding public education. These sentiments about an ineffectual educational system are resounding across the nation, “the U.S. is now deeply into a period of sustained criticism of public institutions, including public education” (Murphy, J., Gilmer, S., Weise, R., & Page, A. (1998), p. 13).

No clear definition for privatizing education exists. What does exist are various objectives in educational values being considered to reorganize academics. The privatization paradigm is designed to reform curriculum and create incentives for success in public schools. This is accomplished by eliminating government service and financing in schools or deregulation of the public school. This is followed by use of a market-based approach of providing better educational services through contracting and franchising services.

Staunch advocates of privatization have strong opinions about academic values in schools today. Levin (2001) writes:

Their proposals for privatization are based on certain claims and assumptions. They assert that current schools are ineffective; that achievement is too low; that education is mediocre; that education’s “bureaucratized management values uniformity and process over initiative and results”; that education “lacks clear standards, sound assessments, and effective accountability mechanisms”; and that “reform efforts over the last 13 years have been generally unproductive. (p. 290)

However claims are supported by a simple fact that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was imposed to monitor academic progress in schools and improve those schools that fail

to meet set standards.

### Purpose

After researching the dilemma in public education and viewing the options families in the community can exercise in voicing their concerns about values, the researcher intends to provide beneficial information about current academic values. Secondary research, coupled with quantitative and qualitative research, will assist in determining whether or not school districts in southern New Jersey are serving parent needs in the area of academic values. More importantly, case study information gathered from focus group interviews may provide answers regarding what factors influence parents' decisions to enroll their children in private and home schools.

### Assumptions

Although an abundance of research exists concerning values, the researcher believes that community needs are not being met in the way of academic values in New Jersey. For purposes of this study, the researcher assumes the following.

1. A majority of public schools in New Jersey understand and reflect community values.
2. Parents of children in private and homes school programs perceive public school education as inadequate.

### Delimitations

1. The focus group interviews performed will use a convenience sample of parents with children registered in private and home school.
2. A focus group involving parents who endorse public school will not be used.

### Definition of Terms

**Bureaucracy-** A body of nonelective government officials or an administrative policy-making group. A system of administration marked by officialism, red tape, and proliferation.

**Charter school-** A school that is independent of the local school district, thereby stimulating systemic reform through competition and market forces.

**Cocurricular-** Being outside of but usually complimenting the regular curriculum.

**Extracurricular-** Not falling within the scope of a regular curriculum. Of or relating to officially or semiofficially approved and usually organized student activities connected with school and usually carrying no academic credit.

**Morals-** Principles or habits with respect to right and wrong conduct.

**Parochial school-** A private school maintained by a religious body usually for elementary and secondary instruction.

**Pedagogy-** The art, science, or profession of teaching.

**Pious-** Marked by showing reverence for deity and devotion to divine worship.

**Privatization-** Establishment of schools operated by nongovernment authorities, whether for-profit or not-for-profit. Also concept that implies a starting point from which various activities lead to changes within the structure and nature of educational provision in a given country.

**Saxon (teaching method)-** Developed by John Saxon, is a teaching method for incremental learning of mathematics.

**Superintendent-** A school administrator who has executive oversight and charge.

Voucher- A coupon issued by government to a parent or guardian to be used to fund a child's education in either a public or private school

### Significance of Study

The New Jersey public school system meets the needs of thousands of parents and students. But there is still evidence that education reforms such as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, along with standardized testing such as the grade eight proficiency assessment and the high school proficiency assessment, may be ineffectual. Public school administrators, teachers and students are accountable because of the new standards; however, it appears some forms of improvement have not necessarily repaired the realities or perceptions public school education.

Because of growing concerns among parents about their child's education, the researcher will attempt to create a clearer understanding about what values are important to parents and examine what factors influence parents decisions for removing their children from public schools and enroll these students in private schools or homeschool programs.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

“Values are those conceptions of the desirable which motivate individuals and collective groups to act in a particular way to achieve particular ends” (Begley, 1999, p. 237). Begley explains values in very basic terms so they can be applied to individual development with an identifiable goal. But, understanding values when they are applied to governing an entire school district and educating a significant number of students becomes difficult to identify. Research on school values shows that schools adopt particular values they perceive to enhance a curriculum and benefit the students. A review of the literature will compare values found in public schools and private/homeschools, while examining contrasts between them.

#### Safety Values

Violence in public schools is a national concern. Reports show a steady increase in discipline problems ranging from bullying to drug use, even weapons possession. School administrators and other personnel in public schools recognize that their first job is educating the student body. But, administrators must first establish a safe environment. Ehrensall (2003) explains, “a state has a compelling interest in assuring that the schools meet this responsibility. Without first establishing discipline and maintaining order, teachers cannot begin to educate their students” (pp. 117-134).

School districts must become proactive in protecting students. Ehrensall (2003) adds, “ apart from education, the school has the obligation to protect pupils from mistreatment by other children, and also to protect teachers themselves from violence by the few students whose conduct in recent years has prompted national concern” (pp. 117-134).

To protect students, public schools must implement a comprehensive crisis management plan. Padgett (2006) states, “good crisis preparedness requires a culture shift. It requires leadership from the top, a critical mass of trained staff members, careful planning, and excellent communication” (p. 27). However, Padgett (2006) points out, not every school will use the same crisis plan. Schools must tailor a plan to meet their needs. Schools must begin to create a plan appropriate for their school. Then , begin creating a plan appropriate for your school. Prioritizing what is considered a crisis may differ at individual schools. The plan must fit the school and its personnel (p. 27).

The federal government passed the Safe School Act of 1994 and Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 setting a standard to combat seemingly lawless activity in public school hallways and classrooms. Passage of these acts not only shapes current public school policy on handling drugs and violence but it shapes future discussions on the subject. Ehrensall (2003) states, “the Safe Schools Act (1994), and the Gun-Free- Schools Act (1994) crystallize the dominant elite national discourse surrounding drugs and violence in schools. These documents not only emerge from this discourse but also shape future discourses through their legitimating of particular social constructions” (pp. 117-134).

## Budget Values

Spending in public schools is an issue that is evaluated often by local governments, the school board and school administrators. Public school budgets are key in maintaining a buildings efficiency and promoting an environment conducive to learning. Grubb, et al writes, “surely revenues are central to the quality of schooling, nearly everybody thinks so” (Grubb, W., Huerta, L., & Goe, L., 2006, pp. 334-359). But, many public school budgets increase without proper funds being available. In other cases public schools are denied additional funding because of unsatisfactory progress under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

A focused effort exists by administrators to reform curriculum by exploring methods for indicating where spending would benefit students most, identifying alternatives to current spending, and determining where additional funds can be found to optimize school improvements. This initiative will help administrators to spend more effectively and reduce waste. Grubb, W., Huerta, L., & Goe, L., (2006) state, “Evidently, just increasing spending has not-- and by extension will not-- resolve the problems in our schools, perhaps because the problems themselves are moving targets” (pp. 334-359).

A concern that poorer urban school districts are victims of conservative fiscal policies needs to be addressed. Grubb, W., Huerta, L., & Goe, L., (2006) adds, “Most school leaders and district administrators plead for more money, especially in urban areas, where the needs often seem limitless, and some of the most strenuous battles in statehouses are now over school funding, particularly in an era of stagnant budgets” (pp. 334-359).

In a landmark 1990 Supreme Court Case, *Abbott v. Burke*, case plaintiffs challenged New Jersey school funding system and its constitutionality. According to Dayton & Dupree (2006), “the court held that the New Jersey school funding system must be amended to ensure funding of education in poorer urban districts at the same level as that of property-rich districts in the more affluent suburban areas of the state” (pp. 22-35). The *Abbott v. Burke* decision enabled poorer school districts an equal advantage in educating students. This gave rise to establishing the Abbott school districts.

