

A Qualitative Study to Examine  
The Effectiveness of a Citizen Advisory Committee

by

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**(Abstract)**

The question of advisory group effectiveness continues to be a topic for discussion and research. As these groups have been organized to study and give recommendations on a diversity of issues, questions have arisen in relationship to their ability to impact educational decision making.

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of effectiveness held by members of a Citizen Advisory Committee and by members of a school board in relationship to the committee's ability to complete tasks as requested by the school board. Data were gathered from members of the Citizen Advisory Committee and the school board through the use of a questionnaire and individual interviews. Data analysis revealed concerns in relationship to the clarity and number of tasks assigned by the school board, membership on the committee, feedback from the school board, and the future of the advisory committee.

In conclusion, citizen advisory councils can be an effective

avenue to involve the community in the operation of schools when given appropriate education and support.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

“The whole people must take upon themselves the  
education of the whole people.”

John Adams

#### **Introduction**

Citizen advisory committees and parent advisory councils have become a standard feature of school systems. These groups have been organized to study and give recommendations in relationship to curriculum, facilities, school polices, or particular school issues as identified by in a 1996 article published by the National School Boards Association. In some instances these councils have been mandated by federal and state statutes that require school systems to include citizen participation in decisions regarding the operation of special programs or individual schools (Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives, 1987; Chicago School Reform Act 85-1418, 1989). The concept of evaluating the work of these advisory groups has not usually been a component to their organization. This issue has raised questions concerning their effectiveness as indicated in a 1994 publication by the American Association of School

Administrators that stated:

Whether local school councils improve education and how they do this are legitimate topics for discussion and debate. The structures of local school councils and how they fit into the governance system are key factors in determining if they will enhance education or cause a serious distraction from the primary task of our schools, ensuring student learning (p. 15).

Berge (1993), in her historical study of advisory committees, suggested “this inability to accurately measure the council’s accomplishments may somewhat contribute to the disappearance of advisory councils” (p. 130). The question of an advisory council’s effectiveness was the basis for Davies’ (1990) study of advisory councils, Mueller’s (1992) study of local school governance councils that were formed under the 1988 Illinois School Reform Act (Chicago School Reform Act 85-1418), and Jones’s (1983) study of parent advisory councils (PAC) in Virginia that were mandated by federal education laws. These studies indicated a range of effectiveness among various advisory groups, a need for parent education in relationship to the committees’ purpose, and the role they were to play on these councils.

This question of advisory group effectiveness has continued to be a topic for discussion and research. Flisram's (1993) case study of two advisory councils in the Milwaukee School System evaluated the councils "in terms of their explicit and implicit goals and judged to what extent the expectations of policy makers and participants are realized"(p. iii). His research concluded that these groups were limited in their effectiveness by their lack of understanding of their role, the bureaucratic process, and expected outcomes.

Case studies were also conducted by Silver (1993) on the ability parents had to influence program decisions through their roles on early childhood advisory councils. This research led her to the conclusion that "role confusion, time commitments, organizational factors, training, knowledge, individual variables, and the coordinator's role contributed to the lack of parent influence" (p. 189) and led to council ineffectiveness.

The uncertainty of advisory council effectiveness and the paucity of research in relationship to this topic are the basis for this study. By conducting this research, additional information will be added to this topic area.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of effectiveness held

by the members of a citizen advisory committee and by members of a school board in relationship to the committee's ability to complete two tasks. The Advisory Committee was directed to complete an evaluation of the system's facilities and to make recommendations on a process to gather data from high school graduates concerning their preparation for post secondary study or work.

### **Research Questions**

1. What was the perception of effectiveness concerning the work of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) by its membership?
2. What were the perceptions of the CAC membership concerning the tasks to be completed?
3. How did the members of the CAC perceive the outcome of their work?
4. What communication processes were perceived as effective by the CAC?
5. What decision-making procedures were perceived by the CAC as effective?
6. What perceptions were held by the school board concerning the work of the CAC?

## **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this research is to add information that would affirm effective practices employed by advisory committees and to support new insights or procedures when utilizing an advisory council. This study will also serve as an example of one of the methods that can be utilized in the evaluation of these committees.

It is important to understand the views and perceptions of volunteers in relationship to the work they are asked to perform in order to use their time wisely. Salisbury (1980), in his study on parent participation, concluded, “citizens who participate in school affairs remain positive in their supportive attitudes toward schools” (p. 177). However, as indicated by Peterson-del Mar (1994), “the mere presence of a school-site council means very little. Only the committed and skillful participation of the school community can breathe life into its form” (p. 4).

## **Definitions**

The following terms are defined in this study as:

1. Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) - An ad hoc study group whose membership consisted of citizens of a county school system as appointed by a

local school board.

2. Perceptions - An impression, judgment, or view held by the membership of the CAC and by the school board concerning the work of this committee.

### **Limitations**

The researcher has had both personal and professional experience working on and with advisory groups. This involvement has given the researcher a familiarity with the work of such groups. These experiences can be considered advantageous as pointed out by Strauss and Corbin (1990) when they indicated that “this knowledge, even if implicit, is taken into the research situation and helps you understand events and actions seen and heard, and to do so more quickly”(p. 42). However, these researchers also acknowledged that these “experiences can also block you from seeing things that have become routine” (p. 42) and therefore may serve as a limitation for a researcher in that bias is possible when the analysis of the data occurs.

The information provided by the members of the school board and by the CAC is limited by their honesty and forthrightness. However, the information provided is limited to the members’ experiences and understanding of the questions presented by the researcher.

The method of data collection could have been influenced by environmental conditions that were uncontrollable. These include, but are not limited to, noises, room temperatures, and outside influences. However, no control was made for time limits or location of the interviews. Additionally, the researcher had no control over the selection process or the qualifications of individuals selected to serve on the CAC.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **Historical Development of Advisory Committees**

Public education in the United States has developed from an uncomplicated, locally controlled, one room schoolhouse to a complex bureaucratic organization regulated by state statutes and influenced by federal regulations. Early schools were controlled and operated by the local community. This allowed for direct control of the curriculum and its instructors. The feature of local control continued as the United States developed and expanded until the early 1800s at that time the War of 1812 ended and the public shifted its attention from defending the new-found nation to creating a strong democracy. To accomplish this task, a shift from locally controlled schools to the involvement of state governments took place. From 1820 to 1850, states began to establish regulations for their systems of education (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 1970). The instruction of students began to be viewed as a specialized science, that dictated the need for trained personnel to carry out specific methodologies such as Pestalozzianism, that centered on using objects in teaching to develop a sense of inquiring by students, and Herbartianism, that utilized formal steps in imparting knowledge to students.

These educational movements, along with the expansion of school populations due to compulsory attendance laws and child labor laws, created highly specialized systems of education (Johnson, et al. 1970). Citizen control was further removed as small school systems were consolidated and school boards began to represent larger constituencies of parents. Meyer (1982), in his research on community participation, contended:

With the reduction in elected officials and growth in size of school systems due to district consolidation and population increases, there arose the professional administrator. With centralized control of city schools came a reduction in the number of lay participants in educational decision making, creating a professional school bureaucracy and expanding the role of the superintendent (p 21).

Educational leaders began to realize that without the participation of parents and the community at large in the educational process, they would lose their support. Dewey (1909) stated that, “education is primarily a public business, and only secondarily a specialized vocation. The layman then will always have the right to some utterance in the operation of the public school” (p. v). Hiemstra (1972) contended that “change in the school as we know it will be successful only to the

point that members of the supportive community share in the attempt to refine programs” (p. 19). Fantini (1981) suggested that, “the abdication of citizens’ involvement in the governance and business of public schools is as true to democratic theory as the assertion of their right to control” (p. 9). Davies (1981) supported the idea of public participation in schools by stating “that a publicly controlled system of common schools is necessary for social cohesion, equal access to educational opportunity, and continued progress toward achieving a stable democratic society” (p. 87). He believed that public education allowed for opportunities of advancement regardless of one’s social-economic status.

