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San Jose State University, 1994

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**MEDIA AGENDA-SETTING AND
ISSUES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Journalism

and Mass Communications

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

by

Elizabeth E. McCarley

May, 1994

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ABSTRACT

MEDIA AGENDA-SETTING AND ISSUES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

by Elizabeth E. McCarley

The agenda-setting effect of the media was investigated in the context of the issues in public education for eight sample years from 1969 to 1991. Data were gathered from the Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools and from *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.

The relationship between the media and public agendas was examined. The results showed positive correlations between the two agendas for four years, negative correlations for three years, and no correlation for one year. The amount and type of coverage issues received also was examined. Chi-square test results for two years showed that issues receiving larger amounts of media coverage were more negatively covered than issues receiving smaller amounts of media coverage. For three years, issues receiving larger amounts of media coverage were more positively covered. The hypothesis was neither supported nor denied for the other three years.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problems in the Public Schools

Public education has come under heavy criticism in the past two decades for failing to provide students with high quality education to prepare them for the future. Teacher preparation programs, weak curriculum, lack of discipline, drugs, government regulations, low test scores, and reductions in funding are a few of the sources that have been blamed for this failure. Those concerned about the public school system have ranged from parents and business owners to Congress and the president.

A recent wave of comparisons between students in the United States and students in other countries has also contributed to the concern about the public school system in the United States. Reports that the test scores of students in the United States are far below those of students in Japan and other industrialized nations have caught the attention of politicians and citizens throughout the country. The high school graduation and literacy rates of students in the United States are well behind those of economic competitors.

Possible solutions to these problems have been suggested by politicians, parents, and other concerned members of society. Vouchers for school choice are being recommended by politicians and parents alike. Private schools have waiting lists. Mandatory teacher testing is being considered. More emphasis on math, science, and technology is regarded as important in solving the problems. Although disagreement is present in regard to the sources of the failure and the best solutions, many Americans

agree on the fact that the public schools are in trouble.

Budget cuts have forced schools to cut electives, fire teachers, crowd classrooms, and seek community donations for such necessities as paper and chalk. The influx of immigrants in recent years has produced a need for bilingual instructors and for programs to teach the English language. Drugs and violence pervade the lives of many children in the United States. Some children live in poverty, some with abusive or addicted parents, and others in homeless shelters. Many children do not come to school prepared to learn. Teachers are underpaid and many talented college graduates do not seek teaching as a career. These obstacles are formidable, but the public schools continue to function in society.

The Accomplishments of the Public Schools

Universities turn out graduates each year who have succeeded in public schools. Teachers usually do their best to provide individualized instruction, guidance, and discipline. They attempt to create successful learning environments where students can achieve. School boards, parents, and teachers have joined forces to formulate educational goals for the students in their communities. The American public school system provides an egalitarian education to all students from kindergarten through college. Many other industrialized nations do not offer such opportunities. Public schools are relying on the financial and moral support of the public in their attempts to overcome their problems and provide the best education possible for all students.

Cuban (1984) stated "there are effective teachers; their students' praise recognizes

them. There are effective schools scattered across the country where principals and teachers have constructed settings, in the most unlikely places, where learning, growth, and deep satisfaction exist" (p. 268). Ravitch (1983) proclaimed that "to believe in education is to believe in the future, to believe in what may be accomplished through the disciplined use of intelligence, allied with cooperation and good will" (p. 330). It appears that the key to the success of education is the cooperation of Americans working toward shared goals. Therefore, Americans need to agree on what the problems in the public schools are and how to solve them.

Public Opinion and Public Schools

Public schools need community and government support to survive. Many Americans are losing the confidence they once had in the public schools. Plisko (1981) stated that "support for education is profoundly affected by how people feel about the schools. When Americans believe the schools are trying to do a good job of educating their children, they willingly contribute their money, time, and efforts" (p. 21). She also stated that if the schools are perceived as not doing a good job, the support will be lessened.

The crucial element in public support for public education is how people feel about the schools. It has been argued that the information presented by the media has brought to light the problems in the schools (Criscuolo, 1985). Criscuolo (1985) described the situation by stating that "education articles in the nation's press . . . have served to lessen the public's confidence in public education" (p. 16). He concluded that the public has

accepted the issues emphasized by the media as the salient issues in public education. This type of media effect is known as agenda-setting.

The basic tenet of agenda-setting is that the media set the agenda for issues and that the public will regard those issues as salient. Agenda-setting implies that if the media emphasize an issue as important, it will be embraced by the public as important as well. Agenda-setting affects people's cognitions. People's attitudes may also be influenced as well as their opinions.

Hennessey (1981) described the formation of public opinion as a process in which people in a society receive information from a combination of sources. Family, friends, and others provide pieces of data. People also receive information from what they see and hear in various media. Based on the information received through these sources, people form or change their opinions. The collective attitudes are termed public opinion. Analysis of public opinion polls can provide insight into people's attitudes on a variety of issues. The Gallup organization has conducted a yearly poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools since 1969. These polls provide data for a study of public opinion on the various issues in public education.

Statement of the Problem

The premise behind this study is that the media have provided a clear picture of the problems in the public schools. The focus of this study is the idea that the media have set an agenda that details the problems in the public schools and that the public has found the issues emphasized by the media to be salient.

The study takes the form of a content analysis of articles on public education from three news magazines for sample years from 1969 through 1991. Data from the Gallup Poll on the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools is available for analysis of public opinion of education issues during these same years.

The first intent of this study is to determine whether the issues in public education mentioned by the education poll respondents as salient will correspond to the issues emphasized by the media.

The second intent of this study is to ascertain whether issues receiving 100 or more inches of media coverage (or 50 or more inches if no single issue receives more than 99 inches of coverage in a year) will be significantly more negatively covered than issues receiving less than 100 (or less than 50) inches of media coverage. This idea is derived from the fact that the media provide more coverage of certain issues than of others. The issues that receive more negative coverage may be found to be more salient by the public.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Legacy of Progressive Education

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched the satellite Sputnik. This event was highly significant in the unofficial "space race" between the Soviets and the Americans. The Soviets, cold war enemies of the United States, had reached space first. Blame for allowing the Soviets to surpass the United States in space technology was placed on the ineffectiveness of American public school education (Ravitch, 1985). The trend in education prior to Sputnik was known as "life adjustment education." Influenced by the progressive movement, the emphasis was on social learning. Ravitch (1983) explained that "the new education was consistently described as democracy in action, because it substituted teacher-pupil cooperation for teacher authoritarianism, stressed socialization to the group instead of individualism, and championed an educational program that was for all children" (p. 45). Traditional academics were rejected in favor of "real life" subjects. Educators emphasized "effective living" rather than acquisition of knowledge. Not surprisingly, many people did not approve of progressive education.

Critics had been publishing their opinions of progressive education for many years by the time Sputnik was launched. The critics had a variety of complaints about life adjustment education, but most were opposed to its anti-authoritarian, anti-intellectual, and non-traditional basis (Ravitch, 1983). By 1955, the enthusiasm for progressive education was very limited. Ravitch (1983) stated that although progressive education

was intended to be forward-looking and future-oriented, "in reality the spokesmen for the movement had become keepers of the sacred texts, defending the ideas and practices of the past, ignorant of the emerging issues in American life and education" (p. 78). Sputnik was a symbol of the conflict between countries and the conflict over public education.

Open Education

In response to Sputnik and the prior criticism of progressive education, the federal government passed the National Defense Education Act in 1958 (Kaestle, 1990). A new trend took shape which emphasized math and science. The drive for excellence in education was underway by the early 1960s. However, this emphasis on traditional education lasted only a few years. In the 1960s, the socio-political climate of the United States changed drastically. The civil rights movement, Kennedy's assassination, and the increasing American involvement in Vietnam served to lessen the emphasis on competition with the Soviets. Bilingual and multicultural education were becoming more pervasive. As a part of the feminist movement, women were demanding equal educational opportunities for girls and women. This eventually led to the passage of Title IX of the Higher Education Act in 1972, which ended institutionalized discrimination on the basis of gender. At the same time, the youth of America began responding to the call of the counterculture (Ravitch, 1985). The lack of respect for authority and contempt for intellectualism had an influence on education. Educators turned to innovative ideas to respond to the changing social climate.

The concept of open education became very popular in the late 1960s. Advocates

of open education stressed the importance of allowing children to learn at their own rates.

The accompanying emphasis on democracy and equal sharing of power between the student and the teacher fit the counterculture mood perfectly (Ravitch, 1985). Modeled on the British infant school (children ages 5-7), the open classroom presented a way to deal with the variety of student needs. Ravitch (1983) stated, "The British model offered everything: learning activities were individualized and based on play and experience; teaching was informal and responded to children's needs and interests; the children were learning, and they enjoyed school" (p. 240). Many educators who had been proponents of progressive education responded with enthusiasm to open education. Ravitch stated, "In 1970, open education received the kind of publicity that turned it into a Movement with a capital M" (p. 245).

However, open education was not without its critics. Many parents complained about the lack of structure and discipline. A downward trend in public confidence contributed to the decline of open education in the mid-1970s. Additionally, a report published in 1975 revealed that Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores had been declining since 1963 (Ravitch, 1985). As a result, the call went out for a return to traditional education. The public had become intolerant of the new programs and regulations developed for the schools by the federal government. Kaestle (1990) described the late 1970s as a time when officials in the Carter administration were reducing student financial aid programs, easing up on civil rights violations, and lessening the number of regulations on the public schools. In the early 1980s, the relaxed standards of education of the 1970s

were being replaced by a back-to-basics movement led by the new Reagan administration.

A Nation at Risk

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released *A Nation at Risk*. This report laid out the doctrine of education reform for the rest of the decade. A number of similar reports also were published by various foundations and committees during the 1980s. Each report identified problems in public education and provided solutions to reform the system. The National Commission on Excellence in Education summed up the concern of the early 1980s in *A Nation at Risk* by declaring that "if an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (p. 5). Economic distress was the risk. America had fallen behind its competitors, especially Japan. The reform efforts called for stricter discipline, more homework, and a longer school day and school year, all a part of the school system in Japan.

