

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to ascertain important information about school/business collaborative activities in the Commonwealth of Virginia and to compare those activities to the findings of a study conducted by Larkin C. Phillips published in 1992. This study measured collaborative activity in the Commonwealth during the 1998 - 1999 school term.

Survey instruments were sent to all public school divisions in Virginia. Categories were developed to reflect school division similarities thus allowing for comparisons of like school divisions. Each school division was placed into categories based on type (rural, suburban, or city), by size (based on number of students), and by composite index (to reflect wealth as determined by the Commonwealth of Virginia).

Findings

The conclusions offered in this section represent important findings from the survey results. The conclusions are compared to the Phillips Study and in some instances to other pertinent studies.

1. Percentage of School Divisions with Collaborative Programs

Seventy-two percent of the school divisions who responded had collaborative activities during the 1998 - 1999 school year. This indicates an eight percent decrease from the Phillips study. While this reflects a surprising decrease it still shows a strong connection between schools and businesses compared to a study conducted by the National Association of Partners in

Education in 1991. The NAPE study showed that 51 percent of school districts in the nation had collaborative partnerships during the 1989 –1990 school year (National Association of Partners in Education, 1991). Therefore, it can be said that collaboration exists between the majority of school divisions and businesses in Virginia indicating a mutually beneficial situation to each sector.

A significant number of school divisions (46%) who reported school/business collaborative activities indicated that they started their activities after the 1990 –1991 school year. This number is inconsistent with the findings in the Phillips Study since he reported that 80 percent of 110 school divisions, who responded to his survey had collaborative activities. It is possible that school divisions have become more aware of the fact that collaborative activities are more than receiving donations from businesses and thus considered real collaborative activities beginning after the Phillips survey. A recent development in partnerships occurred in 1998 when the Commonwealth began to accept federal school to work funds. The Virginia Business Education Partnership (VBEP) administers these funds to schools based on partnerships with business and community groups. All school divisions are eligible to receive funding on a matching basis to foster an alliance between business and industry and the community. These grants have the great potential to encourage school divisions who have not previously worked collaboratively with business and industry to try new innovative activities.

2. Summary of School Division Size, Type, and Composite Index

School divisions reporting no collaborative activity were overwhelmingly located in rural areas. Eighty-nine percent of school divisions in the current study and 91 percent in the former study indicating no collaborative activities were classified as rural. In contrast all the city school divisions reported activities as did 91 percent of the suburban school divisions. This was consistent with the Phillips Study that showed all of the suburban school districts reporting conducted collaborative activities as well as 91 percent of the cities. Also, a United States Department of Education Study in 1989 reported that nationwide partnerships were more prevalent in urban and suburban schools compared to rural schools (U. S. Department of Education, 1989).

In his book, *Building Schools The New School and Community Relations*, George J. Michael a professor at South Carolina State University states “involving the local business community in the schools will have a very positive effect on school outcomes” (Michael, 1997,p25). If rural school divisions are disproportionately not taking advantages of collaborative activities they are putting their students at a disproportionate disadvantage when compared with other students. Those interested in improving schools with the help of collaborative activities in the Commonwealth should seek ways to assist rural school divisions in establishing meaningful activities with business and industry.

Nineteen of the 28 (67.85%) school divisions that reported that they engaged in no collaborative activities were classified as small. Eight (28.57%) were classified as average, and one (03.57%) was classified as large. In this

study, all very large school divisions had collaborative activities. Small school divisions were less likely to conduct collaborative activities. This is consistent with the Phillips findings where he concluded, divisions having the largest enrollments K-12 were more likely to conduct collaborative activities (Phillips, 1992).

Eighteen of the 28 (64.28%) school divisions with no collaborative activities had composite indexes between .2000 and .4000. Nine of the 28 (32.14%) had composite indexes between .4001-.6000 and one school division had a composite index of .6001-.8001. The Commonwealth of Virginia to determine the ability of the school division to pay for education services uses the composite index. With 96 percent of the school divisions with no collaborative activities falling into the bottom half of the composite index in this study it can be said that the relative fiscal capacity of a school division can be a factor in determining the likelihood of collaborative activities occurring between schools and businesses. This knowledge can be important for those who wish to target school divisions for special help in promoting partnerships to strengthen schools.