Alexander and Salmon (1995) proposed that “if the institution of public common schools as we know it is to survive there must remain a constancy of purpose as reflected in certain precepts emanating from both its philosophical and historical traditions” (p. 11). Alexander and Salmon identified these precepts from standards adopted by the Kentucky Supreme Court. One principle they listed is that “schools are to be public, of the body politic, and are to be governed and controlled by the people” (p.12). This principle is reinforced by Sarason (1995) who contends that, “the political principle justifying parental involvement is that when decisions are made affecting you or your possessions, you should have a role, a voice in the

process of decision making” (p. 19).

### **Current Practices**

The use of lay citizens in the public school setting continues to grow in popularity. Organizations such as the National Association of Partners in Education (1991) and the National Community Education Association (1987) have supported the public’s involvement in the schools through seminars, publications, and financial support.

Federal and state governments, recognizing the need for citizen and parent involvement in public education, have enacted various requirements that mandate the use of advisory councils. Federal legislation has required the formation of advisory committees in the areas of early childhood education, Title I, and vocational education. An example of these acts would be Public Law 91-230, that amended federal guidelines to require school districts receiving Title I funding to establish parent advisory committees (Hightower, 1970). The American Association of School Administrators, in their review, (1994) of local school councils highlighted the 1988 Illinois General Assembly’s reform law that required local school councils in Chicago’s schools, the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act that mandated local school councils, and a 1990 West Virginia school

improvement act that established local school councils. This movement to place authority back into the hands of the local citizenry has continued in other states. Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century required school districts to establish a school council within each building by September 1995 (Oregon State Department of Education, 1992). As reported in Education Week, a plan to establish decision making councils in New York City Schools was made public by their chancellor in his efforts to meet the requirements of a school governance law passed by their state legislature in 1996 (White, 1998).

Support for using citizen advisory committees has been advocated not only by federal and state movements but also by individuals involved with the various aspects of school administration. For example, in a presentation to the Annual Conference of the International Society for Educational Planning, Chan (1997) described a participatory approach to school facility planning that included parents and community leaders.

In conjunction with the formation of these various advisory committees, school related organizations developed certain guidelines and principles to be followed to assist them in their purpose. The National Community Education Association (1987) produced a handbook for members of community advisory

councils encompassing areas concerning the philosophical support of the group, membership selection, leadership, purpose, and procedures for evaluating their work (NCEA, 1987). The Alabama State Department division of Vocational and Technical Education (1990) produced a guide for the effective use of advisory committees in conjunction with their vocational programs. This guide provided information on the development of school board policies to cover topics such as the advisory committee function, procedures for operation and reporting, membership selection, and committee evaluation. To evaluate the work of the committee the guide suggested that “those personnel who work closely with the committees” should complete a checklist provided in their manual (pp. 52-53)

Additional guidelines have been produced by the National Association of Partners in Education (NAPE), (1991) and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), (1994). Meagher (1990), a former school board member and college administrator, listed ten “steps in the successful use of citizens’ advisory committees” (p. 14). These steps addressed areas such as issue identification, membership, operating procedures, and school board responsibilities (p. 14).

The first principle in the utilization of advisory committees seems to be that

there must be a shared belief between the organization's membership and the lay citizen, and that there is a basis for entering into a relationship with each other.

Oldham, Brodinsky, & Godridge (1973) identified this need when they stated "Only when organized for a sound purpose and only nurtured with good care can the citizens advisory groups promote the cause of education in the community"(p. 6).

This relationship should enhance the organization's goals and have positive outcomes for both parties (Cunninggim, 1985; Meagher, 1990). One method of promoting advisory groups by school boards is to develop a set of policies that supports the use of an advisory committee and gives credibility to the group's existence. These policies should define the group's authority, purpose, and responsibilities (Meagher, 1990). Once the commitment has been made by the school board, a similar commitment needs to be made by each volunteer. Results of a survey conducted by Mueller (1992) of local school councils in Chicago, he noted the "lack of parental involvement"(p. 15) as one of the major concerns expressed by members of the advisory councils.

A second principle is that educators and school boards must be careful not to misuse the time and commitment of its volunteers. Brodinsky (1972) in his recommendations for improving the use of advisory groups identified five possible

areas of abuse, which included using the volunteers as “free labor, as a rubber stamp, as a shock absorber, as a front-man promotor, and as an S. O. S. Team” (p.6). These abuses can lead to a lack of commitment to the process and undermine the usefulness of the council (Oldham, Brodinsky & Godridge, 1973).

Once the council has been formed, a third principle evolves: those involved with the committee, including its members, must understand the committee’s function, purpose, and organization (AASA, 1994). Byrene & Powell (1976), recommended that “the purpose of an advisory group must be delineated when the group is formed” (p. 27). Procedures for making decisions, determining agendas, communicating, determining membership, reporting, and evaluating the committee’s work should be established. “Local school council members will need both information and skills,” as suggested by the American Association of School Administrators in their 1994 article, Local School Councils...Where We Stand, (p. 7). Time lines for the completion of tasks, lines of authority, and resolution of conflicts should also be addressed, clearly understood, and implemented (ASCVTE, 1990, Flisram; 1993, Silver, 1993).

The last principle involves the development of effective methods for providing feedback and recognition to the advisory group. Procedures, if

warranted, to bring an end to the group and their work must be carefully clarified and understood by the council's membership and by the school board. Council members need to know that their efforts were meaningful and served a useful purpose. The members of the advisory council need to know how their advice will be implemented and utilized (NSBA, 1996).

### **Related Research**

Berge's work, Advisory Councils In The Public Education System Of The United States (1993), gave a historical perspective of the roles and use of advisory councils from the early 1900's to the 1990's. Her findings indicate that, "advisory councils have appeared and disappeared depending upon the cycles of conflict, complacency, day-to-day survival, and/or sense of urgent educational or social issues"(p. v). According to Berge, in the 1940's the need to educate farmers and future farmers about effective agricultural practices led to the formation of advisory committees at the local school level. In the 1960's federally mandated parent councils were required of Head Start programs aimed at improving the educational opportunity for minorities and low-income families. The 1970's saw the formation of school improvement programs with mandated parent or citizen participation on school-based councils. The 1980's and 1990's have seen the formation of local

school councils with elected parent representatives.

Research by Berge (1993) also indicates that the various persons involved with advisory councils, administrators, board members, and citizens themselves, were often confused about the purpose and function of the committee, as well as their participation on the council. Questions related to the selection of council members, the purpose and duration of councils, problems to be addressed, and “whether a council would or could actually improve school-community relationships”(p. 43) were identified by Berge (1993).

The question of whether advisory councils are effective in their various roles has been the basis for investigation by other researchers. Rivard (1981) in his research on advisory councils in Macomb County, Michigan, was trying to identify “some evidence as to the effectiveness of school advisory councils in order to encourage school districts to implement and make use of the advisory council as a meaningful and helpful component of the decision making process”(p. 35).

Through the use of a questionnaire he identified various levels of council effectiveness and recommended that “administrators examine their own council’s participation in decision making to make better use of citizens’ involvement in their schools”(p. 88).

Jones (1983), in his descriptive study, Title I Parent Advisory Councils in Virginia, was investigating the perceptions of various school personnel involved with the Title I program and council members in regard to their relationships, activities and impacts of such councils (p. 17). Data were collected through a survey of selected councils, and from his analysis, he made several recommendations to maintain or increase the effectiveness of these councils. He suggested that they “increase training at the school level and work toward increased involvement of parents emphasizing both quantity and quality,” “provide for continuity of membership,” and “include professionals as an integral part of the council”(p.142).

Meyer (1982) conducted a national survey of school board members to determine their attitudes toward community participation. He concluded that school board members believe that the community should be involved in making decisions in regard to issues such as building management, curriculum, discipline, and budget concerns. However, while the majority of school board members surveyed supported this involvement, he noted that, “20 to 30 percent fewer respondents reported actual involvement or willingness to delegate decision-making responsibility”(p. 194). He concluded that, “if school board members really

believed in community involvement with delegated responsibility, mechanisms with proper legal requirements should be created to make community and delegated responsibility a reality” (p. 194).