Futrell (1989) described the reform movement of the 1980s as occurring in four stages. The first stage focused on what was being taught, how long students were in class, and who was doing the teaching. State legislatures passed over 700 laws between 1983 and 1985 in an attempt to legislate school reform. The second stage sprang from the legislation period. Educators decided that if reform was to be forthcoming, they must lead the way. Legislators should not have so much power over educational decisions. Reform in education was viewed in terms of the national interest. In this case, the national interest was the economy. The third stage of reform was known as the utilitarian wave. Emphasis

was on the need for graduates who could enter the business world and reclaim America's worldwide economic superiority. Finally, the fourth stage focused on preparing students to meet America's economic needs for the future and helping students to meet their own personal goals. Futrell believed that students need an education that "prepares them not only for a life of work, but also for a life of worth" (p. 14). This final stage suggests that education must have as its goal the balancing of America's economic needs with a student's personal needs.

In 1991, the Bush administration produced a document titled *America 2000: An Education Strategy*. The goals set forth in it demonstrated the urgency with which many people, not only politicians, regarded school reform: Americans will be first in the world in science and math; every adult American will be literate; every school will be free of drugs and violence. These goals were to be met by the year 2000. Americans have yet to see what kind of impact the Clinton administration will have on the public school system.

The good and the bad in the public schools have been examined by the media. The public has read articles about progressive education, back-to-basics, and open schools. Positive aspects of the public schools such as effective teaching and challenging curricula have been addressed, as well as negative aspects such as low standards and insufficient funds. The public has come to some conclusions about their schools. Whether those conclusions were reached through exposure to the coverage of education by the media is not clear. However, with all the information provided by the media on the issues in public education, it is probable that some people have formed opinions about the issues based on

that information. The media has set an agenda in regard to which issues in public education will be covered and how they will be covered. When the public embraces the media's agenda as its own, it is known as agenda-setting.

The Concept of Agenda-Setting

Cohen (1963) stated that the press "may not be successful much of the time telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13). McCombs and Shaw (1972) expanded upon this idea and made it the basis for their pioneering empirical study of agenda-setting. They hypothesized that the mass media set an agenda which influences the public agenda, the issues embraced by the public as salient. The study was conducted in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with 100 undecided voters. McCombs and Shaw studied voter perceptions of the most important issues of the 1968 presidential campaign and compared these perceptions with the actual content of the media used by the voters.

McCombs and Shaw concluded that "the data suggest a very strong relationship between the emphasis placed on different campaign issues by the media . . . and the judgments of voters as to the salience and importance of various campaign topics" (p. 181). The public's agenda reflected the media's agenda. They concluded that the media influenced the cognitions of the public on these issues, but not their feelings or attitudes. The public merely accepted as salient the issues emphasized by the media. This relationship between the media's agenda and the public's agenda became the basis for further study of the agenda-setting concept.

Shaw and McCombs (1977) continued their study of agenda-setting in the 1972 presidential election. They studied a representative sample of Charlotte, North Carolina, voters in order to generalize to the population at large. They hoped to duplicate their findings from the Chapel Hill study and to ascertain whether contingent conditions impacted upon agenda-setting by the media. The results were published in the book *The Emergence of American Political Issues*. McCombs (1992) summarized the importance of this book in his retrospective article on agenda-setting by characterizing it as a major test of the agenda-setting hypothesis. He also described the book as instrumental in developing some of the contingent conditions that may impact upon agenda-setting. They include the need for orientation and the role of interpersonal communication in agenda-setting.

Need for Orientation

The need for orientation is a psychological concept that has to do with each person's need to be familiar with his or her physical and mental environment. People attend to certain media messages to find the information they need to orient themselves. Weaver (1977) stated that "each individual will strive to map his world, to orient himself, to intellectually find his way around" (p. 108). He explained that "as an individual strives to map political (or other) issues through the use of mass media, he is more susceptible (at least in many situations) to the agenda-setting effects of the media" (p. 108). Weaver noted that different levels of need for orientation are related to the frequency and amount of mass media use and to the strength of the agenda-setting effect.

Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal (1981) explained the need for orientation in terms of the relationship between the relevance of a subject and uncertainty about that subject. A high level of relevance combined with a high level of uncertainty produces a high need for orientation. Low uncertainty and high relevance and high uncertainty and low relevance both produce a moderate need for orientation. A low level of interest in a subject combined with a low level of uncertainty about that subject creates a low need for orientation.

McCombs and Weaver (1985) studied the relationship between need for orientation and use of the media. They concluded that studies of aggregate data suggest that a high need for orientation is correlated with increased media agenda-setting effects. They noted, however, that in studies using individual data the relationship between need for orientation and agenda-setting effects is not as strong. They stressed the need for more studies measuring individuals. They explained that although the level of need for orientation has been shown to influence the amount of media use and strength of media agenda-setting effects, other influential variables must also be taken into account. These variables include personal experience with the issues and the amount of interpersonal communication that occurs in regard to the issues.

Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Communication

Shaw (1977) stated that "only recently has the literature taken notice of the possible difference between what issues people think about and what they talk about, the intrapersonal and the interpersonal agendas" (p. 232). Intrapersonal communication is

described as an individual's private thoughts, his or her inner communication.

Interpersonal communication is described as what people talk about with their family, friends, and co-workers. Shaw found that "the more frequent and more active is one's participation in interpersonal networks, the closer is the agreement between one's personal agenda and that of the media" (p. 236). He explained that individuals seek out the media to gain information to be used in a social context: anticipated discussions. He stated that "this need with the prospect of its fulfillment having a social utility leads to heavy use of the media" (p. 236). The individual may arrive at the media's agenda out of his or her own anticipated need, or the media's agenda may be reinforced by the individual's involvement in a social setting. Weaver (1977), using data from the 1972 Charlotte voter study, found that "participation in interpersonal communication is positively related to agenda-setting" (p. 86). He explained that "a group setting may reinforce the press's agenda for us by providing occasions for political interchange on topics supplied by the press" (p. 86).

Shaw (1979) took this idea a step further. He contended that the media may be assuming the role of the group due to the weakened interpersonal ties of this technological society. He explained that loosened family ties, decreased church attachments, and political apathy have resulted in a situation in which the media function as a substitute for personal and group influence. Such dependence on the media may lead to a compulsion to conform to the dominant viewpoint expressed by the media. Shaw's view gives strength to the characterization of the media as a powerful controlling force in society and not simply an agenda-setter.

Shaw (1977) also hypothesized that the interpersonal agenda may resemble the media's agenda at the time of questioning by the researcher, but that the intrapersonal agenda is the result of a cumulative process. He declared that although discussions are most often topical, the human thought process is not. He concluded, "The interpersonal factor appears to be an important set of variables in researching and specifying the conditions under which the agenda-setting behavior of the mass media influences an individual's own agenda of issues" (p. 237). His conception of the development of the intrapersonal agenda as a cumulative process relates to another variable in media agenda-setting: the accumulation of media coverage.

Accumulation of Coverage and Time Lag

Salwen (1988) studied the effect of accumulation of coverage on the public's acceptance of issues as salient. He performed a content analysis of the coverage of environmental issues in three Michigan newspapers. He then surveyed Michigan residents to determine the public's agenda on seven environmental issues. He discovered that a relationship between the media's agenda and the public's agenda occurred after eight to ten weeks of accumulated coverage. He suggested that the "continuing endurance of an issue or issues in the news media will also determine what the public will think about" (p. 106). Furthermore, he suggested that the public may interpret the endurance of an issue in the media to mean that the issue is of importance and should be put on the public's agenda. He concluded, "Once people learn about salient issues they are likely to continue to regard such issues as salient for some time even after media coverage declines" (p. 106). The

effect of the accumulation of coverage is also related to what has become known as the time lag in agenda-setting.

Agenda-setting occurs over time. Stone and McCombs (1981) conducted a study in order to determine the length of time it takes for an issue to become a part of the public's agenda. They compared two sets of voter data from 1972 and 1973 with data obtained from a content analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek*. They discovered that "the maximum time frame during which the media agenda matches the public agenda is a four-month period extending from at least six months prior to two months prior to the interview period" (p. 52). Additionally, they stated that "the pattern of correlation also demonstrates that more than the cumulative impact of mass communication is involved. There definitely is also a time lag in the movement of issue salience from the media agenda to the public agenda" (pp. 52-53). They cautioned that the two-to-six month time frame is not concrete. It should be taken as a suggested period of time for research on media agenda-setting and the relationship to the public's agenda. Other variables are also involved in agenda-setting by the media. An individual's personal experience with an issue is the focus of the study of issue obtrusiveness.

Issue Obtrusiveness

Zucker (1978) was interested in variables in news media influence. He noted that it is not clear whether the news media influence is the same for all issues. He believed that the news media can influence public opinion on some issues and not others. He developed the idea of a variable of issue obtrusiveness. An issue is obtrusive when people have

direct experience with it. Unobtrusive issues are those with which people do not have firsthand experience. He discovered through his study that some issues are obtrusive such as cost of living, while others are unobtrusive such as drugs. He suggested that the media influence the public's agenda on unobtrusive issues more than on obtrusive issues. He also discovered the time lag to be significant in public acceptance of the media agenda. Zucker concluded, "The less direct experience people have with an issue area, and the less time that that area has been prominent in the news, the greater is the news media's influence on public opinion on that issue" (p. 239).

Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal (1981) also studied issue obtrusiveness and discovered that "issue obtrusiveness apparently is not a constant and universal attribute of specific issues, nor is it a stable and determined characteristic of any given topic" (p. 105). They believed that factors such as social context and local conditions may be as important as degree of experience. Issue obtrusiveness may be present in different degrees or may not be present at all.

Sohn (1984) studied the agenda-setting effect of a community newspaper in relation to the issue of mining. A new mine was to be built in a town and Sohn wondered whether the newspaper agenda regarding the mine would match the public's agenda. The town was a mining town and the residents had much experience with mining. Therefore, the issue of mining was a very obtrusive one to the residents of the town. Sohn discovered a positive correlation between the newspaper's agenda and the public's agenda. Even though the issue of mining was obtrusive, the opinion of the residents of the town in

regard to the mine reflected the agenda of the newspaper.

Lasorsa and Wanta (1990) hypothesized that personal experience with an issue would interfere with the agenda-setting effect of the media. They actually discovered that "the more a person was personally involved in an issue, the more likely he or she was to conform to the news media agenda" (p. 812). They did not attribute this to one factor, but theorized that many people turn to the media for confirmation of their experiences. People would then be more sensitive to the media's agenda. Lasorsa and Wanta also emphasized that what is obtrusive to one person may not be obtrusive to another. An issue cannot be considered inherently obtrusive or unobtrusive. Issue obtrusiveness is just one mediating variable in media agenda-setting. The influence of the media on public opinion must be examined as well.