3. Collaborative Programs Conducted

Phillips concluded in his study “school divisions in Virginia tended to conduct the same programs at each school level (elementary, middle/junior high, high school). Collaborative programs conducted in Virginia were not a function of division size wealth or type” (Phillips, 1992 p. 131). He found that the most conducted collaborative activities in the typical Virginia school division at all grade levels were: providing career awareness activities; providing special

awards for pupils, teachers or the school; donating or loaning equipment or materials; and sponsoring tutoring programs for pupils. The findings in the current study concur with these conclusions. However, it should be noted that there were large increases in the area of partners providing tutors by businesses in elementary (28 percent) and middle/junior high schools (20 percent). And at the high school level there was an increase (22 percent) in partners assisting school divisions conduct job training and providing internships for students. These increases could be the result of the U. S. Department of Education survey that found school principals expressed the need for more collaborative activities that provided tutoring programs for students (U. S. Department of Education, 1989). Since principals often express a need for tutors, it is not surprising that emphasis was placed on establishing tutoring programs by principals and other school officials.

This finding should be studied further to determine if collaborative programs in Virginia are beginning to address critical education issues. Phillips said "Virginia's educators must determine if the same collaborative programs are offered in the school division each year because of educational needs or because school personnel are confident and comfortable with established, low risk programs" (Phillips, 1992 p.133). Information provided by this study suggests that in many school divisions collaborative activities and programs are beginning to address some of the critical issues facing today's schools. With the emergence of state mandated Standards of Learning tests it may be more critical

for teachers and administrators to explore ways of establishing meaningful collaborative activities with businesses, state agencies and others.

4. Collaborative Partners

The partner in a collaborative program can be any business, industry, civic club, professional association, or any public service agency in the community with resources needed by either the school or school system (Phillips, 1992). However, Dale Mann (1987b) determined that most business contributions came from manufacturing, with the service industry contributing only modest resources to public education. However more Virginia school divisions reported that the service industry participated at a higher rate in collaborative activities than did the manufacturing industry. This study found 9 percent more school divisions reporting service industry participation in 1999 than was found in 1990-91. In fact, the service industry was the most likely category represented in collaborative activities.

However, participation was reported in all of the categories asked about in the survey. The categories included: civic organizations, service industry, manufacturing, retail trade, finance business, government agency, transportation, construction trades, agriculture and forestry, wholesale trade, and mining. The four most likely categories represented in collaborative activities were service, civic, manufacturing, and retail. These are the same as reported in the Phillips study.

Government agencies and construction trades are becoming increasingly involved in collaborative activities showing 17% and 15% increases respectively

from the earlier study. The mining industry was least likely to be involved in Virginia partnerships, being represented in only 6% of school divisions reporting collaborative activities. Obviously, all segments of the economy are seeing benefits of collaborating with schools in the Commonwealth. Increased participation will undoubtedly be dependent on the success that is realized from the activities.

Many believe that school divisions have the opportunity and responsibility to provide services to collaborative partners as a benefit of being involved in the partnership. Whatever, the type of business and education partnership, the benefits must be realized by all partners or the arrangement is not a partnership (Grobe,1993). Eighty-five percent of the school divisions in both studies reported providing services to partners in collaborative activities and programs. The most popular service was providing school building and grounds for business use followed by providing student entertainment for business functions. A 10% decrease from the Phillips study was registered when asked about providing equipment

5. Collaborative Program Growth

The expansion of collaborative programs to additional school divisions in Virginia depends on the ability of small or average size school divisions, rural school divisions, and divisions with a composite index of less than .6000 to organize and establish programs (Phillips, 1992). Virginia continues to have substantial difficulty in providing collaborative activities for rural school divisions, smaller school divisions and less wealthy school divisions. Ninety-one percent of

school divisions without collaborative activities were classified as rural, 93% were classified as small or average and 89% had composite indexes of less than .6000. These percentages almost mirror the findings of Phillips.

Mann (1987a) states that “smaller less wealthy, non-urban school divisions may have special problems developing collaborative activities”. Measures must be taken to assist these school divisions in starting and sustaining collaborative activities. As mentioned earlier, the Virginia Business Education Partnership has embarked on a grant program administered with School to Work funds from the federal government to insure collaborative activities between government, business, and non-profit organizations. To increase the likelihood of success of these collaborative activities VBEP would be advised to carefully consider giving special attention and assistance to rural, smaller and less wealthy school divisions. This assistance can take many forms; however, it should surely include technical assistance, monetary assistance, and human resource assistance.