Berge’s (1993) stated that “there seems to be no procedure to monitor the effectiveness of an advisory council and that this inability to accurately measure the council’s accomplishments may somewhat contribute to the disappearance of advisory councils” (p. 130). It is the intent of this research to add to the body of literature on this subject.

In summary, citizen advisory councils continue to be utilized by some educational systems and to play an important role in our schools. Limited research regarding their effectiveness has indicated concerns with the guidance and support they are given, and the quality of their work.

In November of 1996 an advisory group of lay citizens was formed by a local school board to review the school system’s facilities, make recommendations based upon their findings, and identify procedures for collecting data from graduates. The purpose of this research is to study the perceptions held by the members of this group and the school board concerning the effectiveness of their work.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Questions concerning the utilization of citizens advisory committees and their effectiveness continue to be raised. This research focused on the use of an advisory committee by a school board and how effective it was in completing their assigned tasks. The researcher has identified the result of using this group in the educational setting and has provided additional information to assist in answering this question.

The willingness of these volunteers to freely give their time to assist the school board in these projects tends to support the idea that “there is a natural tendency for people to gather in groups for mutually beneficial purposes” (Gladding, 1994, p.1). However, bringing together this group of interested citizens for some common purpose does not guarantee the success of the project. There is a realization that complex interactions will occur among the members of any organization, and that these interactions will affect the members’ effectiveness in completing tasks hold true for this committee. Dyer and Williams (1991) point out that “all members of any organization, those

who serve on the board (advisory or governing) and the staff must work closely together to help the organization reach its full potential” (1991, p. 4).

The focus of this research was on the perceptions held by the individual members of the CAC and the school board concerning the work of this committee. Specific information was collected from the CAC membership regarding their perceptions concerning the usefulness of the recommendations made by their committee, their perceptions on how this committee functioned, and their views on utilizing citizens to perform tasks for the board.

The following sections identify the setting, populations to be studied, the data needed from each group, the development of the research instruments, the procedures utilized in the collection of data and analysis.

### **Setting**

The county in that the CAC was being studied is elongated in shape, extends from north to south, and lies between two mountain ranges. A major interstate runs through its historic valley, providing easy access to bordering counties as well as linking it to a major metropolitan area. These bordering counties offer many job opportunities and retail sales to the county’s residents. The county has become

attractive to families because of its rural flavor, its access to recreational areas, its small towns, and its light industries. There is a strong sense of community that has been enhanced by the geographical features of the county. Three small population centers serve as sites for the county's schools. Each center has an elementary school built in the early seventies, a middle school built in the late eighties, and a high school built in the mid fifties. Local community pride is enhanced by the rivalries among the three campuses and their schools. Growth in the county's population has resulted in an increase in student population at all three school sites. Overcrowding is being experienced at the elementary schools and middle schools. The lack of sufficient gymnasium space and auditoriums at the high schools has affected their ability to provide programs related to these areas.

### **Data Source I: School Board Members**

#### **Population Description**

The school board membership is made up of individuals who were elected for the first time by county residents. Prior to this election, board members were appointed by elected county supervisors. Each board member represents one of the county's six voting districts. They were elected to terms of six years, four years, and two years, based on of the number of votes each school board member received

during the initial election. One school board member is female and served as the board's representative to the CAC. The remaining members are males. The county has a small minority population of Afro-Americans and Hispanics. Neither of these groups is represented on the board. All of the board members come from a professional background.

### **Instrumentation**

To collect the needed data from the membership of the school board, interviews were conducted. The format of the interview was developed based upon the research questions and conducted with individual school board members. Before a pilot testing of the interview format was conducted, the interview questions were sent to two independent readers to determine their validity and clarity. One reader is recognized as an expert in the field of educational research, and the other is a school superintendent who has had training in the development of these instruments. Modifications to the questions were made and the process repeated until both parties agreed on the interview questions. After validation, the interview format and interview questions were pilot tested by an interviewer other than the researcher. This independent interviewer was utilized by the researcher because of the propinquity of the researcher's position in the school

system. Babbie (1973) recommends that “the interviewer’s presence should not affect a respondent’s perception of a question or the answer given” and that the interviewer “be a neutral medium through that questions are asked and answers are transmitted” (p. 172). The independent interviewer, who has a background in educational administration, was trained by the researcher and had conducted the pilot testing of the interview questions and interview protocol. The training session clarified the purpose of this research and reviewed the interview questions and related probes (see Appendix C), and the interview protocol (see Appendix F). These mock interviews were taped, and an analysis of each session conducted by the researcher. The result of this analysis was shared with the independent interviewer, and additional training conducted if necessary.

### **Data Collection**

To collect the data, the researcher focused on the perceptions as described by the individual members of the school board concerning the work of the CAC. This procedure was based upon the belief that meaning can be derived by perceiving through the subject’s reality (Silverman, 1993). The design of this study focused on the school board members’ perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the CAC and the usefulness of their report.

Permission to conduct this study and collect data was obtained from the Institutional Review Board for Research involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (see Appendix G), the researcher's committee, and the superintendent of schools in the division where the school board is located. These requests included an outline of the study, its purpose, and the list of interview questions utilized by the researcher. Once permission was granted from the various parties and the report of the CAC made to the school board, initial contact was made with the school board members via an introductory letter sent by the researcher (see Appendix H). This letter included information about the purpose of this study, information about how the data will be collected and by whom, and a form giving permission by the school board member to the researcher for the purpose of data collection through an interview. This form also provided information from the school board member in regard to a phone number and the best time for them to be contacted for the purpose of establishing an interview date, time, and place (see Appendix J). This information was forwarded to the independent interviewer by the researcher. The interviewer contacted the individual school board members and utilized the interview questions to obtain data. Also included with this mailing was a stamped, self-addressed envelope for

the school board member to use to return the permission form to the researcher.

Two weeks after the initial mailing, a follow-up letter was sent to any school board member who did not reply to the first mailing. The interview protocol utilized by the interviewer included a request to the interviewee that permission is granted to record the interview session using a tape recorder. These tapes, along with field notes, were given to the researcher for the purpose of data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher applied various strategies to interpret the data provided by the school board members' interviews. Once the tapes were transcribed by the researcher, the process of open coding was applied to the collected information. This process includes breaking down the information so it can be examined and compared to other data, forming concepts, and categorizing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1991). Additionally, the researcher re-organized the data in relationship to the various questions asked on the CAC Questionnaire, the CAC interview format, and the school board interview format. Triangulation, a strategy in that multiple referents are used to draw conclusions about the same concept (Gay, 1996), was applied to the data gathered from the interviews of the school board members. Additional points of triangulation were explored by comparing the data from the

school board interviews and the interviews of the CAC Committee members. After the data were coded and organized, the researcher drew possible conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and suggested further avenues for possible research in chapters four and five, respectively.

## **Data Source II: Citizen Advisory Committee**

### Population Description

The Citizen Advisory Committee was made up of fifteen citizens drawn from various sources. Many of the individuals making up the membership of this committee were appointed by school board members as their representatives. Other members came from various community groups identified by the school board. Representatives came from the department of social services, the senior citizens' group, and the local farm association. School related organizations such as the local teachers' association and various parent/teacher organizations were requested to send a representative to serve on this committee. Several members had a prior relationship with the school system through their participation on a Blue Ribbon Panel that had been formed to assist the school system with a previous building program. Other members were drawn from a concerned citizens' group that had been formed to draw attention to educational issues. Also participating in this

committee's tasks was a representative from the school board and the division's assistant superintendent.

The chairman of the group, from one of the county's industrial sites, was selected by the board of education. None of the county's minority groups was represented on this committee. The majority of the group's membership had been trained beyond high school and was involved in professional jobs.

### **Data Needed**

Data were collected from the membership of the CAC to determine their perceptions concerning the effectiveness of their work as completed by their committee for the school board. Since many of the members of the CAC did not attend any or some of the meetings, a method for determining a representative sample to interview for the purpose of data collection was established. To identify this representative sample a questionnaire (see Appendix B) was developed that included an attendance section. From this attendance data, the researcher determined that members of the CAC were contacted for the purpose of collecting data centered on their perceptions of effectiveness. Data were also obtained from the questionnaire in an attempt to answer the other research questions.