A Link to Public Opinion Formation

The basic premise of agenda-setting, that the media tell people what to think about, but not what to think, continues to be the basis of much of the research on agenda-setting. However, several studies have examined the hypothesis that the media may do more than simply set the agenda for the public. The media may affect public opinion formation. Weaver, Graber, McCombs, and Eyal (1981) discovered that the media affected voter evaluations of candidates in the 1976 presidential election.

Funkhouser (1973) conducted a study of public opinion in regard to issues of the 1960s. He set out "to relate news media coverage to public opinion and to the realities underlying the various issues of the sixties, examining trends in each of these as a means of

exploring the dynamics of public opinion" (p. 62). He analyzed Gallup Poll data on the most important problem facing America. He also performed a content analysis of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* to determine the issues emphasized by these magazines. He related the news coverage of issues to the actual reality of what was occurring during the 1960s. He discovered that certain problems reported in the Gallup Poll corresponded to the media's agenda. He also discovered that some news coverage was created and did not focus on the actual realities occurring at the time. He stated that "at any given time, the 'big issue' in the news was not necessarily really the big issue" (p. 74). He concluded, "The amount of media attention given to an issue strongly influences its visibility to the public. However, the amount of media attention does not seem to relate as closely to public attitudes concerning the issues" (p. 74). This conclusion gives support to the agenda-setting concept, but does not imply that a significant connection exists between agenda-setting and public opinion.

Lang and Lang (1981) believed that studies have ignored how issues originate and how agendas are built. They studied the development of Watergate as an issue. They found that "what people think may not be as easily separable from what they think about, as the various formulations of agenda-setting have implied" (p. 449). They argued that the media build the agenda for certain issues, and that Watergate was built into an issue by the media. They concluded that in analyzing media agenda-setting "one must go beyond a search for simple correspondences between the treatment of certain topics in the press and the extent to which the mass public is aware, informed, and concerned about these

matters" (p. 453).

Weaver (1984) argued that the studies that have been done on the relationship between media agenda-setting and public opinion suggest that "there is likely to be a relationship among media emphasis on an issue, the salience of that issue, and public opinion" (p. 689). The relationship between media agenda-setting and public opinion formation is in need of more study before conclusions can be drawn concerning a direct relationship. He believed that the studies that have been done "should caution us against assuming that mass media have a very limited, or negligible, role in shaping public opinion" (p. 690). Public cognitions may become public opinions.

In *News that Matters*, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) described the relationship between television news and the American political process. They conducted experiments to assess the agenda-setting effect of television news on voters. They found that "people who were shown network broadcasts edited to draw attention to a particular problem assigned greater importance to that problem" (p. 112). Respondents cited that problem as more important than they did prior to watching the broadcasts. They stated that "these experimental results were generally corroborated by our analysis of trends in network news coverage and national public opinion" (p. 113). Their findings indicate that the way Americans view society is powerfully shaped by the stories they see on the television news. They concluded that "in commanding attention and shaping opinion, television is now an authority virtually without peer" (p. 133).

Weaver (1991) studied the federal budget deficit to determine if the salience of this

issue to the public is related to the amount of knowledge of the issue, strength of public opinion about one solution to the issue, and political behavior such as voting and signing petitions in regard to the issue. He used data provided by a survey of Indiana residents. He concluded from the data that media agenda-setting did have an effect on public knowledge, opinion, and behavior. His findings suggest that "increased salience of an issue is accompanied by increased knowledge of its possible causes and solutions, stronger opinions, less likelihood of taking a neutral position, and more likelihood of participating in political behavior" (p. 66). This lends support to the hypothesis that media agenda-setting may influence people's attitudes toward an issue and not simply their cognitions.

Cognitions and Attitudes

Roberts and Maccoby (1985) discussed the difference between cognitions and attitudes. The agenda-setting hypothesis is described as affecting people's cognitions. They explained that "this approach focuses on how the media influence people's levels of awareness about issues as opposed to how the media influence their knowledge about those issues" (p. 547). They stated that it is recognized now that some media campaigns and programs may have an influence on people's attitudes and values. They pointed out that "it appears that even when the impact of mass communication is primarily affective, attitude change usually is characterized by a slow process of erosion and accretion rather than by one of sudden upheaval and conversion" (p. 547). Although the agenda-setting effect of the media is on people's cognitions, Roberts and Maccoby argued that "what

influence occurs takes place through changes in cognitions that, in turn, influence people's attitudes" (p. 547).

Similarly, Shaw (1979) stated that "attitudes and behaviors are usually governed by cognitions--what a person knows, thinks, believes" (p. 101). He argued that "only with long-term studies can media's influence on cognition be traced validly to their ultimate behavioral effects" (p. 104).

Clearly, the media have some effect, whether it be on cognitions or attitudes or both. Roberts and Maccoby (1985) discussed the types of effects the media have. They explained that effects can be distinguished in terms of the formation of new attitudes, cognitions, behaviors, or emotions; in terms of reinforcement of existing responses; in terms of clarification of existing, but hazy responses; and in terms of minor to dramatic changes in existing responses. They argued that the media affect people in different ways depending on how they interpret the messages they receive.

Criticism of Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting has been widely accepted by many in the field of mass communication as a theory of mass media effects. Several researchers, however, have had difficulty accepting certain aspects of the agenda-setting hypothesis. McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes (1974) believed that the basic description of agenda-setting is too simplistic. They believed that a "lack of specificity of the process involved" exists (p. 137). They stated that "due to this lack of specificity, particular attention must be paid to conceptualization and measurement, identification of possible limiting or contributory

conditions, and correct comparison criteria" (p. 137). With these concerns in mind, they designed a voter study of the 1972 presidential campaign to test the agenda-setting hypothesis. They studied two Madison, Wisconsin, newspapers with the intent to discover whether the issues emphasized by each newspaper in regard to the campaign corresponded with the issues given as salient by surveyed readers.

They found that the media emphasized stories related to the topic Honesty in Government, but that the respondents rated this topic as less salient. Conversely, the respondents cited the topics of Defense Spending and Tax Burden as very salient, while the media gave less attention to these topics. They also discovered that the agenda-setting effect varied depending on the respondents' age, partisanship, and amount of newspaper use. McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes concluded that "our results provide a strong warning against the uncritical acceptance of agenda-setting as a broad and unqualified media effect" (p. 159).

Iyengar (1979) conducted a study of agenda-setting in regard to television news. He believed that the hypothesis is weak in that it "constitutes at best, a partial explanation of issue salience as its focus is limited to the effects of media issue coverage. Various other sources of issue salience including individual characteristics and environmental variables are ignored" (p. 396). He also believed that "in the case of television news, the agenda-setting hypothesis has not been consistently supported" (p. 396).

He studied the 1974 and 1976 election campaigns in order to compare agenda-setting in two different types of campaigns: congressional and presidential. He

used surveys to measure issue salience among voters. He also attempted to identify "contributory or contingent variables which may affect the news coverage issue salience relationship" (p. 399). Iyengar discovered that "changes in television coverage of political issues are not accompanied by similar changes in audience perceptions of issue salience" (p. 401). He found that "viewers who rely on television for their political information tend to be less in agreement with the issue content of television news than those who rely on newspapers" (p. 408).

Iyengar concluded that "though a modest degree of congruence between television news coverage and viewer perceptions of issue salience was detected, the causal directions of the relationship was unclear" (pp. 409-410). He stated that "agenda-setting effects were more prominent among infrequent viewers of television news and the issue-salience news coverage relationship did not vary across a large battery of control variables" (p. 410).

Becker (1982) conducted a review of the literature on agenda-setting. He identified several problems that were evident in McCombs and Shaw's (1972) pioneering study of agenda-setting. He found that the two key variables in the hypothesized relationship were not completely defined. He believed that aggregation of data across sample respondents is an inappropriate way to test a hypothesis about media effects on individuals. Additionally, he stated that "potentially important methodological and conceptual issues such as the order of effects and the proper comparisons for evaluating effects are not addressed" (p. 524).

In regard to conceptual problems, Becker explained that definitions do not exist for the two key variables, which are the message variable, the cause in the hypothesis, and the criterion, the audience response variable. He also noted that a lack of a precise definition of "issue" exists. This word can have different meanings to different people. In regard to methodology, Becker stated that "an adequate test of the agenda-setting hypothesis requires the researcher to move beyond these simple aggregate comparisons" (p. 528). He noted that "the analysis must involve on an individual-by-individual basis the matching of a medium agenda with an individual agenda, . . . an issue by issue analysis where contrasts are presented between issues high on the media agenda and those low on the media agenda, . . . or some similar technique" (p. 528).

Becker mentioned the topic of the order of effects as well. This subject has to do with whether the media's agenda becomes the public's agenda or whether the public's agenda is mirrored by the media. Roberts and Maccoby (1985) claimed that "to the extent that the news media are charged with reporting about what concerns the public, it is possible that public concerns influence the media agenda" (p. 564). They also stated that "even more plausible is the possibility that, at least on some issues, both public and the media agendas simply reflect events in the environment" (p. 564). They concluded that "overall, evidence is beginning to accumulate to support the causal influence on the public agenda--for at least some issues under some conditions" (p. 564).

In regard to topic of comparisons, Becker quoted the study done by McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes (1974) in which they compared readers of two different newspapers

with opposite agendas. Becker noted that problems exist in this area because newspapers generally have very similar agendas. Comparisons between different types of media also present problems in that audiences overlap and people differ in their use of the same media. He concluded that "there is an important lesson lurking in the agenda-setting research literature: Be suspicious of the simple explanation of social phenomena, no matter how promising it sounds; things are probably always more complex than they seem on first notice" (p. 533). He stated, "The effects of the mass media on citizen assessment of issue importance are relatively unplotted. Whether such effects take place with any regularity is still an open question" (p. 534).

Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) also studied the agenda-setting hypothesis. They explained that "opinion divides over whether media effects have been demonstrated at all; over the relative power of television versus newspapers in setting the public's agenda; and over the causal direction of the relation between the public's judgments and the media's priorities" (pp. 848-849). They believed that the problem may be with the evidence that has been gathered and not the hypothesis itself. They stated that "much of the confusion is the result of the disjuncture between cross-sectional comparisons favored by most agenda-setting researchers, on the one hand, and the agenda-setting hypothesis which implies a dynamic process" (p. 849). They believed that any agenda-setting effects must be investigated over time.

They conducted two experiments in which voters were surveyed on various political topics. Then some of the voters watched newscasts which had been altered by

the researchers to include more information on a national problem. The control group watched newscasts that did not focus on this problem. None of the respondents knew that the newscasts had been altered. After viewing the newscasts, the respondents took another survey. The results showed that "participants exposed to a steady stream of news about defense or about pollution came to believe that defense or pollution were more consequential problems" (p. 852). They concluded that "viewers exposed to news devoted to a particular problem become more convinced of its importance" (p. 852).

Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder also evaluated the agenda-setting hypothesis in regard to the media's ability to influence the standards people use in evaluating the president. They found that "a president's overall reputation, and, to a lesser extent, his apparent competence, both depend on the presentations of network news programs" (p. 853). They concluded, "We have shown that by ignoring some problems and attending to others, television news programs profoundly affect which problems viewers take seriously" (p. 855). Although they believed that confusion and problems exist in regard to the agenda-setting hypothesis, their research ultimately resulted in support for the hypothesis.

Agenda-setting is a theory of media effects. It has been shown that a variety of factors influence whether the media's agenda is accepted by the public. People use the media to orient themselves. An individual with a high need for orientation tends to use the media more frequently. Frequent media use may lead to stronger agenda-setting effects. The amount of interpersonal experience an individual has may affect the media's agenda-setting effect. People who are more active in interpersonal networks tend to agree

more closely with the media's agenda. Individuals may also use the media as a substitute for interpersonal relationships and therefore adhere more closely to the media's agenda. Agenda-setting has been shown to occur over time. Additionally, an accumulation of media coverage of an issue tends to strengthen the agenda-setting effect. The amount of personal experience an individual has with an issue also influences the media's agenda-setting effect. Agenda-setting is strongest on issues with which the public has little firsthand experience. Whether agenda-setting affects an individual's opinions or cognitions is not clear. Although agenda-setting is not without its critics, it has been shown to be a useful theory of media effects.

Hypotheses

The media are one source of information on the issues in public education. When asked about the biggest problems facing the public schools, respondents to the education poll must draw upon their knowledge of salient issues. Although contingent conditions may strengthen or weaken the media's agenda-setting effect, it is hypothesized that media agenda-setting influences the public's agenda in regard to public school issues.

H1: The rank order of the top six issues, as measured by percentage, mentioned by education poll respondents as the biggest problem in public schools for each sample year will positively correlate with the amount of coverage, as measured in column inches, devoted to those issues by the media for each sample year.

The media cover situations that deviate from the normal patterns of society. These situations are often negative. The public schools receive the same type of coverage as

other societal institutions, but the media cover certain issues in public education more extensively than others. The idea under examination has to do with whether issues that the media cover more extensively also receive larger percentages of negative coverage than issues that receive less coverage. If the issues that the media cover more extensively also receive larger percentages of negative coverage, those issues may be the issues that get reported by the public as problems in the public schools, even though issues that receive less coverage may also be problems.

H2: Issues receiving 100 or more inches of media coverage (or 50 or more inches if no single issue receives more than 99 inches of coverage in a year) will be significantly more negatively covered than issues receiving less than 100 (or less than 50) inches of media coverage.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Content Analysis

Content analysis is an unobtrusive measure of communication because it does not interfere with the subject under study. Content analysis is simply the study of the content of some form of communication such as newspapers, television, books, or magazines. The scientific definitions have varied depending on the scientist's perspective. Berelson (1952) was one of the first to define content analysis. He declared that content analysis is "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). Later researchers raised two main objections to Berelson's definition.

The first objection has to do with observing only the manifest content of communication. The manifest content is the concrete, visible aspect of communication. Certain words may be coded to measure an aspect of the material. The manifest content does not include analysis of the latent content, the underlying meaning of the communication. Observation of the latent content depends on the overall evaluation of the material, rather than on word counts. The tone of the communication is important in assessing the latent content. Carney (1972) stated that Berelson's definition "restricts the operations of the technique to those with the highest validity on the immediate face of things" (p. 24). Berelson's definition seems to restrict making inferences from data because of its emphasis on observing only the manifest content. Carney believed making

inferences is important in studying the effects of the communication. Budd, Thorpe, and Donohew (1967) refined the definition to put the emphasis on the drawing of inferences. They noted that the analyst must be concerned with the larger questions of the process and effects of communication. Carney believed that an analyst cannot argue from a communication to its effects without making inferences.

A second objection has to do with the idea that content analysis is simply a frequency count. Carney explained that Berelson's definition requires that the question be defined in a such a way that the answers can be counted. Krippendorff (1980) noted that qualitative methods have proved successful in studying propaganda and psychotherapy, and in computer analysis of linguistic data. Holsti (1969) defined content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (p. 14). This definition is more broad than Berelson's and allows for examination of both manifest and latent content.

Krippendorff (1980) elaborated on Holsti's definition by stating that content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p. 21). He emphasized the need for content analysis to be both reliable, through replication, and valid because it is an instrument of science. Carney summarized content analysis as "a general-purpose analytical infrastructure, elaborated for a wide range of uses" (p. 26). This definition includes the observation of both manifest and latent content and quantitative as well as qualitative studies. Content analysis is a significant method for scientific measurement.

This study of the media agenda-setting process and public education issues takes the form of a content analysis of the articles written about public education in three news magazines for sample years.

News Magazines

The three news magazines used in this study are: *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. Funkhouser (1973) used these magazines in his study of the issues of the 1960s. He rationalized their use by stating that the content of news magazines reflects the content of television and newspapers. He argued that "if television and newspapers were presenting abundant material concerning ecology (or drugs, or whatever), the news magazines probably would be doing so also" (p. 64). McCombs and Shaw (1972) noted that because news magazines appear weekly, they lack the time constraints of newspapers and television. News magazines can therefore provide deeper analyses of issues over time.

Each of these magazines is considered to be mainstream. They are easily available to members of the public through subscription, newsstands, supermarkets, and other print media outlets. The *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* (1993) lists the current United States circulation figures for each magazine: *Time*: 4,094,935; *Newsweek*: 3,211,958; and *U.S. News and World Report*: 2,311,534. Each magazine is published weekly.

Although these three magazines are often lumped together under the heading "news magazines," they each had their own unique beginning and can be distinguished by their history. *Time* is the magazine with the highest circulation of the three, but it has

often been criticized. Henry Luce and Briton Hadden began publishing *Time* on March 3, 1923 (Nourie & Nourie, 1990). Luce and Hadden hoped to provide a news magazine that would appeal to all Americans. The clever use of language by the writers became known as "timestyle." *Time* writers also rewrote articles that had been published in newspapers. This reporting method became known as "group journalism." The articles did not carry bylines. Critics of the "group journalism" method noted that all the credit went to the organization and not to the writers. Bylines were instituted in 1970, but articles still go back and forth between writers, editors, and others. *Time* has also been criticized as biased. Luce was accused of injecting his own political ideals into the articles. Despite the criticism, *Time* has endured to become the most popular news magazine in the United States.

Newsweek was first published on February 18, 1933 (Nourie & Nourie, 1990). *Newsweek* was known for its outstanding articles and photography in the 1940s. The coverage of the civil rights movement in the 1960s was the first done by a newsweekly. *Newsweek* fiercely competed with *Time*, and even surpassed *Time* in advertisements in the 1960s. *Newsweek* has also won awards for its high-quality reporting.

In 1948, the magazine *United States News* and the magazine *World Report* merged to become the magazine now known as *U.S. News and World Report*. The magazine differs from *Time* and *Newsweek* in its strict attention to national and international news and its focus on government. In the 1950s, *U.S. News* was averaging 90 pages of news per week due to its lengthy analytical articles on single topics, full texts of speeches, and use

of graphics (Nourie & Nourie, 1990). Much of the success of the magazine has been attributed to its straightforward approach to news which provides a distinctive format that contrasts with more culture-oriented *Time* and *Newsweek*. In the late 1980s, *U.S. News and World Report* expanded to provide more coverage of such topics as health, travel, and education to appeal to a wider audience.

Gallup Poll Data

The Gallup organization has conducted the poll on the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools since 1969. The education poll was initiated by Charles F. Kettering II, grandson of auto tycoon and inventor Charles F. Kettering. Kettering II had degrees in education and social studies. He set up a foundation, CFK Ltd., to support education projects. One of these projects was the Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward The Public Schools (Elam, 1983). George Gallup, Sr. was very enthusiastic about the idea of such a poll as he had been a university professor before developing the Gallup Poll in the 1930s. Stanley Elam became involved with the education poll after summarizing the first one for the magazine he edited, the education journal *Phi Delta Kappan*. Edward Brainerd, president of CFK Ltd., asked Elam if the *Kappan* would be interested in publishing the full text of the education poll. Elam accepted and all the poll data has been published every fall since 1969 in the *Phi Delta Kappan*. Elam retired as editor of the *Kappan* in 1980 and began to work strictly on the education poll. George Gallup, Sr. remained involved in analyzing and presenting results of the education poll until his death in 1984.

Elam described how the education poll is conducted. Every November, members of Phi Delta Kappa, education writers, legislators, and other individuals submit ideas for questions. In January, a panel of Gallup staff members, principals, teachers, and others interested in education meets to discuss the ideas. The questions are then developed and field tested. Some questions are used for several years, but then are dropped and new questions are added. Approximately 40 final questions are given to Gallup's interviewers who complete the actual polling. The polling has been done in April, May, or June, depending on the year. The data are analyzed and *Kappan* staff members receive the information in July to be edited for publication. The education poll is then published in a fall issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, usually the September issue. Occasionally, the education polls have been published in October or November. The first education poll taken in 1969 was actually completed in February of that year. Subsequent education polls followed the schedule described by Elam.

Elam and Brodinsky (1989) stated, "One of the prime functions of the Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa Polls of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools is to identify and report national trends in public opinion on questions and issues of interest to education policy makers" (p. 3). The education poll has included many questions since 1969. Some questions have been included repeatedly for comparative purposes. A large database of public education information has been accumulated.

For each education poll, a sample of between approximately 1,500 and 2,100 adults from all over the United States and from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds

has been polled (Elam & Brodinsky, 1989). In 1969, the percentage of respondents with children in public schools was 44%. This percentage eventually decreased to an average of 28% in the late 1970s and 1980s (Elam & Brodinsky, 1989). The percentage of respondents with children in private schools has generally been between 5% and 8% (Elam & Brodinsky, 1989).

Elam and Brodinsky (1989) stated, "The figures presented in these poll reports are relatively accurate for the nation as a whole at the time of polling" (p. 3). They also pointed out that "it is well to remember that a change of one percentage point, assuming that the survey sample is representative, means a change of attitude or opinion by at least 1.5 million persons" (p. 4). They also explained that changes of a few percentage points on an issue from year to year may seem unimportant until they are translated into numbers of people.