Educational foundations, an independent, non-profit organization that raises funds to supplement, not supplant school programs (Kalish, 1987) appear to have positive effects on collaborative activities. A majority of the school divisions, 52 percent, who had collaborative activities also had educational foundations. Those considering ways to establish collaborative activities in rural, smaller, and less wealthy school divisions may be well served by establishing an educational foundation first as a means to deliver and manage the activities.

6. Collaborative Program Effectiveness

An overwhelming majority of school divisions in the Phillips study and the current study responded that they would rate their collaborative activities as meeting the goals that had been established for the program(s). There is a strong belief that collaborative programs have improved the business community understanding of schools and school problems. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents in both studies indicated that the lack of understanding between the schools and industry have improved. When asked if the collaborative program focuses on identified critical educational needs of the students 93 percent of the school divisions responded that this criterion was a satisfactory feature or strong feature of the program. There were 42% who believed this was a strong feature of their program(s), this was a 12% increase from the Phillips study. It appears that partnerships are beginning to focus on identified critical educational needs of students. This is an important finding if business and industry is expected to continue to support collaborative activities and programs.

The Virginia Chamber of Commerce survey conducted in 1990 found that a primary purpose of collaborative programs in Virginia was to improve and increase community support for public education (Harrison, 1991). While this is essential to continued business support of schools a troublesome finding was found in the current study. There was a 14% decrease in the school divisions that reported that a strong feature of their program was that it had been favorably received and supported by the business community, as compared to the Phillips study. This finding does not bode well for those who wish to start or increase

collaborative activities or programs. For business to support these programs they must feel their efforts will make needed changes to the curriculum and in turn provide better prepared workers for their companies.

7. **Collaborative Program Management**

Management of collaborative activities and programs are essential to the success of truly meaningful activities occurring between schools, businesses and other agencies. During the 1998-99 school year in Virginia the management of collaborative activities was most often totally managed at each participating school. This was the case in 48% of the respondents to this study. This contrasts with 33% in the Phillips study. The second most popular management arrangement was one in which one person in the school division had primary responsibility for the development and coordination of collaborative activities. This management technique is used in 40% of the school divisions reporting collaborative activities. This is a 14% increase from the earlier study. These two management techniques increased from the earlier study at the expense of the management technique where one person in the school system serves as coordinator, but each school manages the activity. In the earlier study this technique was used in 40% of the cases compared to only 13 % in the current study.

These management findings can be very important to businesses, state agencies and others wishing to assist school divisions in starting collaborative activities or partnerships. It appears that successful collaborative activities most likely occur when there is one person in charge whether it is at the local school

level or at the central level. There is less likelihood that it occurs with dual management responsibilities. Fragmentation of responsibilities and levels of bureaucracy may impede collaborative activities occurring.

Persons representing schools who were most likely to initiate collaborative activity with area businesses and school divisions were the building principals. This occurred in 43 of the 71 responses to this question in the current study as it did in a majority of the Phillips study. This finding is important to consider. It has been well documented that principals in today's schools are being asked to perform a myriad of administrative tasks that compete for the principal's time and energy. If collaborative activities are to be successfully implemented it seems that some thought should be given to assisting principals with this responsibility. School divisions may be well served to employ someone at the school level or central administration level to oversee partnerships and give leadership and focus to the effort of involving business, government agencies and others in collaborative programs.

A statewide survey conducted by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce in 1991 determined that often persons in important administrative positions within school divisions did not know about the schools and divisions' collaborative activities and programs (Harrison, 1991). Only 21 of the 71 (29.57%) school divisions in this study and 28 (31.81%) of 88 school divisions with collaborative activities had written policies on those activities and programs. Research is needed to determine if adding policies written by administrators and voted into

division school board policy would add to the success of implementing and sustaining school and business collaboration.

The vast majority of collaborative activities are not being assessed for effectiveness in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Only 17 of 71, (23.94%) school divisions who said they were conducting school/business collaborative activities also reported that they had assessed the activities for effectiveness. This is a disturbing finding for getting result-oriented businesses and industries to engage in collaborative programs. Potential partners will insist on getting returns on investment. “When businesses engage in collaborative partnerships, they look for benefits that affect their operation, productivity, and profit line” (Hall et al., p. 23).