## **Instrumentation**

To gather data from the CAC membership two instruments were developed and utilized. First was a questionnaire that provided attendance data and opinions on advisory groups and the opportunities they provide for learning and participation from the membership. The second instrument developed and utilized was a set of interview questions (see Appendix D) developed to collect information to assess the CAC members' view concerning the effectiveness of their work.

The questionnaire, developed by the researcher and based on the research questions, was first validated by sending it to two independent readers, an expert in the field of educational research, and a school superintendent who has been trained in the development of these instruments. They were asked to review the questionnaire for clarity and to determine if the open-ended questions were valid. Modifications to the instrument were made based upon their recommendations.

Interview questions and related probes were developed for collecting information related to the perceptions that members of the CAC have of their work and of their report to the board of education. These questions were developed and tested by the researcher for reliability and validity. To validate the interview questions, the researcher used a group of doctoral students who were given a copy

of the interview questions and the list of research questions. This group was made up of various school personnel from area school systems who were in a doctoral program with the researcher. They, along with the researcher, attended a summer orientation session at the university. The purpose of this session was to prepare this group to conduct research on various topics. The group was instructed to review each interview question for clarity and to make suggestions for improvement. The members were instructed to match each interview question to the research questions related to the perceptions of the CAC membership. Once the data were collected, they were analyzed and questions modified where needed. To determine reliability of the interview questions, a field test was implemented. Mock interviews were conducted and tape-recorded. Before the mock interviews, background information about the advisory committee's role and purpose was given to the participants. After the field test of the interview questions, the researcher made modifications to the instrument where needed.

### **Data Collection**

To collect data the researcher focused on the experiences as described by the members of the CAC. To begin this research, permission to collect this data was obtained from the school division's superintendent, the Institutional Review Board

for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and the researcher's committee. Once permission was granted, a mailing to the CAC membership was conducted. Included with this mailing were a cover letter (see Appendix A) that introduced the researcher and the purpose of this study, the CAC questionnaire, a release form (see Appendix I), and directions for returning the questionnaire. A follow-up phone call was made to the CAC members who did not return the requested material.

### **Data Analysis**

The data to be analyzed from the membership of the CAC came from two different sources, the CAC Questionnaire, and the interviews of selected CAC members. Attendance information from the questionnaire was analyzed to determine that members of the CAC to interview. Members who attended 50% or more of the meetings were contacted for face-to-face interviews. Data from these interviews were coded and applied to various matrices along with data from the questionnaire (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once the data were coded and organized, possible conclusions were drawn and described in Chapter Four. Recommendations for further research were based on this analysis and were identified in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data reported in this chapter were generated from the questionnaires mailed to the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) membership, interviews conducted with selected members of the CAC, and interviews with school board members. Fifteen questionnaires were mailed to the membership of the CAC, and the same number was returned. Members had the opportunity to respond to four questions related to advisory committees, to identify CAC meetings that they had attended, and to give permission to use the data from the questionnaire. Twelve of the fifteen members gave permission for the researcher to contact them for conducting an interview. A stipulation was made that only the CAC members who had attended 50 percent or more of the meetings would be interviewed. Eight members qualified to be interviewed according to their attendance at CAC meetings. One member who qualified to be included in the interviews, declined to be interviewed. Members who did not qualify for interviews because of low attendance indicated their attendance at meetings had been hampered by other obligations or illness. One member joined the council late in the process, filling a vacant position assigned to a

county agency. Four of the fifteen members did not attend any of the meetings.

The following table identifies the number of meetings the members of the CAC attended and any members who declined permission to conduct the interviews.

Table 1

Attendance of CAC Members at Meetings

CAC Member	No. Of Meetings Attended	= %	Interviewed
1	7	70	yes
2	6	60	yes
3	9	90	Declined
4	9	90	yes
5	7	70	yes
6	7	70	yes
7	8	80	yes
8	8	80	yes
9	3	30	no
10	2	20	no
11	0	0	no
12	0	0	no
13	0	0	no
14	2	20	no
15	0	0	no

The purpose of the CAC Questionnaire was to generate attendance data from their members as well as to give them an opportunity to respond to certain questions. The questions on the CAC Questionnaire asked the membership's perceptions concerning the role advisory committees play in school systems, if their participation on the advisory committee assisted them in understanding the school system, if their participation gave them an opportunity to share with others, and if they felt the experience was worthwhile.

The composition of this committee included thirteen white males and two white females. None of the county's minority populations was represented. Six of the members were representatives appointed by school board members. Two of the six members selected by the school board qualified to be interviewed. The remaining members represented various groups or associations throughout the county except for the chairman of the committee. He was selected by the administration of the school system with school board approval.

## CAC Questionnaire Responses

Question Number One: Do you believe committees like the CAC play an important role in the operation of schools?

A total of thirteen members responded to this question with the majority of the respondents, ten out of the thirteen, indicating the beneficial nature of committees like the CAC. They believed that utilizing this process allows for different points of view to be expressed by various community members as indicated by the following statements: “It’s beneficial to get a spectrum of people, ideas, and opinions from the community,” “Having people from all over the county gave everyone different views on the school system,” and “I think it is helpful for citizens that are not involved financially in the school system to give input into its future.” However, they did indicate a concern with these views being influenced by school administrators. They indicated that committees like the CAC could play an important part in the operation of the school system if it is not manipulated by school administrators. In addition, they felt if the committee is given an objective and allowed to take it to completion without influence from the administration, then the system will get a different perspective.

Additionally, they identified that the committee could also play a political

role for the school board. Two dimensions identified were: as an “advocate” for the school system and as “a largely political function showing involvement of community personnel.”

The membership generally felt that they could have an impact on the decision making process. They felt they could address “school concerns that impact directly on each person living in the county.” Two responses, however, did raise the issue that these committees could not impact “the day to day operations due to the complexity of the system” and that all that this process does is “give a little back-up documentation that can be used when the needs occur.”

Question Number Two: Did your participation on the CAC improve your understanding of the school system?

The concept that the CAC could serve as an educational tool for the school system was strongly endorsed by the membership. Individual members indicated that they were “able to find out more about a lot of things” that they didn’t know, that “the information provided the CAC is not readily available to the general public,” that they “became aware of the needs of other schools within the county,” and that, “the needs of the school system are vast.”

They also indicated that it was educational for them to hear other people’s opinions and to see the physical needs of the system. They felt they

could, through the in-depth study, make recommendations addressing current and future needs and make “the community aware of the school system’s needs.”

Question Number Three: Did your involvement on the CAC give you an opportunity to share with others in your community about the needs of the school system?

Most members shared the information they gained while working on this committee in either formal or informal ways. They indicated they shared information with “groups they represented,” at “other committee meetings they attended,” or “whenever the opportunity presented itself.” One member went as far as to say this was the best part of serving on the committee. Another member shared that he used this opportunity to find different views from those expressed by the people he interacted with or that he would use the opportunity “to explain” the work of the group.

Two of the respondents indicated that they had only limited opportunities to discuss the information they had gained with others. Another member felt that the local media would be a better source to get data out to the community.

Question Number Four: Do you believe that your participation on the CAC was a worthwhile experience?

CAC members indicated satisfaction with their participation on the committee. They felt that “it was a learning experience” and that they had become “more knowledgeable about the school system.” They enjoyed the opportunity to volunteer and to give advice to the school board. One member stated that “if nothing else, it shows that there is a sincere and real interest” on the part of members of the community to serve on these committees. Another member indicated, “it was a worthwhile experience because the community was given a chance to have input on various topics.” This view was shared by several other members. Other benefits mentioned by the membership included the opportunity to assist in building “greater community support for our schools,” and the opportunity to “enjoy the speakers and other committee members.”

To gather additional views about the CAC members’ perceptions, face to face interviews were conducted. The criterion established to identify that members to interview was based on their attendance at meetings. Members that attended 50 percent or more of the CAC meetings and gave permission to be contacted were scheduled for an interview. This criterion resulted in a sample of eight members who qualified for an interview.