Even with different approaches to educational reform, public schools and their students continued to under-perform. Districts thought that additional spending would improve facilities, in-class resources (i.e. books and computers), and thus improve student test scores. Little or no progress was made due to the increased spending. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 approach of accountability was implemented to track district, school and student academic achievement. What funds schools receive now depends on the district’s progress. This approach limits wasteful spending.

When extra funds are not available from traditional sources there are several alternate means of getting the money. Solomon (2006) states, “As state coffers continue to shrink this year, there is less money for education, and much of what is available is earmarked for mandates. Yet the money is out there if you know how to find, create, or borrow it. The trick is to be creative” (pp. 16-18).

The most popular method of creative funding is borrowing the money. Solomon (2006) goes on to explain, “The highest-profile strategy this year is leveraging: using information, systems, technologies, funds, or other resources earmarked for one purpose



to support a more pressing priority” (pp. 16-18).

Another method of raising funds is creating a Virtual Charter School. According to Solomon (2006):

Virtual charter schools are public entities funded by tax dollars, chartered by local school districts, and enabled by using technology for instruction. A district contracts with a for-profit company to provide the curriculum for virtual school students to use at home and for the certified teachers who monitor students progress electronically. These schools are cost-effective because the districts receive state aid for students even though they never set foot in traditional school buildings. In addition, districts can charge a premium when enrolling out-of-district students. (pp. 16-18)

Installing a cost cutting infrastructure is beneficial. Solomon (2006) mentions, “as with business, education can benefit from installing infrastructure that supports administrative and instructional applications” (pp. 16-18). There are noted improvements to education by streamlining the way a school conducts its business. One way is for districts to standardize software usage for the entire district, thus reducing unnecessary spending in the budget.

Seeking, or winning, grants from foundations is a viable option for schools in need of extra revenue. Receiving a grant is very competitive so schools are encouraged to align themselves with foundations that share the same concerns about education. Other school districts use partnerships to win profitable grants. A unique approach to fund raising is for districts to create their own foundations to support school programs. This method lets schools work with businesses that provide upgraded computers, technical support and other valuable resources.

Simply asking the community for additional money works as well. Solomon (2006) states, “You’ll never know the answer if you don’t ask the question. While some communities are tightening their belts, others are saying yes to additional spending for schools” (pp. 16-18). However, there are consequences for taxing the community. For example “in Sewell, New Jersey, the Washington Township Public Schools received \$50 million from a bond referendum in 1996. It funded new schools, new infrastructure, new wiring for voice, video, and data, and 22,000 new computers. Perhaps the town saw that as a long-term fix; subsequent bond measures have been unsuccessful” (Solomon, 2006, pp. 16-18).

A final analysis of public school spending indicates professionals in the academic community understand that maintaining, even improving school facilities, is crucial in educating students. According to Lane, R., Bishop, H., Gibbs, J., & Lane, L. (2006):

Administrators, teachers, staff, and other personnel must bear in mind that children are first and foremost our primary concern. As a result of increased accountability, administrators, faculty and personnel at all levels must possess the wisdom, deftness, and competence that heretofore may not have been required. It is of utmost importance that personnel, whether K-12 or higher education, to assess their roles as effective educators and acquire the understanding and knowledge of how to perform facility studies of schools and other buildings placed in their care, custody, and control. Children cannot be educated in an environment that is not conducive to learning. (pp. 599-608)

### Extracurricular Values

Students succeed academically through extracurricular programs. “Identifying with their school helps students achieve academic success. Some students require involvement

that bridges the gap between book learning and practical application” (Lannert, 2000, pp. 24-29).

Extracurricular activities offer students positive programs that enhance their lives outside of traditional reading, writing and arithmetic. Many of these clubs and programs allow students to showcase talents. Other programs help students develop life skills. However, research finds that not all extracurricular activities that students participate in are highly valued.

A student’s primary task at school is learning the material being taught in class. Another is developing an identity. Often workshops offered by public school links literacy and identity enhancement. Yvas (2004) writes, “researchers and educators have used a variety of contextual formats in order to facilitate the development of a relationship between literacy and identity” ( pp. 12-23).

Yvas (2004) writes that a cross-curricular workshop lets students discover their writing talents and aids in identifying themselves as potential authors (pp. 12-23). Yvas adds, “book clubs such as these are effective language tools that can supplement a quality bilingual program for students of immigrant backgrounds. Thus, there is a plethora of research that addresses issues related to various form of literacy and identity” (pp. 12-23).

Extracurricular computer projects provide valuable instruction for students to become proficient at computer programming and create the desire to learn business management. “A key purpose of the LearnGen project was to construct work groups consisting of field-based and preservice teachers and K-12 students to learn new technology applications and new content in a pertinent discipline” (Nimz, Lacey, &

Denson, 2002, pp. 56-64). Further evidence of success with this project is offered by Nimz, et al. (2002) , “all student participants indicated that working on the project was a satisfying and educational experience relative to learning and using computing skills ( pp. 56-64).

Nimz, Lacey, & Denson (2002) detail some of the benefit's the students experienced in this distinctive program:

In their interviews, students highlighted that they enjoyed the opportunity to learn and to apply new skills to build a product that would be used in a real-world setting, not simply a class exercise.

As the students evaluated and reflected on the experience, several of them expressed the desire to learn organizational and management skills, particularly how to facilitate communication among several work groups. One student summed up the benefits as follows: ‘From my experience in this project, I can, in the future, organize and distribute the work among more people.’ Students also commented that they learned how to interview prospective clients so that the work could be accomplished efficiently. ( pp. 56-64)

The objective of introducing new interests outside of traditional instruction is inspirational for high school students.

McIntyre (2002) addresses an unfortunate reality that occurs across the nation concerning values on science and technology. This attitude about advanced learning affects many students. McIntyre states:

In America today, we uphold music and movie stars and professional athletes for mass recognition and financial reward. Consequently, there is no shortage of actors, recording artists, or NBA players. Meanwhile, hundreds of people in the scientific and technical areas have made major contributions to society, contributions that have profoundly affected the quality of our

lives, yet we as a society barely recognize or celebrate their accomplishments. ( pp. 14-18)

This reality keeps ingenious and inventive students from being recognized for their extraordinary talents. McIntyre (2006) continues:

This omission continues in high schools where pep assemblies honor the athletes, and the athletes compete before adoring throngs with cheerleaders and pep bands. Academic teams get either a back seat or no seat at all. Unless we something to change the very fabric of our society, all of America will continue to see increasing shortages of engineers and technicians. (pp. 14-18)

A program called the Oakland County Competitive Robotics Association, introduced in Michigan, offers students the opportunity to strengthen their engineering knowledge while giving them the reward of competition. The program is instrumental in promoting science and technology. McIntyre (2006) states, “OCCRA has successfully generated enthusiasm for such technical and academic disciplines as design, fabrication, engineering, physics, and electronics. We have provided recognition and encouragement for students who devote their energies to these areas of study”. (pp. 14-18)

Many extracurricular programs offered by schools need volunteer teachers, parents and especially students. School theatre is one of those extracurricular activities that encourages, and even promotes, the spirit of volunteerism in a community.

Teachers direct acting for the productions and provide musical direction to the school orchestra. The student body supplies the actors, and the community, by and large supports the schools efforts by conducting bake sales, donating pieces for the wardrobe and filling the seats on the evening of the presentation. School theatre rewards students

who have musical, acting or production management talents. Lazarus (2005) explains the benefits of this particular extracurricular activity:

Just as in learner-centered classroom work, learner-centered production work engages student performers, playwrights, directors, designers, technicians and dramaturgs in dialogue, decision making, and individual and collective action. The students' place at the center of the production process is acknowledged, valued, and nurtured. Collaboration, co-ownership, risk taking, and experimentation should be hallmarks of theatre making with middle and high school students. ( pp. 21-25)

School theatre ultimately gives students the opportunity to be recognized by faculty and students in the school, the administrators in the district, and members of the community.