The Gallup Poll data for this study is taken from the only question asked annually since the education poll began: "What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?" The responses to this open-ended question have encompassed a variety of topics over the years. Many of the same issues have been mentioned year after year, with different percentages of respondents ranking those issues as the biggest problem.

Time Dimension

The present study is a longitudinal study. The time period for this study was chosen on the basis of available Gallup Poll information. Data from the Gallup Polls on

education are compared with data gathered from the content analysis of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*. The broad sample period is between 1969 and 1991.

Sample years during this time period are used in this study.

Sample Poll Years and Content Analysis Months

The eight sample years are 1969, 1971, 1972, 1976, 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1991.

The sample years were chosen to include years from each of the four decades represented in the Gallup Poll data. The year 1969 was chosen as the only year representing the 1960s because it was the first year the poll was taken. This study deals with data from only one year, chosen at random, for the 1990s. Three years from the 1970s and three years from the 1980s were chosen at random for a final total of eight years.

The content of the three news magazines under study was examined over the six-month period prior to the month of the Gallup Poll in each sample year. The following table indicates the sample year, the month in which the poll was taken for that year, and the six months used in this study as the sample months for each year.

Table 1

Sample Months Based on Month of Gallup Poll Survey for Each Sample Year

Sample Year	Poll Month	Sample Months
1969	February	August, 1968-January, 1969
1971	April	October, 1970-March, 1971
1972	April	October, 1971-March, 1972
1976	April	October, 1975-March, 1976
1982	May	November, 1981-April, 1982
1984	May	November, 1983-April, 1984
1986	April	October, 1985-March, 1986
1991	May	November, 1990-April, 1991

The six-month time span is based on the agenda-setting study by Stone and McCombs (1981) whose data suggested that there is "an approximate two-to-six month period for the transition of the mass media agenda to the public agenda" (p. 550). They noted that their study is "methodologically valuable in its suggestion that agenda-setting researchers look a few months prior to their survey fieldwork for the best match between the media agenda and the public's agenda" (p. 55).

Statistical Analysis

The articles collected for the content analysis were limited to those that covered an

issue or issues in primary or secondary public education. For the purpose of this study, an article was defined to include news stories, features, editorials, interviews, and columns. Headlines, charts, graphs, drawings, and photographs were not included. The unit of analysis for the content analysis is one vertical column inch devoted to an issue pertaining to public education. Therefore, if an article partially addressed an issue in public education, only the portion of the article that pertained to public education was measured.

Analysis of H1: The top six issues, according to the percentage of respondents who mentioned them as the biggest problem for each year, were correlated with the total amount of column-inch space devoted to those issues during the six-month period prior to the poll for each sample year. Although the Gallup Poll question "What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools in this community must deal?" is open-ended, only the top six responses mentioned were chosen. The sixth-issue cut-off point was selected because issues mentioned below the sixth rank usually had response percentages of 5% or less.

Analysis of H2: The issues that received 25 or more column inches of both positive and negative coverage for all three magazines combined for each sample year were coded by tone as either positive or negative. For each sample year a chi-square test was performed using the number of inches of positive and negative coverage of issues that received 100 or more inches of media coverage (or 50 or more inches if no single issue received more than 99 inches of coverage in a year) and the number of inches of positive and negative coverage of issues that received less than 100 (or less than 50) inches of

media coverage.

Tone

The coverage of each issue was coded as positive or negative according to tone. Tone is best described as the general feeling an individual gets from reading an article. For purposes of measurement, specific definitions and words and phrases were used to code the issue or issues in each article as having a positive or negative tone. The definitions for positive or negative tone are as follows:

Positive: Public schools are portrayed as effective and achieving the goals of high test scores, competent teaching and administration, successful preparation of students for jobs and for the future, and using relevant and challenging curricula. Violence and drug problems are dealt with effectively.

Words and phrases that connote a positive tone include: successful, relevant, innovative, challenging, excellent, quality, effective, tranquil, creative, motivated, high achieving, high standards, financially sound, first place, rank high, well-rounded students, bright students, individualized instruction, making progress, and good teachers.

Negative: Public schools are portrayed as ineffective, needing reform in curricula, teaching, and structure, not meeting the needs of students in preparing them for jobs and for the future, and not effectively dealing with violence and drugs.

Words and phrases that connote a negative tone include: ineffective, embattled, bleak, failure, weak, mediocre, disaster, troubled, crisis, dismal, needing reform, at risk, national problem, last place, sliced budgets, militant teachers, appalling conditions,

lawlessness and disorder, without hope, and financial woes.

Intercoder Reliability

Two individuals were used to code the coverage of the issues as either positive or negative in tone. The intercoder reliability score was .82, which was calculated using the formula reported by Holsti (1969).

Amount of Coverage

The total number of articles collected for all eight sample years was 280. For each sample year, an average of 35 articles was compiled. The number of articles accumulated from each magazine is as follows: 72 from *Time*, 108 from *Newsweek*, and 100 from *U.S. News and World Report*. A wide range of issues was covered in the articles.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one, which theorized a positive correlation between the amount of news coverage and the percentage of people perceiving an issue to be relevant, was supported in part and denied in part. A positive relationship was found for the sample years 1971, 1972, 1984, and 1986 (see Tables 3, 4, 7, and 8). For the other four years, 1969, 1976, 1982, and 1991, correlations between the amount of media coverage and issue salience were negative (see Tables 2, 5, 6, and 9).

Table 2

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1969

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Discipline	26	4
Facilities	22	4
Teachers	17	28
Finances	14	48
Integration	13	71
Parents' lack of interest	7	0
(r = -.30)		

As shown in Table 2, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is negative for the sample year 1969.

In 1969, the public was mainly focused on the issues of discipline and facilities. Although the issue of discipline received 26% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem and the issue of facilities received 22% of their votes, the media gave only four inches of coverage to each of these issues in 1969. Of the education poll respondents, 7% also chose the issue of parents' lack of interest as the biggest problem in the public schools. The media did not provide any coverage of the issue of parents' lack of interest in 1969.

The media gave 71 inches of coverage to the issue of integration, but only 13% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of integration as the biggest problem in the public schools. The issue of finances received 48 inches of coverage, but 14% of the education poll respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem. Although the issue of finances received less media coverage, more education poll respondents chose it over the issue of integration as the biggest problem.

The issue of teachers received 17% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem in the public schools in 1969. The media, however, only provided 28 inches of coverage of this issue.

Table 3

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1971

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Finances	23	25
Integration	21	205
Discipline	14	0
Facilities	13	0
Drugs	12	0
Teachers	6	15
$(r = .53)$		

As shown in Table 3, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is positive for the sample year 1971, indicating that the media's agenda was accepted as salient by the public.

In 1971, the education poll respondents gave the largest percentage of their votes for the biggest problem, 23%, to the issue of finances. The media, however, only provided 25 inches of coverage of the issue of finances. The issue of integration received 21% of the education poll respondents' votes. However, the media coverage of this issue was 205 inches. A larger percentage of the public had begun to view the issue of integration as a problem. Furthermore, the media had begun to cover the issue of

integration more extensively.

In 1971, the issue of discipline received 14% of the education poll respondents' votes. This was a decline from 26% in 1969 (see Table 2, p. 43). The percentage of the respondents who chose the issue of facilities as the biggest problem also declined from 22% in 1969 (see Table 2, p. 43) to 13% in 1971. The issues of discipline and facilities did not receive any media coverage in 1971.

The issue of teachers had been chosen by 17% of the respondents as the biggest problem in 1969 (see Table 2, p. 43). In 1971, the issue of teachers received only 6% of the respondents' votes for the biggest problem. The media coverage of the issue of teachers declined from 28 inches in 1969 (see Table 2, p. 43) to 15 inches in 1971.

The issue of drugs ranked among the top six biggest problems in the public schools in 1971. The media did not provide any coverage of this issue, yet 12% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of drugs as the biggest problem in 1971. The issue of drugs was not mentioned among the top six biggest problems in 1969 (see Table 2, p. 43) by the education poll respondents.

Table 4

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1972

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Discipline	23	0
Finances	19	260
Integration	18	890
Teachers	14	79
Large schools/classes	10	0
Parents' lack of interest	6	0
(r = .33)		

As shown in Table 4, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is positive for the sample year 1972, indicating that although the correlation is weak, the media's agenda was accepted as salient by the public.

In 1972, the media were very focused on the issues of finances and integration. The issue of integration received 890 inches of coverage in 1972, but the percentage of respondents who chose it as the biggest problem declined from 21% in 1971 (see Table 3, p. 45) to 18% in 1972. Similarly, the issue of finances received 260 inches of coverage in 1972, but the percentage of respondents who chose it as the biggest problem declined from 23% in 1971 (see Table 3, p. 45) to 19% in 1972.

The public was very focused on the issue of discipline in 1972. The issue of discipline received 23% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem. The media did not provide any coverage of this issue in 1972. Additionally, the issue of large schools/classes received 10% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem in 1972. The issue of parents' lack of interest was chosen by 6% of respondents as the biggest problem. The media did not provide any coverage of these issues in 1972. The lack of involvement of the parents in the schools again was seen as a problem, as it was in 1969, when 7% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of parents' lack of interest as the biggest problem (see Table 2, p. 43).

The percentage of the education poll respondents who chose the issue of teachers as the biggest problem increased from 6% in 1971 (see Table 3, p. 45) to 14% in 1972. The media's coverage of this issue increased from 15 inches in 1971 (see Table 3, p. 45) to 79 inches in 1972.

Table 5

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1976

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Discipline	25	10
Integration	15	174
Finances	14	42
Curriculum	14	114
Drugs	11	20
Teachers	11	0
$(r = -.08)$		

As shown in Table 5, there is no Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda for the sample year 1976. The media provided some coverage of all but one of the issues mentioned as the biggest problem in the public schools by the education poll respondents.

The issue of teachers was the only issue among the top six issues mentioned by the education poll respondents as the biggest problem that was not covered by the media in 1976. The public was very focused on the issue of discipline. One-quarter of all the education poll respondents chose the issue of discipline as the biggest problem, while the media devoted only 10 inches of coverage to that issue in 1976.

The media focused attention on the issue of curriculum in 1976. The issue of curriculum appeared for the first time among the top six issues chosen by the education poll respondents as the biggest problem in the public schools in 1976. The issue of curriculum was chosen by 14% of the education poll respondents as the biggest problem in 1976.