The focus of this research was based on the perceptions held by the

participants. Five of the six research questions developed around this theme were directed toward the membership of the CAC. Interviews were conducted with seven of the eight members who qualified according to attendance data. One member, who had qualified to be interviewed, declined. The data has been organized in relationship to the research questions and the concepts that have evolved from the analysis of information derived from the interviews.

### **Analysis of CAC Members' Interviews**

Research Question Number One: What was the perception of effectiveness concerning the work of the Citizens Advisory Committees by its membership?

The results indicated that the members who were involved with the work of this committee were very pleased with their final report and the recommendations that they presented to the school board. They indicated that there were several factors that led to the success of their committee. These included the number and type of tasks to be completed, the support they received from the school administration, the information provided to them by a consultant, the smallness of the group and how well they were able to interact with each other, and their ability to reach decisions.

Respondents indicated that “the final report contained everything we

studied” and that “ the recommendations were good.” Satisfaction was also felt from the membership when they were told that their report was requested by the county board of supervisors to assist them in their planning. This information indicated to committee members that their efforts were appreciated and valuable.

Members felt the organization of the committee assisted them in the completion of their report to the school board. Respondents felt that having a limited number of issues helped them to remain focused. As one member said, “This was better, we could look at one issue and try to resolve it.” Another member stated that “this time we had a lot of focus and this helped us get through.” The focus on the number of issues came from members who volunteered on previous committees where there had been quite a few topics reviewed, but little or no action had been taken to resolve any of these concerns.

Members acknowledged that with volunteers from the community and different businesses, it was hard to get together for meetings. However, most of the respondents felt that the number of meetings held was adequate to get the job completed and that they had completed the study in a timely fashion.

One member stated, “For the most part the committee worked very well together.” This concept was reinforced by other committee members. Respondents indicated that the meetings of the CAC “weren’t real business like.” The members felt this informality was a result of the group’s size and the ability to get to know one another. Committee members felt that they could bring any issue to a meeting and that time would be spent discussing the topic.

Additionally, members felt that the limited number of active participants helped to open discussions and that the “interactions between committee members were very active.”

Members indicated that responsibilities were shared. As one member pointed out, “We weren’t inhibited. If you were willing to volunteer, you had a job.” Respondents also felt that the approach of breaking down into study groups was effective and that the campus visits were very helpful.

Respondents indicated they were uncertain on how to proceed at first, but a step that really assisted the group was when a consultant from outside the school system met with them. They shared their belief that “having the consultant was an asset to the group,” and that the consultant made it personal for them. They indicated that the consultant “pointed out things we should

consider but didn't try to influence us.”

Additional comments were that “the consultant gave us the guidelines to do a good study and that “it was important to have brought in someone from the outside who didn't have an agenda and presented material objectively.”

Respondents said that their work was supported by the school administration, and this support helped in the gathering of information. Examples of these beliefs that were shared were the perception that they “had the backing of the board and administration,” and that “the principals were very receptive” to their inquiries and visits. They also felt that “the schools were cooperative in providing the information requested” and that “there was a good deal of respect for what the committee was trying to accomplish.” One committee member indicated that “everyone seemed pretty supportive of what we were doing.”

Concerns with attendance of the members who was asked to serve on this committee and the criteria for membership were of great interest to the active members of this committee. Also of concern was the lack of feedback they received from the school board during their work, the attention one of their recommendations received by the media, and how the activity was drawn

to a conclusion.

One respondent indicated, “I met some of the committee members for the first time and the last time at that first meeting.” Another shared that “there were a number of people you only saw once. I think people thought they were only going to be representatives.” Participants put forth several ideas explaining why committee members did not participate. One suggestion was that several of the members were not convinced that the school board was sincere in wanting them to do these tasks or that their recommendations would be considered. For example, one member stated that he was “skeptical if the board really wanted the information,” another stated that “the concept that we had the power to impact wasn’t there, so our attendance dropped off,” and finally one member said that “some people thought they were going to just rubber stamp decisions.”

Several members suggested that once the participants realized the time involved with completing these tasks “participation really dropped off.” Another suggested, “a lot of people volunteer and don’t have an idea on what it will take to do the job.” One respondent noted, “there was a lot of representation at the first meeting then it dropped off.” This could have been

due to a “lack of interest,” indicated another interviewee.

Concerns that the lack of attendance had an impact on the committee and its decisions were also identified. “There were members of the committee that never showed up, and they represented different segments of the community.” Participating members felt that the insights these additional members could have shared would have added strength to their recommendations. As one respondent stated, “My only disappointment was that we had fewer people participate in the end.”

Suggestions that participants had in regard to this issue were that “if someone sets up a committee like this then it must be understood that participation is required.” Another suggested that “because of the lack of participation from some members, they should have been replaced.”

Respondents felt that more consideration should have been given to the variety of members needed to serve on this committee. One suggestion was a need for “different members with more of a professional background to help give a better perspective.” Other recommendations included the need for “representation on the committee from the county government” and “to have representatives from different groups in the community.”

Another suggestion was “that when you have a committee like this,

there needs to be some sort of criteria for selection.” Some felt that “the school board didn’t put a lot of thought into their representative. They just needed a member.” This response was generated from members of the committee who represented outside groups and saw that many of the school board representatives were not involved with the committee’s function.

The committee indicated it would have been beneficial to receive feedback from the board during their work. “ This would have helped us to know if we were on the right track. This way we would not go off in the wrong direction and waste a lot of time.” However, some respondents felt their work came to a sudden end. One member stated, “ But it was bam! You are done. We got what we want.” Another said, “It ended! We wondered about our future.” Still another “thought that the board would like to discuss their recommendations with them,” and finally a member responded, “I didn’t think they would be just taken and given to the board of supervisors.” Members indicated they would have liked to have an informal session in that the school board members could have questioned the group about their recommendations. They felt that this meeting would have provided information to the board members that supported the report.

In summary, the CAC Committee members felt they were effective in completing the tasks as assigned. However, the process did raise several questions and concerns in regard to attendance and membership, feedback, and an effective way to end the work of the group.

Research Question Number Two: What were the perceptions of the CAC membership concerning the tasks to be completed?

The school board requested that the CAC review the school system's facilities and investigate a process for gathering information from graduates of their three high schools in relationship to how well the school's programs prepared them for their post-graduation careers or future education. Once they completed this work, they were asked to present their recommendations to the board.

Two major themes evolved from the data analysis: the worthiness of the tasks requested by the board and the clarity of what was being requested. The respondents indicated that the tasks they were undertaking were going to be worthy of their time and interest. One participant explained, "I think the group accepted the objectives and once started, we kept our nose to the grind." Members indicated that "this was one thing we could actually get our teeth

into” and that “we could actually see that we were going to get somewhere.”

In regard to the time spent on each task, members indicated that “the facilities study was given greater weight” and had the total interest of the committee. Members indicated, “there wasn’t a lot of emphasis on the graduate study” but that “the board didn’t say to spend more time on one than the other.”

Concerning the clarity and understanding of the tasks, members had various points of view. Some members felt their understanding of the tasks was “absolutely clear” while others indicated that “it was vague on how we were to go with the graduate survey.” “I don’t think the committee understood the issue of the survey as well as they did the facilities study,” shared one respondent. Another pointed out that “one could get a grip on the facilities studies but not the survey.” Still another respondent felt the “facility study was more concrete than the graduate study.”

At first, the group indicated that they were unclear as to what the school board wanted from them. One member felt that the “school board didn’t even know what they wanted, but that the administration had an agenda.” Another shared, “What the school board wanted wasn’t very clear at first but later it was defined.” One member indicated, “at first we were trying to decide what the needs were and then the board gave us direction.” An event that

seemed to help the group define their tasks and procedures was after meeting with the consultant. One member said, “The consultant was fine; he gave us information to flag in our brains. His coming later in the process kept us from forming opinions and helped us understand the tasks.” One member shared that “my school board member informed me as well as he could about the projects.” Another member pointed out that once the group had invited the superintendent and the director of maintenance to speak on various topics, they had a better understanding of the needs and the direction they were to take.