However, Lazarus (2005) raises some ethical questions about values in high school theatre:

Secondary school theatre programs in the United States range from a single class or an annual play or musical to programs with comprehensive curriculums and production seasons headed by several certified theatre teachers. Whatever the size of the program, whenever adults are engaged in dynamic educational and artistic experiences with children twelve to eighteen years old, many questions arise. Fundamental among them are ethical considerations. How should teachers develop their learning communities so that, at this critical time in children's development, the instructional and creative environment is physically, emotionally, and socially safe for students naturally and appropriately to grow toward adulthood? ( pp. 21-25)

Lazarus (2005) first reminds faculty members who participate in school productions that, "despite signs and protests of maturity, secondary school students are still children who need our protection, guidance, and sound professional judgment" (2005, pp. 21-25).

Lazarus (2005) goes on to provide suggestions that will protect the integrity of high

school performing arts:

- ◆ Recognize the power you wield and use it with benevolence toward all.
- ◆ Learn your district's policies and your school's procedures so that they address unique circumstances that may arise in your theatre program.
- ◆ Never be alone with a student in a room with the door closed.
- ◆ Take the work seriously, Do not take yourself too seriously.
- ◆ Never confuse your job with yourself. Kids love the work of the theatre. That is different from you in the work.
- ◆ Make a life for yourself outside of school. It will make you a better teacher and artist.

Success of school theatre depends largely on administrators endorsing the performing arts for advancing academic and personal growth of students, responsible faculty members to present productions in good taste and community volunteerism.

In the late 1980s public schools across the nation adopted a anti-bias/multicultural curriculum to educate students about the perceived institutionalized oppression of different races, ethnicities, religions and cultures. The objective was to promote a healthy attitude toward diversity. The multicultural movement prompted minority students to create clubs where they could discuss issues and share their culture with others like themselves.

Public schools are adjusting to another cultural shift, the emergence of clubs that provide support to students who practice *alternative* lifestyles. The first GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) club formed in 1989 in Massachusetts. This organization's history of success with helping teens cope with *alternative* lifestyle issues includes having over a

thousand clubs in U.S. school districts.

Because this aspect of student culture is more prevalent, public schools have a open dialogue course of action on how to educate communities about the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered) community, how to introduce LGBT tolerance into the curriculum and what is the best way to protect LGBT students. One analysis for community involvement on the issue reads, “Groups that often find themselves on opposing sides of the cultural war over gay rights have bridged their divide to draft consensus guidelines designed to help public schools address sexual-orientation issues with sensitivity and respect” (“Advocacy”, 2006, pp. 7-8).

The article explains further that “Americans are deeply divided over homosexuality in our society. But if school officials and community members use the ground rules of the First Amendment, they can reach an agreement on how public schools can guard the rights of all students in a safe learning environment” (“Advocacy”, 2006, pp. 7-8). The previous citations address community awareness and ground work for possible protection of LGBT students. Mayberry (2006) offers additional ideas on (LGBT) reform in public schools stating:

Recent efforts of school personnel across the country to implement a variety of initiatives aimed at providing safe and tolerant learning environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students have resulted in inclusion of homosexual identities in school curricula, identification of positive role models, counseling programs, and support groups. (pp. 262-264)

Recognizing that many students practice an *alternative* lifestyle and establishing an atmosphere conducive to learning for those students is a precedence for administrators.



The alternative lifestyle is controversial; however, these students need protection and above all understanding. Mayes (2006) explains:

The reality is that the typical American school is a lonely and frightening place to be for gay and lesbian and other sexual minority students. Sexual minority students routinely are targets of verbal and physical violence perpetrated by their peers. In fact, one study reports sexual minority students hear anti-gay hate speech an average of 26 times in a school day. Because schools and the broader culture are so toxic, sexual minorities have a higher rate of mental health problems and unhealthy behaviors and suicide. (pp. 339-348)

A very unique extracurricular program in high schools is the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC). The JROTC is a program sponsored by the United States Armed Forces and district high schools. JROTC is unique in that it provides instruction on leadership training and character education. In most high schools JROTC is an elective for students and the program is available to students throughout their four years of high school. Many believe the program is effective and essential for reforming at risk youth, others view the organization as a insidious recruiting tool for military.

The JROTC program was established by Congress through the National Defense Act of 1916, "to develop citizenship and responsibility in young people" (Avers, 2006, pp. 594-599). A basic but powerful benefit of JROTC is that, "all students cannot be athletes, cheerleaders, or in the band, but all students can be part of the JROTC program" (Bulach, 2002, 559-563). JROTC also offers students the opportunity of obtaining advanced rank after enlisting in the Armed Forces.

Supporters of the JROTC expound the importance of this program for individual development as well as a necessity in counteracting the breakdown of the family in

American culture. Bulach (2002) explains:

Traditionally, the curriculum has been shaped by an emphasis on basic competencies in prescribed skills and understanding. More recently, there has been an added emphasis preparing students to function as responsible citizens. With the breakdown of the family, more and more students are entering schools without proper role models to shape their behavior and character. Consequently, character education has become a nationwide movement with many school systems implementing character education programs. (pp. 559-563)

The American Armed Forces opportunistically use high schools to recruit young men and women. Opponents of military education in high school feel that the JROTC is primarily a recruitment tool for the armed forces and serves no constructive purpose for high school students. Avers (2006) writes, “military recruiting in high schools has been a main stay of the so-called all-volunteer armed forces from the start” ( pp. 594-599). Avers (2006) continues, “The military culture seeps in at all levels and has a more generally corrosive impact on education itself, narrowing curriculum choices and promoting a model of teaching as training and of learning as ‘just following orders’” (pp. 594-599).

Avers (2006) irrevocably refutes the idea that a JROTC program is instrumental in developing exceptional student/citizens saying:

A vibrant democratic culture requires free people with minds of their own capable of making independent judgments. Education in a democracy resists obedience and conformity in favor of free inquiry and the widest possible exploration. Obedience training may have a place in instructing dogs, but not in educating citizens. (pp. 594-599)

In the final analysis, proponents of the JROTC tout the value of the program for students,

while opponents of the program expose the uniqueness of military culture.

### Athletic Values

School athletics give students the opportunity to have a sense of belonging and identity in the adolescent culture. Participating on the football team or field hockey team instills a sense of pride in its athletes'. A school and community's view of itself is often measured by its athletes successes and sports teams' championships. Hoch (2005) gives the reason for this occurrence stating:

While academics is definitely the most important mission of secondary education, athletics remain its most visible aspect. The esteem in which the school is held, rightly or wrongly, is based upon what the public views on the fields and in the games. It is probably the taxpayer's only first-hand observation of the school's effectiveness. ( pp. 14-15)

Hoch (2005) adds, "how often does a parent or taxpayer get to view a science lab in action or how instruction is being conducted in one of the many academic disciplines? Very seldom, but the parents do make judgments based upon athletics" (pp. 14-15). This passage exemplifies how school athletics directly impacts a school's and a community's image.

Creating a positive school and community image through athletics takes great effort. Faculty members must understand that during the course of a day, even a school year, they will come in contact with members in the community. Leaving a positive impression is paramount to a school as well as the community's image.

The athletic director and coaches have to project a professional image. There is great emphasis placed on team appearance and uniformity on the field. An intangible is

sportsmanship. Because athletics are public, sports fans in the community want to be represented favorably.

The idea of school athletics representing an entire community is overwhelming. Creating a favorable image of a school and community is based on establishing an organized and effective athletic program.

Having exceptional talent in the student body will aid a community in winning championships. But, in order to build a championship caliber sports team, schools must offer student athletes an efficient athletic program that provides knowledgeable and experienced coaches and improved facilities where students can increase their physical strength.