The media gave 174 inches of coverage to the issue of integration in 1976, while 15% of the education poll respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem. The year 1976 was the last sample year in which the issue of integration was covered as extensively as it had been in previous years. It is interesting to note, however, that for three sample years, 1969, 1971, and 1972, the issue of integration received large amounts of media coverage and many of the education poll respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem in the public schools.

The issue of drugs received 20 inches of coverage in 1976. This is an increase in coverage from 1971 when the media did not provide any coverage of this issue (see Table 3, p. 45). However, only 11% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of drugs as the biggest problem in 1976. This was a decline from 12% in 1971 (see Table 3, p. 45). The issue of drugs did not rank among the top six biggest problems in the public schools in 1972 (see Table 4, p. 47).

Table 6

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1982

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Discipline	27	0
Finances	22	0
Drugs	20	0
Curriculum	11	161
Teachers	10	0
Teachers' lack of interest	7	0
(r = -.32)		

As shown in Table 6, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is negative for the sample year 1982. The issue of curriculum is the only issue among the top six mentioned as the biggest problem in the public schools by the education poll respondents that received any media coverage.

The education poll respondents gave much attention to the issues of discipline, finances, and drugs. In 1982, the issue of discipline received 27% of the education poll respondents votes as the biggest problem, the issue of finances received 22% of the respondents' votes, and the issue of drugs received 20% of the votes. The media did not provide any coverage of these issues in 1982.

The media was focused only on the issue of curriculum. The issue of curriculum received 161 inches of coverage in 1982, but only 11% of the education poll respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem in the public schools. This data is very interesting because issues such as finances, drugs, and teachers mentioned by the education poll respondents as among the top six biggest problems in 1982 had received coverage in previous years. The issue of finances received 42 inches of media coverage in 1976 (see Table 5, p. 49) and 260 inches of coverage in 1972 (see Table 4, p. 47). Similarly, the issue of drugs received 20 inches of coverage in 1976 (see Table 5, p. 49). The issue of teachers had received 79 inches of coverage in 1972 (see Table 4, p. 47). The media's focus on the issue of curriculum in 1982 was unusual.

Table 7

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1984

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Discipline	27	58
Drugs	18	0
Curriculum	15	37
Finances	14	38
Teachers	14	30
Integration	6	3
(r = .64)		

As shown in Table 7, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is positive for the sample year 1984. The year 1984 is the sample year with the strongest positive correlation of all the sample years.

The media devoted 58 inches of coverage to the issue of discipline in 1984. This was the first sample year that the media provided a fairly large amount of coverage of the issue of discipline. The issue of discipline was chosen by 27% of the respondents as the biggest problem in 1984.

An interesting aspect of the results for 1984 is the decrease in media coverage of the issue of curriculum. In 1982, the media provided 161 inches of coverage of the issue

of curriculum (see Table 6, p. 51). In 1984, media coverage of this issue declined to only 37 inches. Additionally, in 1982, only 11% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of curriculum as the biggest problem in the public schools. In 1984, 15% of the respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem.

In 1984, 18% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of drugs as the biggest problem in the public schools. This was a slight decrease from 20% in 1982 (see Table 6, p. 51). The media, however, did not provide any coverage of this issue in 1984. The issue of drugs was the only issue among the top six biggest problems that did not receive any media coverage in 1984.

The issue of integration was chosen by only 6% of the education poll respondents as the biggest problem in 1984. The media provided only 3 inches of coverage of this issue. The issue of integration had not appeared among the top six biggest problems in the public schools since 1976 (see Table 5, p. 49).

Table 8

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1986

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Drugs	28	45
Discipline	24	0
Finances	11	0
Curriculum	8	58
Teachers	6	0
Moral standards/dress code	5	0
(r = .24)		

As shown in Table 8, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is positive for the sample year 1986. This is the weakest positive correlation for any of the sample years.

The year 1986 was unusual in that the media provided coverage of only two issues that ranked among the top six biggest problems in the public schools. Only 8% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of curriculum as the biggest problem, but it received 58 inches of media coverage. The issue of curriculum received the most media coverage of any issue in 1986.

In 1986, 28% of the education poll respondents chose the issue of drugs as the

biggest problem in the public schools, yet the media provided only 45 inches of coverage of this issue. This is a very small amount of coverage for an issue chosen by over one-quarter of the education poll respondents as the biggest problem in the public schools.

Another interesting aspect of the data for 1986 is that the issue of moral standards/dress code was chosen by 5% of the education poll respondents as the biggest problem in the public schools. The media did not cover this issue at all in 1986. This issue appeared among the top six biggest problems only in 1986.

As in 1982, the issue of finances received no media coverage (see Table 6, p. 51). Only 11% of the education poll respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem in 1986. This is quite a decrease from previous years, especially 1971, when the issue of finances received 23% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem in the public schools (see Table 3, p. 45). It is also a decrease from the previous sample year, 1984, when the issue of finances received 14% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem (see Table 7, p. 53).

Table 9

Correlation Between Percentage of Education Poll Responses and Inches of Media Coverage for 1991

Issue	Percentage	Inches
Drugs	22	0
Discipline	20	0
Finances	18	85
Teachers	11	81
Curriculum	10	285
Large schools/overcrowding	9	0
$(r = -.48)$		

As shown in Table 9, the Pearson correlation between the media's agenda and the public's agenda is negative for the sample year 1991. This is the strongest negative correlation found for any of the sample years.

The issue of curriculum received 285 inches of coverage in 1991, but this issue was mentioned as the biggest problem by only 10% of the education poll respondents. This is the largest amount of coverage received by the issue of curriculum in any of the sample years.

The issue of drugs received 22% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem in 1991, but the media did not cover this issue. Similarly, the issue of

discipline received 20% of the respondents' votes as the biggest problem, but the media did not provide any coverage of this issue either.

The issue of finances received 85 inches of media coverage in 1991. The percentage of education poll respondents who chose the issue of finances as the biggest problem in the public schools was 18%. Similarly, the issue of teachers received 81 inches of media coverage, but only 11% of the education poll respondents chose this issue as the biggest problem in the public schools in 1991.

The issue of large schools/overcrowding was again among the top six biggest problems, as it had been in 1972 (see Table 4, p. 47). This issue received 9% of the education poll respondents' votes as the biggest problem in the public schools, but this issue did not receive any media coverage.

Hypothesis Two

Hypothesis two theorized that issues receiving 100 or more inches of media coverage (or 50 or more inches if no single issue receives more than 99 inches of coverage in a year) will be more negatively covered than issues receiving less than 100 (or less than 50) inches of media coverage. After performing chi-square tests, the data show that the hypothesis is significantly supported for the sample years 1971 and 1984 (see Tables 11 and 15). The reverse of the hypothesis is significantly supported for the sample years 1982, 1986, and 1991 (see Tables 14, 16, and 17). This means that for these three sample years the issues receiving 100 or more (or 50 or more) inches of media coverage received a larger percentage of positive coverage than the issues receiving less than 100 (or less than 50) inches of media coverage. For the sample years 1969, 1972, and 1976 the hypothesis is neither supported nor denied (see Tables 10, 12, and 13).

Table 10

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in PublicEducation using Column Inches for 1969; Percentages of Positive and Negative MediaCoverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
Issues with 100+ inches of coverage		Positive	Negative
Strikes	196	10	90
Racial violence	155	39	61
Administration/control	136	36	64
Issues with less than 100 inches of coverage			
Curriculum	76	14	86
Integration	71	45	55
Finances	48	10	90
Teachers	28	64	36

Note. Table 10 continued on page 61.

Table 10 continued

Totals for issues with 100+ inches of coverage	487	27	73
Totals for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage	223	30	70
$\chi^2 (1, N = 710) = .64$, not significant			

As shown in Table 10, the hypothesis is neither supported nor denied for the sample year 1969. The percentage of negative coverage of issues that received 100 or more inches of media coverage is not significantly larger than the percentage of negative coverage of issues that received less than 100 inches of media coverage.

Some interesting results were found for the sample year 1969. The issue of strikes received 196 inches of coverage, the most media coverage of any issue in 1969. The coverage of the issue of strikes was 90% negative. The issue of finances received the second smallest amount of media coverage with only 48 inches, yet 90% of that coverage was also negative. Similarly, the issue of curriculum received a smaller amount of coverage, 76 inches, yet 86% of that coverage was negative.

In 1969, the percentages of negative coverage were higher for every issue except for the issue of teachers. The issue of teachers received 28 inches of coverage, the least amount of coverage for any issue in 1969. The percentage of negative coverage of this issue was only 36%.

Table 11

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in PublicEducation using Column Inches for 1971; Percentages of Positive and Negative Media Coverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
Issues with 100+ inches of coverage		Positive	Negative
Integration	205	17	83
Administration/control	106	43	57
Issues with less than 100 inches of coverage			
Racial violence	78	13	87
Curriculum	51	71	29
Alternative schools	39	56	44
Reform	36	25	75
Finances	25	4	96

Note. Table 11 continued on page 64.

Table 11 continued

Totals for issues with 100+ inches of coverage	311	26	74
Totals for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage	229	34	66

$\chi^2 (1, N = 540) = 4.43, p < .05$

As shown in Table 11, the hypothesis is supported for the sample year 1971. The percentage of negative coverage of issues that received 100 or more inches of media coverage is significantly larger than the percentage of negative coverage of issues that received less than 100 inches of media coverage.

The percentage of negative coverage of issues that received 100 or more inches of coverage in 1971 was 74%. However, the coverage of issues that received less than 100 inches of coverage was only 66% negative. This is due to the fact that two of those issues, curriculum and alternative schools, received larger percentages of positive coverage.

The issue of curriculum received 76 inches of coverage in 1969 (see Table 10, p. 60). In 1971, the issue of curriculum received 51 inches of coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of curriculum declined from 86% in 1969 (see Table 10, p. 60) to only 29% in 1971. This was a large decline in negative coverage. The coverage of the issue of alternative schools was 44% negative in 1971. The issue of alternative schools did not receive 25 or more inches of coverage in 1969 (see Table 10, p. 60).

The year 1971 was the last sample year that the issue of racial violence received 25 or more inches of coverage. In 1969, this issue received 155 inches of coverage and 61% of that coverage was negative (see Table 10, p. 60). By 1971, the amount of coverage had dropped to only 78 inches, but 87% of that coverage was negative. Although the amount of coverage of the issue of racial violence declined from 1969 to 1971, the percentage of negative coverage increased.