In summary, understanding and clarity of the tasks and the kind of information the group was to provide the board came later in the process. Events that seemed to assist the group were the assistance provided by the consultant and the information provided by the school administration.

Research Question Number Three: How did the members of the CAC feel about the outcome of their work?

Data analysis revealed the emergence of three common themes in relationship to this question. First was the concept of satisfaction with the recommendations the group made to the school board; next was the perception

that the media and school administration “feasted” on one of their recommendations, as stated by one member; and lastly was the need for recognition.

Generally, the membership was very satisfied with recommendations they made to the school board. They felt that the drafts and the final report were done very well and that they gave the board food for thought. They were glad to see the administration had been given the report and actually had begun to work on many of the areas pointed out in their recommendations. They also felt that their recommendations in relationship to the graduate survey would be useful later and would be helpful.

Concerns related to the membership issue were also expressed during this part of data collection. While the members interviewed felt that the group’s differences added to their recommendations, there were concerns that having additional input from a larger number of people would have given additional strength to their report. Members felt that due to the lack of participants, they “couldn’t look in depth at some questions like they should” or that they didn’t have the expertise to make some of the recommendations.

One recommendation, that the members felt drew undue attention from the media and the school administration, was related to the need for

larger gyms and auditoriums at the high schools. Members indicated that this topic had been raised by the school administration and was part of their hidden agenda. One member indicated that they had “compromised to nullify the issue.” Respondents felt that this item overshadowed their other recommendations and was “feasted on,” as one respondent indicated, by the media.

When the respondents were asked if they were recognized for their efforts on this committee, all interviewees indicated they were not; but they qualified this by saying they really did not feel a need for recognition. They did indicate that they were pleased to see the information being used and that there was a feeling of satisfaction with knowing that “they did the right thing.” One respondent did indicate, “it would be nice to sit down later and know what happened with our recommendations.”

Research Question Number Four: What communication processes were perceived as effective by the CAC?

The information provided by the respondents centered around the opportunity to share ideas and information at meetings, perceptions concerning the information they had requested to be supplied to them, the accuracy in the minutes of their meetings, and issues about feedback

concerning their work and recommendations.

Respondents indicated that the number of meetings that were held were adequate in number to complete the tasks. They felt that the meetings were open and “everyone had equal say” on issues. Members indicated that they could talk as freely as they wanted to, agree, or disagree. The respondents also felt that through their discussions they were able to come to a consensus regarding various issues and topics.

Respondents indicated that the administration was supportive in their efforts to obtain information as requested by the group. They felt that they had materials when they needed them but that this could have been an area for improvement. Respondents indicated that the information usually did not arrive “until right before the next meeting.” Respondents also felt that the information in relationship to the graduate study was appropriate and that the draft reports that were developed really helped them to make their decisions. In summary, as one respondent indicated, “The information flow was all right. It all goes back to that the administration had an agenda.”

Respondents pointed out that the minutes of the meetings were very helpful . They felt they were received in a timely fashion and were always

very informative. One respondent stated in relationship to the minutes, “Excellent, you could miss a meeting and the minutes would bring you up to speed.”

Of concern to the respondents was the limited amount of feedback they received from the school board concerning their progress and the final report. One member suggested that “about half way through we should have had a meeting with the school board. When you wait until the end you wonder what kind of reaction you will get from them.” Another felt that “the group needed feedback right away” and that “no committee knows if they are on the right track.” Another suggested, “with the facilities study it needed to be hands on right away!” The respondent felt that the group needed information from the school board in relationship to their work and procedures. Members also indicated that they wished that there had been a meeting where the members of the school board could have met and questioned the group freely. Respondents also shared that they would have liked to have known that what they did was beneficial.

In summary, respondents felt that the information provided to the group was beneficial to their decision making process and that the minutes reflected the proceedings of their meetings. The group indicated that they would have

liked to receive feedback from the school board in relationship to the group's progress and how their final recommendations were utilized by the school board.

Research Question Number Five: What decision making procedures were perceived by the CAC as Effective?

Several themes were developed from the data analysis in relationship to the respondents' answers to this question and related probes. Members recognized the diversity in the group but felt this diversity helped them to make good decisions and contributed to positive group dynamics. Members indicated that the size of the group "eliminated the need to be very business like." They felt that the flow of the meetings was very cordial, that everyone had an opportunity to discuss any issue they felt necessary, that everyone could share their ideas without the fear of getting cut off or being put down, and that there was a genuine effort to accommodate others and to work things out. They felt that even though a member was in the minority, he/she could still voice his/her opinion.

In reaching decisions the respondents indicated that they would discuss things until they got them worked out. One example a member of the group gave was that "there was one individual, like a dog with a bone, who was very

insistent on one issue.” The member indicated, “the group was very tolerable [sic] of this individual and found a compromise that seemed to satisfy everyone.” Members indicated that each decision was based on reaching a consensus. One respondent stated, “This group and their ability to reach decisions was very healthy. It was better than other groups I have been on.”

Several members raised the issue that others might have had an impact on some of their decisions. They felt that the school board member who served on the committee and members of the administration influenced the thinking of the group. A respondent indicated that they “often looked to the administration for answers rather than looking inside our group.”

In summary the group felt that all members had an equal say in the decision making process and that the diversity of the group and the group’s size impacted the group’s ability to function smoothly. They felt they could work out any issue and reach consensus without anyone feeling like he/she could not participate in the process.

### **School Board Interviews: Data Analysis**

The second part of this research focused on the perceptions held by the members of the school board concerning the work performed by the Citizens

Advisory Committee. To collect these data, face-to-face interviews were conducted. The following data analysis is organized according to the interview questions and related probes. Concepts evolving from this analysis are listed along with supporting data.

Research Question Number Six: What perceptions were held by the school board concerning the work of the CAC?

School board members were very impressed with the efforts of the CAC in completing the requested tasks. Members felt that the committee “dug in and did great work,” that “the assignments were done very well,” and “they did what we wanted them to do.” Board members indicated that they were extremely impressed and surprised with how well they did. Several school board members tended to associate this committee with a previous advisory committee, and their comments often reflected this idea. For instance, their perceptions regarding the work of this committee included statements such as, “bringing it back to this latest situation, they did an admirable job” and “one of the better projects they produced for us.” The school board membership was collectively pleased with the efforts of the CAC. One member indicated that he would give them a grade of “A+.”

Members were asked about the guidelines or school board policies, if any, that were established for this group and for advisory groups in general. Responses indicated varied opinions and ideas in relationship to this probe. Comments ranged from the idea that having a policy for these groups is not the way to go and that guidelines should be set by the school board for the purpose of these committees. Specifically, in relationship to this committee, school board members had a wide range of ideas on what policies or guidelines were shared with the members of the CAC. Some school board members thought they had given guidelines to the group. Others thought the superintendent or the assistant superintendent met with them to establish general directives, and still others thought there were not any absolute guidelines or that the group had any directives to follow.

The school board was very positive in their responses concerning the benefits the work of the CAC provided to them. They felt that the committee provided a very detailed and specific report and that the information provided in the written report was very appropriate, helpful, and valuable. Members felt that the report presented information from a different perspective and a different point of view and that they would be moving forward with many of their recommendations.

Beyond the information the board received from the CAC, school board members felt that the work of this committee helped to validate the work of the school board. They felt that the involvement of citizens on this committee gave the report its strength. School board members also indicated that they had received positive comments from their constituents in regard to the CAC report.

School board members also felt that the utilization of citizens on a committee of this nature was an effective process. They felt that involving citizens brought different factions of the community together and got them talking to each other, that it gave the citizens a better perspective of the needs of the school system, and that there was an increase in the communication on the needs of the board and school division. They also felt that this process assisted in building the relationship between the community and the school board. As one member responded, "Their work helped to build a bridge between the board and the community." School board members felt a great deal of respect developed between the school board and its communities as a result of this process. Additionally, the members of the school board felt that this process also strengthened the relationship between them and the

governing body of the county. School board members felt the report gave the board of supervisors detailed information and an insight into the needs of the school system. They felt the information and the process used to obtain it would assist them with funding requests.