Miller (2005) writes that one high school took necessary steps to develop and expand their athletic program:

At a time when our high schools are running over with multi-sport athletes, dwindling workout space, and shorter strength and conditioning workouts, it has become essential to assure efficiency in the workout time and design of our high school programs. (pp. 33-34)

Miller (2005) talks about obstacles student-athletes face during sports season transitions, efforts to organize the athletic training program to better serve those student-athletes and reform in workout values:

Our student-athletes are given little or no time to participate in workouts for the upcoming season, and little opportunity to rehabilitate the injuries that occurred in the previous season. Another issue is the amount of space we have to utilize for strength training. Since our workout area consists of converted space from other areas within the school, our coaches are faced

with the problem of prioritizing both time and space to create workouts. (pp. 33-34)

Miller (2005) discusses is, “the first question we need to address was the philosophy of our coaching staff, specifically the type of training they were comfortable with” (pp. 33-34). He adds that it is finally decided that, “all of our coaches focused on selling the idea that multi-jointed movements were more useful from a sport-training viewpoint, and that the building of strength, speed, and agility were cornerstones of improvements in athleticism” (pp. 33-34). These examples of values in athletics are designed to enhance student-athlete performance hence improving the school’s efforts of winning more competitions and enhancing the community’s image.

While having a successful athletic program speaks volumes about the school and district, the success of the team speaks to the program. According to Liccione (1999), building team cohesiveness involves dedication from a coaching staff that is often unrecognized; however, those coaches continue to work at forging a positive image of the community through athletics:

The construct of a successful team program involves a lot more than just what happens after school between 3 and 5. It requires literally hundreds of hours over the course of the year for which the coach will go uncompensated. (p. 38)

Liccione (1999) continues:

Thousands of high school coaches do it for the love of the kids and the love of the sport. In short, for all of the highs and lows of the coaching experience, coaches derive an intense personal satisfaction from building programs for which they are meagerly rewarded. (p.38)

Liccione’s personal account expresses the need for a plan and the ultimate goal of

managing a successful school athletics program:

Over the course of my 15 years in coaching at the grade school, high school, and college levels, I have put together a catalog of ideas, activities, and promotions for building a comprehensive program. The ideas, most of which I have tried myself, can be used by any coach to improve his or her program and build school community pride. (p. 38)

These ideas help to build and maintain cohesiveness of student-athletes, teams, staff and the community at large.

By implementing Licciones' (1999) detailed program [broken into three areas: (1) Communication, Team Building, and Motivation, (2) Game and Season Ideas, and (3) Public Relations and Program Promotion], coaches can create harmony between team members and the community. Liccione adds "while most coaches may find it difficult to implement all of these in one season, they should be able to find enough to improve their program, enhance team camaraderie, and build school and community support" (p. 38).

Because the culture of high school sports is extremely popular in some areas which brings out the media for coverage of athletic events, it is imperative that school districts practice sound school/community relations. This will ensure that a district receives favorable media coverage, thus boosting its image.

Hoch (2004) states:

In our area, the moms, dads, families, and friends expect to see their youngsters mentioned in the papers covered by the local press. It was Andy Warhol who said that everyone gets his or her 15 minutes of fame. For many of our young athletes, those 15 minutes are far more treasured than the hours of idolatry heaped on the college and pro stars. (p. 6)

Positive coverage of the school and community can be achieved through sending

news releases. Hoch (2004) offers the following methods for advancing the district and endorsing athletics.

- ◆ Highlight all sports, not just football, basketball or baseball.
- ◆ Send news releases via e-mail. It is more efficient and convenient for local papers.
- ◆ Send releases weekly. This gives the school/community relations coordinator control over the content of the story.
- ◆ Consult coaches to include information or quotes about something they observed.
- ◆ Focus on the athletes. Provide as many names and quotes as possible. This gives a release vigor.
- ◆ Provide the local media with as much information about the sports season as possible.

Hoch (1999) states, “most high school athletic departments have a lot of trouble dealing with public relations (PR). Unlike the colleges, high schools have to have their athletic director or coaches handle the PR” (p. 4). He points out that high schools won’t always have a school/community relations coordinator to work with the media. Athletic directors must also ensure the content of the news release is not questionable or that miscommunication occurs between parties in an interview.

Hoch (1999) gives some useful tips on communicating with the media:

The two common axioms that should guide the high school PR effort are:

1. Always put your best foot forward and accentuate the positive.
2. First impressions do count, so make sure to get off on the right foot. Coaches may also have to educate their players in the matter of answering reporters’ questions. The aforementioned guidelines for coaches can serve the athletes as well. (p. 4)

Hoch (1999) succinctly adds that in public relations:

Continual and effective PR is extremely important. The time and effort spent on it pay huge dividends in the form of a greater understanding of and appreciation for the program. Remember, PR is not a luxury or frill. It is a must. (p. 4)

Effectively dealing with the media will aid the advancement of an athletic program ultimately benefiting the school and community.

Values in school athletics, especially high school, has increased over the years. For some student-athletes it is a way to pay for ever-increasing college tuitions or it can be the reality to a dream of playing professional sports. Parents are often familiar with the advantages of being an elite athlete and seek schools that increase their child's chances of attaining an athletic scholarship. Cook (2003) states:

The lure these days is much greater for both the athlete and the parent than it ever was 10, 15, or 20 years ago. Parents are much more motivated to go out and school shop for places that provide the best opportunity for their son or daughter to excel in athletics. One reason is the lure of a college scholarship, a potential \$100,000 to \$150,000 windfall if a student is accepted to an elite university. (p. 13)

This enthusiasm for high school sports, held by student-athletes and parents, stems from the influences of major corporations such as Nike, Adidas and Reebok who aggressively promote high school sporting events. According to Cook (2003):

What is also different is the commercialism associated with high school sports, especially in connection with shoe companies such as Nike, Adidas, and Reebok. All three sponsor high-profile national tournaments featuring high school athletes, and the McDonald's All-American program is one of the most prestigious in sports. (p. 13)

These corporations and television entities, like ESPN are extremely successful at



launching the careers of highly talented high school athletes such as Lebron James.

This fervor concerning sports carries the potential for conflict between the importance of academics and athletics. More importantly, this over zealousness about athletic competition has created an unhealthy attitude among parents. This in fact, affects adolescent perceptions about what should be valued. Cook explains:

What is emerging is a win-at-all-costs mentality that increasingly promotes commercialism over academics. It's the same mentality that has parents suing coaches over playing time for their son or daughter, puts high school games on national television, and has kids as young as 12 or 13 looking for that one-in-a-billion shot-with blinders on. (p. 13)

This extreme behavior on the part of parents and student-athletes may subsequently destroy the integrity of high school athletics. Cook (2003) continues:

High school should be the largest and most pure form of athletics we have, but increasingly it's not. If we keep letting those outside agents and outside coaches and gifts and trips and money and shoe companies get involved, we're going to have a mess that we won't be able to get out from under. (p. 13)

Even more damaging to an athletic program, besides aggressive sports wear companies vying for school and student-athletes attention, is intense competition that causes student-athletes to use performance enhancing drugs. The potential for student-athletes resorting to steroid use has prompted the state of New Jersey to adopt a program, the first of its kind in the nation, aimed at reducing use of performance enhancing drugs. This program also sanctions student-athletes who use these drugs:

Athletes whose teams qualify for state championship tournaments could be subjected to testing. If they test positive, they will be barred from state championship events and could face a year-long ban from school athletics. It's a first-of-its-kind

for any state in the U.S., according to the National High School Athletic Coaches Association. ( *Steroid*, 2006, p. 26)

A study of elite and varsity athletes conducted in 1992 gives compelling evidence that participation in sports has a positive and lasting impact on athletes. Specifically in the areas of education, the labor market and health. The National Center for Education Statistics (2005) reports:

Educational

High school athletes at the elite and varsity levels are more likely than nonathletes to have any post secondary education by 2000 and to have earned a bachelor's degree by 2000. No differences were detected for JV/intramural athletes.

Labor Market

Elite athletes are more likely than nonathletes to be employed and employed full time in 2000. Those who participated in high school athletics at the elite and varsity levels earned a higher income in 1999, when compared to those who did not participate in high school athletics.