Table 12

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in Public
Education using Column Inches for 1972; Percentages of Positive and Negative Media
Coverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
Issues with 100+ inches of coverage		Positive	Negative
Integration	890	53	47
Finances	260	23	77
Administration/control	114	37	63
Issues with less than 100 inches of coverage			
Teachers	79	48	52
Violence	60	35	65
Alternative schools	45	51	49
Urban schools	45	9	91
Curriculum	32	66	34

Note. Table 12 continued on page 67.

Table 12 continued

Totals for issues with 100+ inches of coverage	1,264	45	55
Totals for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage	261	41	59

$\chi^2 (1, N = 1,525) = 1.59$, not significant

As shown in Table 12, the hypothesis is neither supported nor denied for the sample year 1972. The percentage of negative coverage of issues that received 100 or more inches of media coverage is not significantly larger than the percentage of negative coverage of issues that received less than 100 inches of media coverage.

The percentages of negative coverage for issues with 100 or more inches of coverage and for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage were much lower than in 1969 and 1971 (see Tables 10-11, pp. 60-63). In 1972, the issues of integration, alternative schools, and curriculum each received larger percentages of positive coverage. This contributed to the lower percentages of negative coverage in 1972.

It is interesting to note that in 1972 the issue of integration received the most coverage of any issue in any sample year, 890 inches. The coverage of the issue of integration in 1972 was 47% negative. In 1971, the issue of integration received 205 inches of coverage, but 83% of that coverage was negative (see Table 11, p. 63). The amount of coverage of the issue of integration increased from 1971 to 1972, but the percentage of negative coverage decreased.

The coverage of the issue of alternative schools was 49% negative in 1972. The percentage of negative coverage of this issue was 44% in 1971 (see Table 11, p. 63), so the increase in 1972 was not large. Similarly, the coverage of the issue of curriculum was 29% negative in 1971 (see Table 11, p. 63). The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of curriculum increased to 34% in 1972, but this was not a large change from 1971. The amount of coverage of the issue of curriculum decreased from 51 inches in 1971 (see

Table 11, p. 63) to just 32 inches in 1972.

The issues of violence and urban schools emerged with 25 or more inches of coverage in 1972. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of urban schools was 91%. The issue of violence received 60 inches of coverage, 65% of which was negative. Although these two issues received coverage in 1972, the issue of urban schools did not appear in the sample again. The issue of violence received coverage again in 1976 (see Table 13, p. 70).

Table 13

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in Public
Education using Column Inches for 1976; Percentages of Positive and Negative Media
Coverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
Issues with 100+ inches of coverage		Positive	Negative
Integration	174	7	93
Curriculum	114	38	62
Issues with less than 100 inches of coverage			
Violence	74	7	93
Test scores	70	3	97
Alternative schools	54	76	24
Finances	42	52	48
Dropouts	37	3	97

Note. Table 13 continued on page 71.

Table 13 continued

Totals for issues with 100+ inches of coverage	288	19	81
Totals for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage	277	26	74

$\chi^2 (1, N = 565) = 3.48$, not significant

As shown in Table 13, the hypothesis is neither supported nor denied for the sample year 1976. The percentage of negative coverage of issues that received 100 or more inches of media coverage is not significantly larger than the percentage of negative coverage of issues that received less than 100 inches of media coverage.

For issues with 100 or more inches of coverage, the percentage of negative coverage is the highest of any year at 81%. The percentage of negative coverage of issues with less than 100 inches of coverage was 74% in 1976. Only the issues of integration and curriculum received 100 or more inches of coverage in 1976. Of the issues that received less than 100 inches of coverage in 1976, the issues of alternative schools and finances received larger percentages of positive coverage.

The issues of test scores and dropouts received 25 or more inches of coverage in 1976. The issue of test scores received 70 inches of coverage and the issue of dropouts received 37 inches. For both issues, 97% of the coverage was negative. The issue of test scores did not receive media coverage again until 1991, when it received 99 inches of coverage. The issue of dropouts did not receive 25 or more inches of coverage again.

It appears that the media were more focused on these issues and less on issues such as finances and administration and control. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of finances declined from 77% in 1972 (see Table 12, p. 66) to 48% in 1976. The issue of the administration and control, which had received 100 or more inches of coverage in 1969, 1971, and 1972 (see Tables 10-12, pp. 60-66), did not receive 25 or more inches of coverage in 1976.

Table 14

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in PublicEducation using Column Inches for 1982: Percentages of Positive and Negative Media Coverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
		Positive	Negative
Issues with 100+ inches of coverage			
Curriculum	161	63	37
Issues with less than 100 inches of coverage			
Alternative schools	50	76	24
Integration	44	36	64
Administration/control	42	21	79
Banning books	42	48	52
Totals for issues with 100+ inches of coverage	161	63	37
Totals for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage	178	47	53

 $\chi^2 (1, N = 339) = 9.54, p < .05$

As shown in Table 14, the reverse of the hypothesis is supported for the sample year 1982. The issues receiving 100 or more inches of media coverage received a significantly larger percentage of positive coverage than the issues receiving less than 100 inches of media coverage.

Only the issue of curriculum received 100 or more inches of coverage in 1982. This issue received 114 inches of coverage in 1976 (see Table 13, p. 70), but in 1982 the coverage increased to 161 inches. The percentage of negative coverage decreased from 62% in 1976 (see Table 13, p. 70) to 37% in 1982.

Of the issues that received less than 100 inches of coverage, only the issue of alternative schools received a larger percentage of positive coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of alternative schools was 24% in 1982. This is the only issue that consistently received a larger percentage of positive coverage each time it appeared (see Tables 11-14, pp. 63-73).

Additionally, the percentages of negative coverage for issues with 100 or more and less than 100 inches of coverage are the lowest of any year. The percentage of negative coverage of issues with 100 or more inches of coverage was 37%. The percentage of negative coverage of issues with less than 100 inches of coverage was 53%. The fact that the only issue that had 100 or more inches of coverage, curriculum, also had a larger percentage of positive coverage contributed to this situation.

An interesting aspect of the data for 1982 is the lack of coverage of issues that had received large amounts in previous years. The issue of integration had received over 100

inches of coverage in 1971, 1972, and 1976 (see Tables 11-13, pp. 63-70). Similarly, the issue of administration and control had received over 100 inches of coverage in 1969, 1971, and 1972 (see Tables 10-12, pp. 60-66). However, in 1982, the issue of integration received only 44 inches of coverage and the issue of administration and control received only 42 inches of coverage.

Table 15

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in PublicEducation using Column Inches for 1984; Percentages of Positive and Negative MediaCoverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
Issues with 50+ inches of coverage		Positive	Negative
School prayer	62	27	73
Religion in schools	60	35	65
Discipline	58	60	40
Reform	56	48	52
Issues with less than 50 inches of coverage			
Asian students	40	73	27
Finances	38	82	18
Curriculum	37	54	46
Administration/control	36	11	89
Teachers	30	70	30

Note. Table 15 continued on page 77.

Table 15 continued

Totals for issues with 50+ inches of coverage	236	42	58
Totals for issues with less than 50 inches of coverage	181	58	42

$\chi^2 (1, N = 417) = 10.02, p < .05$

As shown in Table 15, the hypothesis is supported for the sample year 1984. The percentage of negative coverage of issues that received 50 or more inches of media coverage is significantly larger than the percentage of negative coverage of issues that received less than 50 inches of media coverage.

An interesting aspect of the data for 1984 is that for issues receiving less than 50 inches of coverage each issue, except the issue of administration and control, received a larger percentage of positive coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of administration and control was 89%. For issues with 50 or more inches of coverage, only the issue of discipline received a larger percentage of positive coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of discipline was 40%.

The issues of school prayer and religion in schools received 50 or more inches of coverage in 1984. The issue of school prayer received 62 inches, the most coverage of any issue in 1984. The percentage of negative coverage of this issue was 73%. The issue of religion in schools received 60 inches of coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of this issue was 65%. The sample year 1984 was the only year in which these issues received 25 or more inches of coverage.

In 1984, some interesting results were found for the issues of discipline and curriculum. The issue of discipline received 58 inches of coverage in 1984. This was the year with the largest amount of coverage of the issue of discipline. The amount of coverage of the issue of curriculum declined from 161 inches in 1982 (see Table 14, p. 73) to 37 inches in 1984.

Table 16

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in PublicEducation using Column Inches for 1986; Percentages of Positive and Negative Media Coverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
		Positive	Negative
Issues with 50+ inches of coverage			
Curriculum	58	60	40
Issues with less than 50 inches of coverage			
Drugs	45	13	87
Bilingual education	41	34	66
Grades before sports	27	93	7
Totals for issues with 50+ inches of coverage	58	60	40
Totals for issues with less than 50 inches of coverage	113	40	60
$\chi^2 (1, N = 171) = 6.48, p < .05$			

As shown in Table 16, the reverse of the hypothesis is supported for the sample year 1986. The issues receiving 50 or more inches of media coverage received a significantly larger percentage of positive coverage than the issues receiving less than 50 inches of media coverage.

Only the issue of curriculum received 50 or more inches of coverage in 1986. This is similar to the year 1982, when the issue of curriculum was the only issue to receive 100 or more inches of coverage (see Table 14, p. 73). In 1986, the percentage of negative coverage of the issue of curriculum was 40%. This is also similar to the year 1982 when the coverage of the issue of curriculum was 37% negative (see Table 14, p. 73).

For issues with less than 50 inches of coverage in 1986, the issue of grades before sports was the only issue that received a larger percentage of positive coverage. The issue of grades before sports received 27 inches of coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of this issue was 7%. This issue concerned a plan to set a certain grade point average limit that must be met before students can participate in school sports programs.

The other two issues that received less than 50 inches of coverage in 1986, drugs and bilingual education, received larger percentages of negative coverage. The issue of drugs received 45 inches of coverage. The percentage of negative coverage for the issue of drugs was 87%. In 1986, the issue of drugs received the most coverage it had ever received. The issue of bilingual education received 41 inches of coverage. The percentage of negative coverage for the issue of bilingual education was 66%.

Table 17

Chi-Square Analysis of Positive and Negative Media Coverage of Issues in Public
Education using Column Inches for 1991; Percentages of Positive and Negative Media
Coverage

	Total Inches	Percentage	
Issues with 100+ inches of coverage		Positive	Negative
Curriculum	285	42	58
Reform	128	15	85
Administration/control	108	17	83
Issues with less than 100 inches of coverage			
Test scores	99	25	75
Finances	85	7	93
Teachers	81	19	81
Integration	32	59	41

Note. Table 17 continued on page 82.