School board members were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the report the CAC presented to them. Members overwhelmingly stated that they could not identify any weaknesses. As one member indicated, “ I didn’t see much that they failed to do.” They implied that the report was very in-depth, that it identified problems in relationship to the facility needs and supplied realistic solutions to those problems, and that it did not hold back on the expansion issue.

When asked to give their overall reaction to this process, school board members felt this was a highly effective and successful process. They thought that it was a positive experience for everyone involved.

Members were asked to give suggestions on how to improve this process if they were to utilize it again. First, they indicated that it would be important for them to give a committee like the CAC a project that was worthwhile and very tangible. They also indicated that they would need to look at who would participate on the committee and actually be involved.

Members of the school board indicated that it was important to have the right people on the committee. They felt that the personnel making up the committee would have an impact on its chances for success.

To summarize the school board members' perceptions about the work of the CAC, they felt that the committee "hit it on target," that they "would do it the same way again," and that "it was the "best approach" they had utilized for work of this nature.

### **Triangulation of Data**

Related ideas were triangulated from the analysis of the CAC Interviews and the CAC Questionnaire. Additionally, data from CAC member interviews and the school board member interviews were triangulated. Comments, oral and written, were recorded from the various data sources and compared for likeness. These ideas and concepts are identified in the following text.

The belief that the school administration's participation in this committee's project had an influence on its outcome was identified. Opinions ranged from positive to negative in relationship to this idea. CAC members felt that the administration was very supportive in assisting them with data,

providing them with the minutes of the meetings, and preparing the draft reports. However, they also felt that the presence of school administrators on the committee influenced their decisions and that the administration had an agenda they were trying to put forth. Specifically, they identified the issue of needing larger gymnasiums in the three high schools.

The idea that this committee carried some past history evolved from the data provided by some of the CAC members and several school board members. This idea evolved from members of the CAC who had participated on an advisory committee organized under the direction of a previous superintendent and from school board members who were aware of this committee and had interaction with its members. CAC members who had participated on this committee expressed their feeling that the school board finally gave them a worthwhile project and that they were surprised the school board wanted their input. School board members indicated their surprise at the transformation of this committee and the success they had in meeting the requested tasks. At the final meeting, the report was shared with several members of the school board, members from the board of supervisors, and representatives from the local newspapers. The members of the CAC and school board members who had worked with a previous advisory committee

expressed an interest in continuing the work of this group. However, other members of the CAC indicated that this was a one time commitment for them and that it was time for others to become involved.

Another point of triangulation between the data provided by the members of the CAC and members of the school board was in relationship to the membership of the CAC and their involvement. Both groups felt that criteria should have been established for membership, potential members should have been informed of the committee's mission, and of the time needed to complete the process should have been estimated. Both groups felt a process for replacing members who were not actively participating on the committee should have been established.

Concerns regarding the lack of involvement by members of the county government came forth from the data provided by both groups. The CAC members felt that the county government (board of supervisors) should have had an active participant on this committee. This same feeling was expressed by members of the school board.

Members of the CAC and school board felt that the recommendations made in the CAC report were detailed and would prove to be very useful.

They felt that the committee was effective in completing the assigned tasks and that the experience produced positive outcomes for the school board.

The concept that consideration needs to be given to the kind of tasks committees like the CAC are to be assigned evolved from the analysis of data. The members of the CAC felt that the tasks were worthy of their time and were something they could accomplish. School board members also recognized this concept and felt that the tasks they requested to be completed were tangible and worthy of the committee members' time.

In summary, several points of triangulation developed from the data analysis. Concepts that were identified involved the role and participation of school administrators on the advisory committee, the nature of the tasks assigned to the committee, membership issues, the effectiveness of the committee, perceptions regarding the work of this committee in comparison to that of a previous advisory group, and concerns with ending the work of the group.

The process of collecting data through the questionnaire afforded an opportunity to gather from all CAC committee members their insights and perceptions in relationship to the mission of the committee. Additionally it provided reasons explaining why many of the members did not participate at

many of the committee meetings. The process of collecting data through face to face interviews also seemed to be very productive. The majority of CAC members who qualified readily provided information and seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to give their opinions regarding the tasks completed by their committee.

The process of using an independent interviewer did not seem to have an adverse effect on the collection of data needed to answer the research questions. The independent interviewer, who has a background in interviewing, was provided training utilizing the interview questions. He was able to produce data for analysis through his interview notes and by taping the interview sessions. These tapes, which were transcribed by the researcher, provided an insight to the reactions of the interviewees to the interview questions.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **RESEARCH SUMMARY**

Contained in this chapter is a discussion of the results, conclusions drawn from the data, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further study.

The analysis of data from the CAC Questionnaire revealed that citizens are willing to participate on advisory committees and believe that their input can be helpful. They believe that having representatives from various organizations and geographical areas in the county can bring diverse insights, ideas, and possible solutions to various issues and problems. They believe that through their participation they can gain knowledge about the needs of the school system and then share this information with friends, special groups, and others in their communities. They feel they can play an important role in school systems by assisting the school board as an advocate for their needs, especially if not manipulated by the school system's administration.

The data analysis of CAC members' interviews and school board members' interviews indicated that both groups felt that the committee was very successful in accomplishing the assigned tasks. This opinion was based on the usefulness of the

information provided to the school board through written reports compiled by the CAC. School board members felt the committee did not attempt to hide any problems they found to exist in their study of the schools and provided worthwhile suggestions and ideas to correct these problems. CAC members indicated that they gained a feeling of satisfaction knowing that the information was being used not only by the school board but also by the county board of supervisors.

Additional satisfaction of utilizing community members in an advisory capacity was recognized by school board members because of the additional support they generated for the school system's needs, the positive communication the work of the committee created between the members of the committee and the school board, and the enhanced relationships that were formed between the school board and their communities. School board members indicated that this was the best process to expansion they had utilized, and if they were to do this, they would not change a thing. These opinions were based upon the feedback school board members received from members in their communities with regard to the recommendations made in the CAC Report. The school board members also indicated the CAC Report assisted them when making funding requests to the board of supervisors.

CAC members felt satisfied with the group's ability to successfully meet the tasks presented to them by the school board. They said the smallness of the group allowed them to quickly familiarize themselves with the tasks and each other. These factors contributed to the openness of their meetings, the group discussions, and the ability to reach consensus. However, the CAC members interviewed indicated a concern over the lack of participation and commitment by all members on the committee. Reasons cited by the membership for this lack of participation related to the time commitment required by a project of this nature, to the idea that the members could not impact the decision making process, and to a general lack of interest. CAC members interviewed and members of the school board felt that criteria should have been established for membership on this committee.

The analysis of CAC member interviews also indicated a feeling that the tasks requested by the school board were worthy of their time and "something that they could really get their teeth into!" This idea was reinforced by school board members who indicated that they had made an effort to give the CAC a project that was worthwhile.

While the tasks seemed worthy to the members of the CAC, exactly what the school board wanted from the group was not clear to them initially. The group also

indicated that the facility study was better understood by its members but the task of the graduate survey was somewhat vague. An event, that seemed to assist the CAC in defining their work was when an expert in the area of facilities planning spent time with the group. Members indicated that having the consultant work with them was an asset and essential.

Part of this confusion might have been eliminated if the group had established guidelines. Interviews with school board members revealed that there were various opinions on whether guidelines existed and on who was responsible for giving these guidelines to the committee. Because of this lack of direction, the CAC realized a need for additional information. It was at this time they asked the superintendent and the director of maintenance to meet with them. They also requested that the administration seek out information from other school systems in relationship to the process they used to gather data from students who had graduated. The administration also provided data from other governmental agencies and population projections. They also produced the draft and final CAC Report. CAC members interviewed indicated that the support shown by the administration was helpful to them in completing their tasks.

The CAC members interviewed felt that the final report to the school board

reflected their work and was done very well. They felt the report was well organized and that the recommendations were good. The feeling of satisfaction was also reinforced by school board members who indicated that the committee had done an excellent job. They felt the report was very detailed, well presented, and it would prove to be very helpful to the board.