Health

High school athletes at all three level of participation-elite, varsity, and JV-are more likely than nonathletes to participate in physical fitness activities and in group sports/recreation activities in 2000. Elite and varsity athletes were less likely to be daily smokers in 2000 than were nonathletes, but were more likely to binge drink in 2000 than their nonathletic counterparts. (Carlson, D., & Scott, L., 2005, p. 1)

Academic Values

The fundamentals of education for decades are instruction in arithmetic, language arts, reading, writing, history, social studies, science, art, and physical education. But education values, more specifically academic values, have changed over the years. Administrators, faculty members and school boards are using new methods and approaches to educate students. The new position on values in academics stems from an

innovative view that a students' academic success starts with development from the inside out.

Early childhood educators are focusing on student development from within with the belief children will grow not only grow in character, more importantly, these children will become better students. Burrington (2006) states:

As educators of young children, we know how important children's social and emotional development is, not only in terms of developing empathy, compassion, friendship, confidence and the like. But also as an essential component of cognitive growth. As children gain skills in social/emotional areas, they build language and problem solving skills, as well as creative-thinking, memory, and abstract-thinking skills. These skills are important components cognitive development, particularly for reading, writing, and math. (p. 26)

This fundamental view on early childhood education is sound and thorough; however, the school recognizes the importance of parents in the community becoming involved with the education process.

Burrington (2006) also details plans that districts can implement into the curriculum that involve parents in their child's education. This type of plan ultimately benefits the entire family:

#### Host Family Meetings

Throughout the school year, we host monthly meetings where parents and teachers can talk about social goals and their children's growth in these areas. These group discussions are really helpful for parents. They begin to develop a context for thinking about their child in relationship to other people and in the context of school. We send the minutes home to all the families so everyone can read what was said. (Remember, an important aspect of effective dialogue is the ongoing nature of it.)

### All Around the Classroom

You can include documentation of children's social/emotional progress (as well as progress in other areas of development) in each area of the classroom. Be sure to point them out and share them with families each time they visit. (p. 26)

Inviting parents to celebrate birthdays and other achievements is essential in aiding healthy development. Burrington emphasizes that acknowledging student progress throughout the school year will result in positive growth.

At the primary and particularly the secondary education level the school community continues its focus on student development but with a more practical and corporate tone of reforming this part of education.

Lewis & Borunda (2006) explain:

The school counseling profession is engaged in a discourse that concentrates on the transformation of what school counselors do. Professional school counselors, counselor educators, and other stakeholders are in the process of revising the stories that guide the school counseling profession. (p. 406)

According to Lewis & Borunda (2006) the school counselor's role changes with values dictated by social constructs of the time. Counselors follow this design guiding students through the education system with little or no emphasis on community inclusion:

The school counselor's role and function have undergone various transformations in response changing social forces and perceived student educational need. Commonly accepted landmarks in the history of school counseling illustrate that the role and function of school counseling is constantly evolving in a historical context. (p. 406)

In the 1900s, school counseling focused on preparing students for work in various industries and military service. Or measured student ability for college placement. During

the 1950s emphasis was placed on counseling academically talented and gifted students (particularly white males) in order to compete with other world powers. Around the early 1980s there was little or no mention about where school counselors fit in the education system. Lewis & Borunda (2006) state:

Sadly, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) left school counselors out of the school reform conversation, and equally, concentrated more on licensing qualifications than on transforming the role of the teacher in a learning culture. (p. 407)

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 places more accountability on schools, consequently causing the school community to take a closer look at the role of counselors increasing their role in education. School counselors are receiving developmental support in programs designed to improve their effectiveness. Ultimately, school counselors are required to fill the roles of leaders in education and communities. Lewis & Borunda (2006) explain:

The school counselor is a leader within the educational community who works with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other members of the community to build a supportive learning environment that nurtures the development of academic, career, and personal/social competence among students and fosters an appreciation of diversity and a commitment to social justice. (p. 407)

Increased accountability and changing perceptions about how public schools are managed is causing school counselors to lead the way in promoting academic excellence throughout the community. As stated by Lewis & Borunda (2006):

When counselors believe in the capacity and worth of every human being, they engage the community where they are employed to serve in clarifying community defined needs. Once

theses students and community needs are identified, the stakeholders being served and the counselors take action to change the environment conditions that suppress the capacity of youth to fulfill their potential. (p. 408)

By making reforms on how school counselors perform in their field, school districts, the communities they serve, and students will benefit. Administrators maintain counseling reform is necessary but also point out, today the counselor's job is a leadership role that is becoming more instrumental at unifying the school district and the community.

While many educators view learning as a function that occurs from the inside-out, some administrators, teachers and school board members feel learning and improving grades are accomplished by altering the exterior. In fall 2006, Paulsboro High School, New Jersey students are required to wear uniforms. Starting in winter 2007, Winslow Township High School students will don khaki pants and collared polo style shirts.

The public school uniform policy is popular in popularity around the nation. Public schools are adopting this policy citing school uniforms eliminate distractions, promote unity among students and result in improved academic performance. According to King, A., Walker, L., & Minor, D. (2002):

Many schools justify strict dress code/uniform policies as a symbol of school membership, which conceals status and promotes conformity to organized goals. Other institutions encourage adherence to the dress code/uniform policy on the basis that students should dress for success. By following the standards for appropriate dress, an environment for learning is created. (pp. 52-56)

Community opponents of the uniform policy feel the school policy is oppressive and does

not necessarily create economic equality. King, A., Walker, L., & Minor, D. (2002)

explain:

Despite national reports of decreases in school violence and an increase in attendance rates, many parents and students oppose uniforms on the basis that they stifle creativity and don't conceal status. Initial financial outlay for uniforms is prohibitive claim parents. Freedom of expression in appearance, however, is the primary objection to strict dress codes and school uniforms. Limiting a child's freedom of expression, adults contend, results in a restriction of identity experimentation that creates a possible negative effect on academic achievement. (pp. 52-56)

However, proponents of the uniform policy describe success at all levels concerning implementation of a strict dress code . King, A., Walker, L., & Minor, D. (2002) state:

Elementary schools reported a relationship between school violence and the lack of a uniform or dress code policy with comments in regard to behavior. When students are dressed for learning, they are better behaved and adhere more to the rules. Some schools report that students base the worth of peers on the kinds of clothes that are worn but distinctions in worth were not noted when the entire school population was dressed in uniforms. Uniforms put students on a more even level and discourage gang affiliation. (pp. 52-56)

King, Walker, & Minor add further:

Middle schools reported students are less likely to act out and are more respectful when dressed ready to work. Poor, sloppy attire does not foster self-confidence thus creating a negative environment for academic achievement. High schools also report a positive relationship between dress codes/uniforms by noting better dress equates to better behavior. (pp. 52-56)

Conclusively, a comprehensive study conducted by Brunson (2005) suggested there is not enough convincing evidence that school uniform policies modify student behavior, further more the school and community are at no significant advantage by

adopting such a program:

What is clear from the research is that school uniforms, as a policy and strategy, do not play a role in producing more parental involvement, increased preparedness, positive approaches toward learning, pro-school attitudes, a heightened feeling of school unity and safety, or positive school climates. Therefore, such a policy should not be touted as increasing the educational atmosphere at any level of schooling. It is my hope that these research findings can direct us away from the assumptions, conjecture, and unfounded claims concerning the effectiveness of school uniform policies. (pp. 50-53)

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has educators considering curriculum that is preparing its students for adult life, inspiring them to become involved in the community and learn specialty skills useful for employment. Some public school reformists believe that schools and students are wasting valuable time practicing a model where the teacher lectures and the students listen.

The Corporation Learning method is a innovative approach to learning that is designed to teach students from a work place perspective. O'Hara & O'Hara explain:

A primary goal of Corporation Learning is to provide students with life skills they will need in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. CL is a departure from traditional teaching, and acts as a bridge that connects the core curriculum requirements and standards to the workplace readiness standards recently developed in New Jersey. Corporation Learning views every student as a resource, not as a product. CL is student centered, not teacher centered. It focuses on learning, not teaching, and emphasizes collaboration and teamwork, not competition and individual work. (pp. 9-17)

This method of learning is demonstrated in some vocational/technical schools. It is preparation for the possibility of immediate employment. A positive impact this addition has on a community is it immediately provides the workforce with an individual that has



practical experience. Thus potentially eliminating cost for training.