8. School Profile

There has been an increase in the percentage of schools participating in school/business collaborative activities at the division level since the 1990-91 Phillips study. At the elementary level there was a 19 percent increase with 90% of the elementary schools participating. At the middle/junior high level a 10% increase was seen with 90% of the schools participating. And at the high school level there was a 5% increase to 97% of the schools participating. It can be said that if any school in the division is participating in a partnership or collaborative activity it is highly likely that the other schools in the division are participating in partnerships or collaborative activities.

More than half (52%) of all school divisions reporting collaborative activities also had established educational foundations. This is a 28% increase

from the Phillips study. The majority of the foundations work to enrich both vocational and academic programs.

Recommendations for Further Study

School/business collaboration is occurring in many schools and school divisions throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia as outlined in this study. However, there are school divisions that are not taking advantage of opportunities available for collaboration with businesses and other agencies. There are also cases of those who are collaborating that are not fully utilizing collaboration programs and activities to their fullest potential. Recommendations for further study are offered based on the findings of the study, current literature and personal experiences, which would add to the knowledge of what makes for successful collaboration activities and programs. The recommendations are not in any order but are included for their relative importance to promoting successful collaboration activities and programs.

1. Collaboration and partnership activities funded through the Virginia Business Education Partnership with federal school-to-work funds should be studied. Emphasis for this study should focus on innovative practices and techniques that have proven successful in integrating partnerships into schools that are meaningful for students and teachers.
2. Rural school divisions and less wealthy school divisions are not reporting the same level of collaboration activities and partnerships as more suburban and wealthy school divisions. Specific school divisions

should be surveyed to determine barriers they face in implementing collaborative activities and strategies developed to assist in developing partnerships.

3. Partnerships and collaborative programs should be studied to determine if they are addressing identified critical educational issues instead of continuing with programs that are comfortable and easy to maintain.
4. The majority of school divisions reporting collaborative programs also reported participating in educational foundations. Further research should be done to determine if school divisions who participate in educational foundations benefit more from collaborative activities than do those who do not have any alliance with a foundation.
5. In order for collaborative activities to flourish in schools both the schools and the participating partners must benefit from the arrangement. Further study should be conducted to determine what benefits partners receive from schools and school divisions. This should be done from the perspective of the partners with an emphasis on determining the motivation of business partners to become involved with schools.
6. Evidence suggests that fragmentation of management responsibilities and bureaucracy impede collaborative activities from occurring. Therefore, successful partnerships should be studied to ascertain what management strategies are used.

7. Potential partners insist on getting returns on investment. However, most collaborative activities in Virginia are not being formally assessed for effectiveness. Those that are should be studied to develop a model for assisting those who are not assessing for effectiveness. Special emphasis should be placed on identifying specific goals and objectives that contribute to program effectiveness.

Discussion

School business collaborative activities are occurring in most school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. However, there are many questions left to answer in how these collaborative activities can better benefit schools and business partners. This study categorized collaborative activities based on size, type, and wealth of school divisions and made observations as to what categories were conducive to fostering collaborative activities. The interaction between size, type, and wealth to predict successful collaborative arrangements should be examined to determine the factors that contribute to the probability of success. In all instances unique situations will influence the degree of success. As no two communities are the same, no two collaborative arrangements can be the same. However, successful partnerships can be studied to assist in starting and maintaining other successful partnerships.

As mentioned in an earlier section, there is an ethical question as to the limits that collaborative partners can dictate curriculum and other instructional matters in return for collaborating with schools. For example, one large networking company has provided considerable resources to school divisions and community colleges in the Commonwealth of Virginia for training in the

company's field of endeavor. As a result many school divisions are training students on specific equipment used by this company. As this practice becomes more prevalent, educators will have to determine whether the interests of the community as a whole is best served in this matter or if the educational experience is being unduly influenced by large conglomerates to the detriment of students as a whole.

It is my belief that collaborative activities between businesses and schools are essential to the continued success of public schools in meeting the needs of our Commonwealth and indeed our nation. Therefore, educators must hold true to the tenants of providing a strong well-rounded educational experience for students that is enhanced by partnering with businesses and other agencies. In so doing educators and politicians have a responsibility to continue to study what contributes to successful collaborative activities.