Table 17 continued

Totals for issues with 100+ inches of coverage	521	30	70
Totals for issues with less than 100 inches of coverage	297	22	78

$\chi^2 (1, N = 818) = 6.23, p < .05$

As shown in Table 17, the reverse of the hypothesis is supported for the sample year 1991. The issues receiving 100 or more inches of media coverage received a significantly larger percentage of positive coverage than the issues receiving less than 100 inches of media coverage.

The percentages of negative coverage received by both groups of issues are high. However, for issues receiving less than 100 inches of coverage, the percentage of negative coverage is the highest of any sample year at 78%. Only the issue of integration received a larger percentage of positive coverage. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of integration was 41%.

In 1991, the issues of administration and control, finances, and teachers received 25 or more inches of coverage. The issue of administration and control received 108 inches, the issue of finances received 85 inches, and the issue of teachers received 81 inches of coverage. Each of these issues had a percentage of negative coverage that was over 80% in 1991.

The issues of reform and test scores also received 25 or more inches of coverage in 1991. The issue of reform received 128 inches of coverage and the issue of test scores received 99 inches. The issue of curriculum, the only issue to receive 25 or more inches of coverage in each of the sample years (see Tables 10-17, pp. 60-81), received the most coverage it had ever received, 285 inches. The percentage of negative coverage of the issue of curriculum increased from 40% in 1986 (see Table 16, p. 79) to 58% in 1991.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions about Hypothesis One

The data for hypothesis one showed that for four of the sample years the public's agenda positively correlated with the media's agenda. The public found the issues emphasized by the media to be salient.

One interesting aspect of the data for hypothesis one concerns the issue of discipline. The public was very focused on the issue of discipline for all the sample years, while the media were not focused on the issue of discipline, except for 1984 when it received 58 inches of media coverage (see Table 7, p. 53).

One explanation for the public's preoccupation with the issue of discipline may be the number of education poll respondents with children in public schools. In 1969, 44% of education poll respondents had children in public schools. Even in later years, the average number of education poll respondents with children in public schools was 28%, over one-quarter of all respondents. These respondents may have chosen the issue of discipline because of their direct personal experience with their own children's behavior. In the case of the issue of discipline, the agenda-setting effect of the media may have been mediated by the obtrusiveness of the issue.

Another explanation for this situation may be that when the media present certain issues, the public may interpret those issues as resulting from other, deeper issues. The public's agenda may reflect those deeper issues and therefore may seem to differ

significantly from the media's agenda. Thus, although the two agendas are similar, they are expressed differently.

The 1960s was a decade of extreme unrest on college and high school campuses. The coverage of the teachers on strike, the violence, the strife occurring in the general administration of the schools, the dropouts, and the growing number of alternative schools could have been interpreted by the public as resulting from slack disciplinary standards. Instead of mentioning these actual issues as the problems, the respondents may have incorporated the information into one issue that would function as the cause of these situations. Subsequently, discipline was mentioned as the problem.

Although much of the coverage of the issues of racial violence, violence, and strikes dropped off, new issues emerged to take their places in the sample years 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1991 (see Tables 14-17, pp. 73-81). The Reagan administration's focus on the return to prayer and the teaching of morality in the public schools, the renewed efforts to fight drugs, and the emphasis on the low achievements of American students compared to the Japanese may have been interpreted as symptoms of an underlying problem: lack of discipline.

By looking at the public's focus on the issue of discipline throughout the years, as well as its focus on the issue of drugs, it seems that the public is very concerned about whether students are being properly socialized by the public schools, and about how the nationwide problem with drugs has affected children via the schools. The media, however, seem to balance their coverage between primarily classroom issues and issues

that have more of an impact on society in general. This might be ascribed to the media's "watchdog" role in society. The media must be concerned with objectively presenting all the issues surrounding a public institution.

It is also interesting to note that the public indicated that stricter standards, more discipline, would be one of the greatest steps that could be taken to solve the problems in the public schools. The data to support this idea were not found in any of the articles produced by the media that were used in this study. It can be generalized from this that the data did not appear in the media at all. Whether any data exist to support this idea is not known. However, year after year the public continued to indicate that more discipline would improve the quality of the education that students in this country receive. This idea clearly has its origins in a source other than the media.

The idea that contingent conditions weaken the agenda-setting effect has been studied by several researchers. The concept of issue obtrusiveness is important. Almost everyone has had experience in the public school system. Although certain issues such as curriculum, finances, or administration and control may be dealt with on a more regular basis by those in the field of education, it is possible that many people draw on their own experience in the public schools when asked to comment on issues related to the schools. The obtrusive nature of public school issues may be so strong that the media's agenda-setting effect is weakened substantially. Zucker (1978) found that agenda-setting effects are stronger with unobtrusive issues.

The time lag in agenda-setting may also contribute to a lack of positive correlation

between agendas. An issue may appear on the media's agenda for a year or more before the public finds that issue to be salient. Alternatively, the media may move quickly from issue to issue depending on the trends in society and in education. The public, however, may be focused on the same issues from year to year. If the media's agenda changes too quickly, the public may respond by ignoring the media's issues in favor of the familiar issues. This may have been the case in those years in which negative correlations were found.

Conclusions about Hypothesis Two

The data for hypothesis two showed that the hypothesis was significantly supported for two of the eight sample years. In the sample years 1971 and 1984, the issues that received more media coverage were covered more negatively than the issues that received less media coverage. The data also showed that for three of the sample years the reverse of the hypothesis was significantly supported. In the sample years 1982, 1986, and 1991, the issues that received more media coverage received more positive coverage than the issues that received less media coverage. Finally, for three of the sample years the hypothesis was neither supported nor denied.

The data from hypothesis two showed that the tone of the coverage of the issues in public education has to do with something other than the amount of coverage received by those issues. The volume of coverage received by issues in public education is not an indicator of whether the tone of coverage will be more positive or more negative. The hypothesis was only significantly supported in two of the sample years, and in three of the

sample years the reverse of the hypothesis was actually significantly supported. The influence this may have had on the public's choice of an issue as the biggest problem in public schools is not clear.

The education poll respondents may have been influenced by the media when making their selections for the biggest problem in the public schools, but there is no data to support this idea. In fact, it would be difficult to gather such data because it is unclear as to which sources people use to gather the information they use to make decisions. The media is one source, however, and negative coverage of an issue may have had an influence on the respondents.

Another interesting aspect of this data has to do with the total amount of coverage that public school issues received for each of the sample years. The year with the most education coverage was 1972, with 1,525 inches of coverage. The sample year 1986 was the year with the least education coverage, with only 171 inches. The amount of education coverage for the rest of the sample years ranged between 300 and 900 inches of coverage.

It is interesting to note that in 1972 most of the coverage was of the issues of integration, finances, and administration and control of schools. These issues dealt with serious problems that affected the country. Integration did not only affect the schools, but was part of the civil rights movement. The government-mandated approach to integrating the schools, primarily through busing, caused immense controversy over how much control the government should have over the schools and how finances should be

distributed so that all children could benefit equally. These were very emotional issues that involved the entire country.

Conversely, in 1986, the public schools were basically being ignored after the controversy surrounding the reports of the early 1980s and the Reagan administration's early attempts to reform the public school system. The lack of media coverage reflects the lack of controversy surrounding the schools in 1986. The emotional issues that were affecting society were not related to the public schools as they had been in the past.

Finally, the data from this study show the close relationship between the government and the media. Many of the issues that received large amounts of coverage, especially in the 1980s, were issues that were being addressed by politicians in their efforts to reform the public school system. This can be seen in 1982 with the issue of banning books (see Table 14, p. 73), in 1984 with the issues of school prayer, religion, and Asian students (see Table 15, p. 76), and in 1986 with the issue of grades before sports (see Table 16, p. 79). These could be called "created" issues because they were made into issues by those who were interested in school reform. Funkhouser (1973) made note of created issues in his study. Other issues such as strikes, integration, violence, drugs, and finances existed because they were real issues that were occurring. These issues occurred regardless of whether politicians said they were issues. The fact that the created issues appeared in the sample shows that the media did not focus their coverage only on what was occurring in the schools, but what government leaders were concerned about in regard to the schools.

It appears that the media's agenda is a reflection of several agendas. The media must decide which information is newsworthy. These decisions may be based on what the public wants, what the national leadership wants, or simply events as they occur. Like the public's agenda, the media's agenda is shaped by a variety of sources.

Limitations to Research

The research into the effects of media agenda-setting on the public's perceptions of education can be broadened by the use of other types of periodicals. Magazines aimed at women, parents, teens, and older adults, as well as magazines that purport to reflect a certain political stance, may be alternative sources for content analysis. The media's agenda can be studied through a variety of other media sources. Television and newspapers are two media sources that could be studied. The media agenda-setting effects on public attitudes toward the public schools based on televised portrayals of schools, teachers, and students in comedies, dramas, and documentaries also would provide interesting data. The use of the three news magazines limited the scope of this present study.

Research into the Gallup Poll data may also clarify the public's agenda. The Gallup Poll uses approximately 40 questions on a variety of topics to gauge the public's attitudes toward the public schools. Analysis of the responses to several or all of these questions would provide a wider scope for research. Individual issues could be studied in greater depth. The problems in education could be compared to the issues mentioned as positive aspects of the public schools. The question about the biggest problems in public schools

was used in this study because it is asked annually. Other questions may not be asked every year, but that data could be used as a part of smaller, more detailed study.

The Gallup Poll data is not the only source of public opinion. Surveys and personal interviews are two additional methods for judging the public's attitudes. The public opinion data could be narrowed to address only certain groups within the public such as parents, teachers, or students. This may provide a more accurate picture of how the media affects individuals' opinions.

Future Directions for Research

The contingent conditions that mediate agenda-setting effects should be studied in relation to the public's attitudes on education. Public school issues tend to be more obtrusive because most people have had some personal experience with them. The media may have relatively little influence on people's attitudes toward schools. Other contingent conditions that may influence agenda-setting such as time lag, amount of media use, age of respondents, and political partisanship also require further study.

The issues in public education can be considered primarily political issues. A voter study would provide insight into how the media affect voters' attitudes on the issue of school funding. The financial needs of the schools result from voter confidence. If the media were shown to influence voters in regard to ballot measures, individuals may be spurred to examine more carefully the information before they cast their votes.

Finally, the best way to determine how the public feels about their schools is to take a survey. A lengthy, detailed survey would provide much useful information. A

survey of members of the media on the topic of public schools and how they are covered would be revealing as well. A comparison of the two sets of data would probably provide interesting results, as well as provoke much discussion.

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