Cocurricular activities are prevalent in schools. Cocurricular events are not to be confused with extracurricular activities such as athletics, theatre, band or other clubs directly sponsored by the school district. "Cocurricular activities are an extension of, not a diversion from, a good educational program and support the academic mission of the school" (Kleese & D'Onofrio, 2000, pp. 5-8). These activities are usually, a trip somewhere to facilitate learning, participation in a leadership committee and organization of a dance. All events are meant to foster volunteerism in the community, create unity and build character. Kleese & D'Onofrio state:

Youth service can build a community. When young people from different racial, ethnic, economic, and educational circumstances work together in close quarters, they come to trust each other and depend on each other. Youth service can build up the young people themselves: When young people engage in community service, they become valued, competent resources, rather than clients of social institutions, such as schools, and gain self-respect. (pp. 5-8)

### Comparisons and Contrasts

In comparison, public, private and homeschools share the fundamental values of teaching students reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Public and private parochial schools even endorse the values of cocurricular activities and extracurricular athletics. However, public, private and homeschooling differ in philosophies on achieving academic excellence and perceived image.

According to Gnanarajah (2006), a list of several statements outline the mission for creating and maintaining a quality private parochial education:

**Catholic Identity-** A quality catholic school is committed to nurturing Catholic identity based on the following basic beliefs: It accepts that each child is a unique creation of God with spiritual, emotional, intellectual and social needs. The school in partnership with parents, the first educators of children in their family; it is also a communion with the archbishop, parish faith community and its leadership.

**Clear Purpose-** All members of the school community, including staff, students and parents, have a clear and articulated understanding of the mission of the school. The focus on the mission is integral to shaping all activities of the school and in guiding the allocation of resources. Definite and measurable school wide learning expectations are part of this clear focus.

**Accessibility-** A Catholic school should be a microcosim of the local faith-community. Primarily it should be accessible to all Catholic families who desire Catholic school education in the formation of their children as Catholics. The school should strive to be accessible to all students of the faith community irrespective of their income level, learning needs, ability level or ethnicity.

**Academic Excellence-** The core curriculum of the school should strive to exceed the standards of schools in parallel systems. The school will execute a quality curriculum with consistency. The total program will transform students and inspire them to become lifelong learners capable of providing ethical leadership to society.

**Continuous Improvement-** A quality Catholic school should be dedicated constantly to continuous improvement. All members of the school community must be dedicated to self-improvement and betterment of others in their sphere of influence to achieve school wide success. These efforts should be geared toward new learning and constant refinement through advanced degrees.

**Strong Leadership-** A quality Catholic school has strong leadership that establishes and maintains a clear vision and mission for the school. School leadership is embodied in three ways: strong pastoral leadership, administrative leadership (principal/staff) and stewardship among the parents who make up the consultative bodies in the school and parish. The principal should enhance the teaching and learning environment through effective instructional and managerial leadership.

**Recruitment, Development, and Retention of Excellent Staff-** A quality Catholic school should seek and recruit teachers who

consider teaching as a calling and a ministry. At the school, the faculty should experience the culture of a learning community open to commendations and recommendations to enhance teaching and learning. Faculty and staff must live out their calling by demonstrating their commitment to the success of each student.

Facilities and Resources- It is essential to provide a welcoming and safe environment to achieve quality faith formation and excellence in curricular and co-curricular activities. This requires sufficient resources and sound management practices. Integration of appropriate educational technology and establishment of ethical standards to use these tools is essential to enable students to access and use diverse information. (pp. 30-33)

Comprehensive approaches focusing on delivering a quality education to students in private schools creates a positive perception of these institutions. The result is public schools continually work at emulating a successful image. Bracey (2006) references a supposition made by scholars regarding private schools:

From Chubb and Moe's work, and that of other free-market theorists, Richard Rothstein, Martin Carnoy, and Luis Benveniste generated six hypotheses about the advantages we should find in private schools:

- ◆ Private school personnel are more accountable to parents.
- ◆ Private schools have more clearly defined expectations and outputs.
- ◆ Private elementary schools teach good behavior and values better.
- ◆ Private school's teacher selection and retention practices are more efficient.
- ◆ Private schools achieve success with curricular materials that do not differ from curricular materials in public schools.

- ◆ Private school innovations stimulate improved practices at the public schools with which they compete. (pp. 58-61)

America's campaign to improve public education throughout the nation is aggressive but efforts remain ineffectual. Stewart (2005) states:

On the heels of harsh criticism of public schools and public demands for a response to a variety of competing agendas, the most recent wave of reform in education has brought many changes that impact nearly every aspect of the American education system. Demands for quality through accountability, standards-based reform, parental choice, and societal inequities have led to magnet schools, high stakes testing, revised professional licensure standards, charter schools, and voucher systems. (pp. 253-263)

According to Stewart, (2005), currently, attitudes and evidence for success in homeschooling strengthen, "among the recent trends that may have marked effect on the education system as a whole is the rapid expansion of home schooling", ( pp. 253-263). The option of homeschooling continues to increase in popularity, Stewart (2005) adds:

The rise of home school popularity has been one of the most significant trends in education over the past half century and indications are that the home school movement may even be becoming a social movement instead of simply an educational alternative. (pp. 253-263)

Not only are homeschooled students better educated than their counterparts in public schools, but colleges are tailoring admissions to enroll larger numbers of homeschooled pupils, "by almost every measurable outcome, homeschoolers in general outperform their public educated peers, and many colleges are beginning to rework their admissions procedures to accommodate the growing numbers of home-schooled applicants." (Pannacker, 2005, p. 16)

The discourse about what values are paramount to any curriculum will continue but college and university professors give first-hand accounts that suggest public school values on civility, accountability, and academics are deficient in comparison to other options, Pannacker (2005) states:

Every professor seems to complain that most high-school graduates are not really prepared for college, either academically or emotionally. More and more, our energies are devoted to remedial teaching and therapeutic counseling. Most believe that something is wrong in public education, or the larger culture, that can only be dealt with, in part by selective withdrawal. Home schooled students are not always perfect, but they seem more respectful, attentive, mature, and academically prepared than their peers. And they do not automatically perceive teachers as “the enemy” out of peer solidarity. (p.16)

The primary responsibility of public, private and home schools is educating students in reading writing, arithmetic and other academic disciplines. But school administrators, parents and communities should recognize that: safety, budget, extracurricular, cocurricular, athletic and academic values combined, strengthen curriculums. These value in education are also instrumental in shaping student character, improving individual talents and providing invaluable service to communities through volunteerism.

## Chapter 3

### Research Design

#### Qualitative Research

Before conducting this original study, the researcher examined qualitative research methods and focus groups. Understanding focus groups in qualitative research, specifically the use of focus groups, planning and involvement of members in a community, moderating the focus group, development of the survey instrument and analyzing significant data, increases the success of gathering pertinent information thus establishing some evidence of a theory being investigated.

Focus groups are helpful at gathering information that can support qualitative and quantitative data. Focus groups are primarily used to generate discussion between members while a moderator records the answers given by participants. This method of gathering data is not a conventional approach to interviewing. According to Morgan (1988):

As a form of qualitative research, focus groups are basically group interviews, although not in the sense of an alternation between the researcher's questions and the research participant's responses. Instead, the reliance is on interaction within the group, based on topics that are supplied by the researcher, who typically takes the role of a moderator. The fundamental data

that focus groups produce are transcripts of the group discussions. (pp. 9-10)

While focus groups are unconventional, they are quite effective at introducing researchers to new studies, creating hypotheses, assessing different studies, forming survey questions and obtaining group member's perceptions, ideas and opinions. Morgan (1988) feels that focus groups are powerful survey tools when utilized, "the important point is to recognize the full potential of focus groups, both as a self-contained means of data collection and as one of several components in a larger research program. (p. 11)

When developing focus groups, planning for involvement of community members is crucial because the integrity of the research must be maintained. Preserving the integrity of the study is done by soliciting the participation of volunteers. Volunteers benefit focus groups in different ways. Focus group volunteers are cost effective in research, have an increased interest in the study's results and reap personal advantages for future use. Krueger & King (1998) state:

A highly pragmatic reason for using volunteers is that they increases the feasibility of conducting studies in settings where a more traditional research design would be prohibitively expensive and simply out of the question. Because they will work for free or with minimal support, volunteers are extremely cost effective. Volunteers can work creatively with professional researchers to ensure the quality of a study while keeping costs down. (pp. 5-6)

Kreuger & King (1998) add, "one of the presumed benefits of volunteers' participation in studies is the increased likelihood that they will care about the results" (p. 6). Lastly, Krueger & King (1998) write:

Those who participate as volunteers may benefit as individuals,

and these benefits may help strengthen the organizations in which they work. People who have learned research skills as volunteers often discuss personal benefits, such as new skills or increased self-confidence. (p. 6)

Setting clear objectives is important in planning focus groups. Researchers must take into consideration the purpose of the study, the audience, expectations of the moderator, line of questioning and the actual writing of the questions, also the debriefing of group members.

Success for this type of qualitative study depends on the attitude of the moderator. A successful moderator requires self-confidence, ability to learn and think quickly, a personable character, being a good listener, the ability to concentrate and recall information discussed. These personal attributes are essential to effective communication in a focus group setting.

Developing the survey instrument, the questionnaire, is a challenging task. The questions should be conversational, this produces active discussion, “the first principle is to ask questions in a conversational manner. Because the focus group is a social experience, conversational questions are essential to create and maintain informal environment” (Krueger, 1998, p. 3).

Questions need to be clear and concise so good communication between all members is achieved. According to Krueger (1998):

Effective questions are clear, brief, and reasonable. Clear questions are usually short, one-dimensional, and jargon-free. Lengthy questions can be redundant or confusing to respondents. The risk of longer questions is that participants have a hard time distinguishing the core intent of the question. In general, you reduce clarity as the length of the question increases. (p. 4)



It is vital for researchers to understand that analyzing and reporting results on a qualitative study can be complex. This is due to the respondents having the option of changing their answers and views during the interview. Ability to interpret respondents answers aids in organizing the noteworthy information. Krueger (1998) summarizes the role of the researcher and the approach needed to analyze significant data:

The analysis process is like detective work. One looks for clues, but in this case, the clues are trends and patterns that reappear among various focus groups. The researcher's task is to prepare a statement about what was found, a statement that emerges from and is supported by available evidence. In preparing the statement, the researcher seeks primarily to identify evidence that repeats and is common to several participants. (pp. 6-7)

Krueger (1998) continues:

However, some attention is also placed on the range and diversity of experiences or perceptions. The researcher must identify those opinions, ideas, or feelings that repeat, even though they are expressed in different words and styles. Opinions that are expressed once are enlightening but should not form the crux of the report. (p. 7)

In addition, after the information given by the focus group is evaluated, the explanation of the findings should be systematic, verifiable and informative.

### Conducting the Research

The researcher chose a qualitative method of study to elicit a consensus about important values among parents of children in private or homeschooling. The qualitative method of conducting a focus group is a practical way of accessing members from different communities and getting those members to have an open, uninhibited and honest

discourse about significant issues regarding values in education. This original study's purpose is to definitively answer the question, what motivates parents to choose alternatives to the public schools in their communities. Focus group parents were formed on the basis of convenience.

The focus group conducted with private school parents was conducted in a neutral location and the homeschool parents were interviewed the residence of one of the participants. The researcher felt it imperative to provide or suggest an environment that fosters positive discussion and debate, for the purpose of finding specific perceptions or opinions concerning values in education.

The focus groups were conducted in late January and early February of 2007. The parents in the focus groups filled out a brief form providing the moderator with information about the districts they lived in, how many children they have enrolled in private and home school, what grade level the children were in, and whether any of their children attended public school.

Parents were asked 13 questions pertaining to shared community values. The questions asked focused on gaining an understanding of what curriculums, extracurricular, cocurricular, athletic and academic values parents of private and homeschooled children feel are essential to their children's success in the educational process.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The qualitative study designed bifurcated the groups into PS1= parents of private schooled children and HS1= parents of homeschooled children. Responses to the questions are easily understood by separating the educational systems preferred by each set of parents. During the focus group the researcher documented responses to the questions. The results follow.

Question 1, what curriculum does your particular private or home school offer? (For example; traditional reading, writing, arithmetic.) And what electives are offered such as science, art and music? PS1 respondents stated that between elementary school and high school the curriculum is traditional regarding reading, writing and arithmetic. Other disciplines are offered such as history, science and physical education. Parents in the private school group spoke about the teaching of phonics to strengthen their children's ability to read and spell.

HS1 respondents expressed a similar curriculum. But, during the discussion on curriculum, homeschool parents spoke more about the importance of teaching methods they employ in their curriculum. Homeschool parents also shared that they use the Saxon method of teaching mathematics to their children. The Saxon method involves teaching arithmetic incrementally by introducing new math concepts and reviewing old ones

everyday.

Consensus, private and home schooled children have traditional curriculums that teach reading, writing, arithmetic and other electives such as physical sciences, social studies and physical education. More significant, both private and home school parents agreed that teaching methodology is important. Both groups mentioned two styles of teaching that have proven to be successful in pedagogy, phonics versus whole language for reading and spelling, and the Saxon teaching method versus standards based mathematics.

Question 2, does your private/home school offer sports as an element of your curriculum? Respondents in PS1 were unanimous on this question. All parents acknowledged that their school offered intramural sports for their children or sponsored an interscholastic junior varsity and varsity sports. Parents in this group also spoke about their children competing in the Garden State Association of Christian Schools. This sports conference allows students from Christian Schools to compete against each other in several sports.

HS1 responded that they did not have organized athletics when building their curriculum. However, homeschool parents encourage physical fitness and are supportive of their children becoming involved in athletics.

Consensus private and home schooled parents acknowledge that physical activity and sports are positive extracurricular activities. But, athletics rank low in priority concerning their child's education.

Question 3, besides athletics, what extracurricular activities does your private or

home school program offer? PS1 respondents stated that their private schools offered various extracurricular activities and clubs. For example, one school has a form of student government. Also an academic club exists that holds spelling competitions.

HS1 respondents stated that their homeschool program does not offer extracurricular activities in the sense of organized student activities such as student government.

Homeschool parents may offer an individual activity such as learning an instrument, voice, or some other aesthetic project.

Consensus, parents of private and home schooled students encourage their children to seek other interests outside of customary academic disciplines.

Question 4, what cocurricular activities does your private or home school program offer that enhance the academic curriculum? (For example, music, theater or programs that promote volunteerism.) Respondents from PS1 gave responses that their schools have theater, chorus and band. At the high school level, students are free to participate in a ministry that promotes helping people nationally and globally.

HS1 respondents stated that their children are not involved in group cocurricular activities in homeschool. But, homeschool parents think it is imperative that their children develop other talents. Again, these parents talked about music lessons and singing lessons. The homeschool children often use their talents in church activities.

Consensus, private and home schooled children are actively seeking to develop personal talents in different aesthetic areas. These students, also proactively volunteer their time and talent for their Christian communities at home and abroad.

Question 5, what are common values for private and home school? PS1 and HS1

consensus is that both share the ability to practice their religious beliefs, grow spiritually with their families, and have an active voice in determining the quality of education that their children receive.

Question 6, what are perceptions about the value of the public school system?

PS1 and HS1 share common beliefs about the public school system. Both groups of parents believe that there is a disturbing lack of discipline in public school classrooms. Private and home school parents feel that the students are setting the tone for learning in public schools. These parents also share the view that public school teachers are not as dedicated to the learning process as private school teachers or homeschool teachers/tutors. Parents of private and home school students share the perception that public school teachers are ineffectual and work in the teaching profession because of job security.

Private and home school parents feel that public school students place a high priority on social life in school rather than on academics. Public school students are believed to be more promiscuous, materialistic, self absorbed and more likely to become involved in recreational drug use.

The researcher notes that despite reports by the media on an apparent rise in student violence in public schools, none of the parents in either group perceived public schools as violent.

Finally, there is a perception that public schools are more apt to pass students through their system without addressing learning needs.

Question 7, what values are not met in your district regarding public school

education?

PS1 and HS1 respondents similarly stated that a lack of discipline exists in their respective school districts and that public school faculty teaching methods are ineffectual. Private and home school parents have the opinion that student-to-teacher ratio in public schools is high. Also, respondents believe that crowded classrooms diminish learning. The last concern is that public school faculty make little or no time for their students.

Question 8, what educational values do you feel your private school shares with public school educational values? Respondents from PS1 shared the general idea that educating children is a shared value. Furthermore, parents agreed that schools want students to achieve.

Question 9, what educational values are shared between your homeschool program and public school? HS1 group members felt that public schools shared their belief in providing a structured education for children.

Question 10, have you considered sending your son or daughter to college? All participants in PS1 emphatically said yes to this question and explained they are major proponents of higher education.

HS1 group members also support the idea of their children receiving a post secondary education.

Consensus, parents of private and homeschooled students recognize the importance and advantages of their children continuing their education after meeting compulsory education requirements.

Question 11, do you feel private or home school will better prepare your child for

college? If yes, in what way? PS1 participants feel that their children will be better prepared for college because of the quality of education received in private school.

Participants also explained that their children have learned the importance of being motivated academically.

Parents in the group shared with the researcher that their children earned high scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

HS1 participants explained that some subjects in the homeschool curriculum, in particular Latin, would undoubtedly help their children excel at the post secondary education level.

Question 12, for parents of children not enrolled in high school, would you consider sending your son or daughter to public school? Why or why not? PS1 and HS1 participants responded that their children may attend public school in the future.

Participants in PS1 considered sending their children to public school for financial reasons. Another reason is that some colleges and universities fail to recognize all private school high school diplomas.

Parents in the HS1 group will consider sending their children to public schools, because similar to private schools, some homeschool programs are not viewed as acceptable by certain colleges and universities. Another reason for opting to send their children to public school is the coursework becomes more difficult for parents to instruct.

Consensus, parents of private and home schooled children consider public education as an option when acceptance into a college or a university is a factor.

Question 13, would you recommend private or home school to other parents and why? PS1 respondents were unanimous with respect to choosing the option of private



education. All parents agreed that a private education is the best investment for their children and absolutely recommend a private education over a public education.

Respondents provided various reasons for choosing private schools over public schools.

Parents chose a private school education over public school education because of negative personal experiences regarding their children in the public sector. Other parents in the group explained there appears to be too much emphasis put on liberal thinking, specifically the acceptance of ideas that have no academic value. Respondents feel that public schools are simply too permissive when designing school curriculum.

HS1 participants responded that they are more than satisfied with the decision to choose homeschooling over public school. They also support the idea of others choosing a home-school program over public education. The overwhelming reason parents of homeschool students gave for their decision is appreciation of managing their children's learning process.

### Results Summary

The consensus for PS1 and HS1 comparison of private education and homeschool to public schools indicates that public schools are designed to provide students with a quality education. In addition, private, home and public schools have curriculums that enhance student talent. The curriculums created by private, home and public schools recognize the development of an individual. However, the unfortunate contrast is that public school classrooms are perceived as ineffectual due to lack of control.

At the end of each focus group the researcher asked group members to clarify the meaning of a Christ centered education. The explanation given was that a Christ centered

education focuses on developing and maintaining pious and moral conduct. This is what private and home school parents feel strengthens and even improves education. A Christ centered education focuses on the fundamentals of character. Without a moral and ethical value system learning cannot take place.

## Chapter 5

### Interpretation and Suggestions

Parents in both focus groups, PS1 and HS1, contributed significant information about comparisons and contrasts between public, private and home schools. Interpreting the values expressed in the research, may create an understanding of what core values public schools should consider adopting to improve public education's reputation in the respective community. More importantly, the researcher sees a use for this data in developing successful school and community relation programs.

Furthermore, research was conducted regarding public school safety values. This is significant because a perception exists that public schools are experiencing an increase in violence. Data supports an increase in school violence nationally. Violent incidents become headline news supporting the claims of savagery in public schools. However the author found it interesting that focus group discussions between PS1 and HS1 never yielded concern about violence.

The literature points toward a trend that diminished values will lead children to engage in aggressive behavior. This is a an unpleasant reality. In contrast, the aggressive behavior in private and home school programs does not match the scale of intensity shown by public school students. This is a result of zero tolerance approach by private schools to maintain order and discipline. And, students in private and home schools

report a stronger moral and ethical foundation that fosters pious behavior.

Dealing with incidents involving students will require a delicate and thoughtful approach. A challenge facing school and community relation programs is communicating truthfully and sincerely with the media.

Unfortunately, diminished budgets have caused a shift away from communication needs. Building expansion, teacher salaries, classroom improvements and various educational tools vital to learning are sustained by a budget. The budget essentially determines how well a school will function, more important these funds may affect the quality of education a student receives.

Public schools in many communities across America continue to receive reports describing an underachieving and failing education system. Private and home schools, in contrast, have not drawn much, if any, attention regarding the quality of student education. In fact, the number of families choosing alternatives to public education is increasing. This indicates that public school funds, after careful evaluation, are not being spent effectively.

Raising funds for private schools is crucial to the institution's existence and success. A school and community relations coordinator must forge relationships to help raise funds.

Healthy athletic competition between schools builds healthy relationships. Students benefit from organized athletic competition because sports are an essential part of a school's curriculum because athletics provide exercise, discipline and an opportunity to develop physical skills. Public, private and home education programs share this value in

their curriculums. Athletic competition enhances school image, improves student morale and brings communities together.

Extracurricular and cocurricular values allow students the opportunity to explore interests, develop unique talents and serve their communities. Public, private and home schools believe in fostering individual growth. These extracurricular and cocurricular programs are invaluable to academic curriculums and personal development.

Athletics, extracurricular and cocurricular activities connect students to their schools. Students develop a positive identity when they participate in athletics, theatre or clubs. School and community relations coordinators should seize this opportunity to recognize student's achievements by providing the local media with press releases and video news releases about the school and students.

The fundamental duty of any education system is teaching students essential reading, writing and arithmetic skills so they can lead productive lives. A comparison between public, private and home school is each education system agrees in principle that academics are key to individual success.

However, there is a difference in academics value practices between public, private and home schools.

Public education is designed to represent and accommodate community values. And public schools understand their primary responsibility is providing a quality education to students in that community. It appears that issues, such as the acceptance of *alternative* lifestyles, removal of Christian and Judeo values, educating and promoting other religious beliefs and the amoral behavior that is often exhibited and tolerated,

contributes to a perceived reduction in learning standards.

Public school and community relations practitioners should use every opportunity and technique available to advance the school's image and endorse student's academic accomplishments.

Suggestions for further study on this thesis topic are conduct research in the form of surveys or focus groups with parents who have children in public schools. The author recommends gathering data from parents because public school officials, administrators, board members and faculty may decline any requests that requires divulging certain information about public schools.

### Conclusion

This thesis project reveals that education is a critical issue in America. And there is no exact formula for delivering a quality education. Public, private and home school programs are successful in accomplishing the task of educating children. All provide each student with the opportunity to find, develop and improve their unique academic and personal talents. Also, public, private and home schools will progress with changes in academic standards, technology and student lifestyles.

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