After the report had been presented formally to the school board, several members of the CAC expressed a concern regarding the future of the committee. Some members felt that the process came to an abrupt end. This feeling might have been related to involvement of several members with a previous advisory committee that had been an ongoing group, the lack of clarity about the group's function, and the lack of guidelines.

CAC members perceived that communication processes were effective. They felt that the format of the meetings was casual and open and that everyone had equal say on issues, perceived needs, ideas, and suggestions. The general feeling among members was that they could talk freely, agree, or disagree.

They indicated that the information they needed for decision-making was provided through the efforts of various members or the administration and was timely and available. They also indicated that the minutes were reflective of the

work of the group and assisted them with planning. In addition, during the interview of CAC members, they had indicated that they felt a need of feedback from the school board members. One member stated that this lack of feedback left him wondering if the CAC members were “just figureheads.” Another felt this feedback was needed to let the committee know that they were heading in the right direction. In relationship to the final report, a member felt that it would have been beneficial to know that their work was helpful.

The CAC membership considered their decision making process to be very effective. One member of the group felt that the small size of the group eliminated the need to be very business like. The data indicated the membership felt that everyone’s opinions were valued, meetings were open to ideas, discussions were healthy, and they could share ideas freely. They indicated that their decisions were based on the ability of the group to reach consensus.

The data indicated the school board members’ felt the CAC was very effective in completing the tasks and that the report presented by them proved to be very useful. The school board was pleased that this project helped to improve board/community relationships that the efforts of the CAC resulted in

a wider base of support for the school board to request funding for suggested improvements, and that the media provided positive coverage.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the perceptions held by the school board members and the membership of the CAC were that utilization of a citizen advisory committee was highly effective. The CAC membership perceived that the tasks were worthy of their time, that communication processes supported their work, and that they were effective in reaching decisions. The process was viewed as a positive experience for the CAC members and school board members. Both groups felt the results from the work of the CAC provided valuable information to the school board.

The data from this research indicated that citizens are willing to volunteer their energy and time to assist organizations such as school boards with special projects and tasks that are meaningful. The data also indicated that the special advisory group could be an effective means to produce valuable information for school board members. In addition, additional benefits such as enhanced community support, positive media coverage, and improved governmental relationships may evolve from effectively utilizing this process.

The data also indicated a need for careful planning for committees of this

nature on the part of the school board. Without clear and well-defined guidelines, the committee is left to struggle with its own organization. They may not feel comfortable making decisions in areas such as meeting guidelines, evaluation, membership, and reporting processes.

The type of task the board wants completed may influence the participation of certain community members on the council or committee. Selecting members prior to revealing the tasks may lead to some members choosing not to participate.

Consideration also needs to be given to the number of tasks the committee is expected to investigate at a given time. The research indicated that having more than one task might limit the time devoted to one over the other. The board also needs to consider how the group will be supported in the completion of these tasks without the members feeling that their efforts are being guided by the school administration or that they are being used to support a politically controversial issue.

When formulating these groups, school boards need to take into consideration the leadership that will guide the group through its tasks. The school board may want to select a person who is highly respected for his/her work with other community groups, or they may want to determine

guidelines for the group to follow in their own selection of a chairperson.

The school board would be well served by taking care in determining the group's membership. Consideration needs to be given not only to the number of members but also to the type of members. They need to be careful not to overload the group with people of the same background or with someone who is determined to use this process for gaining recognition for his/her own cause. The number of participants can have an effect on the functioning of the group. As the group size increases, a number of issues may arise that affect the ability of the group to be successful in reaching its objectives. Too many participants could make the group unmanageable and not allow for the active participation of all its members. A large group will also lessen the opportunity for each participant to share ideas and lead to the likelihood that they will influence others. The group size also increases the number of interactions between its membership. These interactions increase geometrically, thus creating the need for increased organization. Additionally, as the group size increases, the membership may have trouble in reaching decisions. More time will be spent working out issues, thus making the group less effective and often less attractive to its participants. These factors can have an impact on the participants and their willingness to persevere through their assigned work.

However, too small a group may leave it short of personnel to carry out the necessary tasks to be effective, or it may limit the number of possible solutions to a given problem.

School boards will need to consider the role they and the school administration will play regarding to participation on the committee. Committee members may consider it an invasion of their role if there are school board members and administrators who are proposing their own agenda or impacting the decision making process. However, the school board may want to assign a member from their board and a representative from the school administration to serve as liaisons to the committee. Their role on the committee needs to be clarified to the committee members and defined in any guidelines. The representatives need to be supportive of the individual committee members who are volunteering their time to work on the assignment made by the school board.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The practice of utilizing citizens on advisory boards can produce direct and indirect support for school boards. However, for these groups to have a chance for success, school boards should have in place policies that promote the use of citizen committees in the policy process. The school board should develop a policy that

establishes their support for the participation of citizens on various school and school board functions. This policy should be well known by all school personnel and supported by the administration of the school system. Once the school board has made this commitment for public involvement, it needs to plan carefully for that involvement. They need to identify the various types of committees they want to establish and the purpose of each. For example, an ad hoc committee could be established for a very specific topic, and its work would be completed once it gave its recommendations to the school board.

A standing committee might be organized for determining the public's opinion on various topics and could be called into action as needed by the school board. However, in utilizing a standing committee, the board should be careful in determining its duration. If left standing for too long, it narrows the number of participants, as well as creates an image that its members are the contacts for public input rather than the members of the school board. It would be very important that the school board in its guidelines and communication make very clear to both types of committees that the committee's role is advisory in nature and that decisions related to the topics being investigated are the sole responsibility of the school board.

The school board should establish a much-defined process to select members from the community to these committees. It is important that all groups in a school division have equal access to this process and have the opportunity to serve the needs of the school board. It would be advisable for the board to establish a pool of possible candidates from that they could establish committee memberships. The school board might enact a process to advertise annually for interested community members to attend an informational meeting on how to become a volunteer on one of these committees. Invitations could also be sent to various volunteer organizations, professional groups, businesses, and governmental groups located within the division. Additionally, local school administrators could be asked to submit names for possible consideration. At this function, the school board could inform participants of the possible roles they would be expected to play and gather data from those who express an interest to serve. This directory information would then serve as a resource for the school board and its administrators.

Next, the school board could look for ways to actively involve these interested citizens. They should compile a list of topics or issues on that they desire information and prioritize their importance. With each area, the school board should be very clear on the type of data it wishes to receive from the group. This

will help define the committee's activities, the number of members, and its mission.

The school board might also develop guidelines for these groups to follow. This procedure will help to eliminate many questions on how the group is to function effectively. These guidelines should cover topics such as membership, education, meeting procedures, reporting, feedback, evaluation, and recognition. Time lines should be established for beginning the group's work as well as an estimated date for reporting the group's findings.

The board would do well also establish guidelines for supporting the work of these committees. Once the committee has been formed, the school board should spend time in educating its members to insure they have a clear understanding of the topic. The school board could accomplish this task with a consultant who is an expert in the topic field. It would be advisable for this person to come from outside of the school system. This will allow for new insights and give the committee members the view that their recommendations are not being guided by the administration or school board.

Consideration needs to be given to the role the school system's administration will play in relationship to these committees. Once these groups are

functioning, the school board also needs to consider how to inform other groups involved in the schools about the purpose and role of these committees. Additional support such as the use of equipment, meeting places, record keeping, expenditures, and media releases need to be defined by the board. During the work of the committee the school board needs to consider a process for providing feedback to the advisory committee on their progress and how they will provide assistance if needed. However, this feedback must be given in such a way that the committee's mission and purpose are not affected. The issue of independence of function is important to the committee's purpose. The committee should be able to function without its decisions and reports being influenced by the school system's administration or members of the school board. One recommendation is to have the committee identify a member who would gather concerns, information, or requests made by the group and present them to the school board, as well as bring back information from the board to the group.

Once the advisory committee has formally presented its findings to the school board, a process should be in place to officially end the work of the committee. A meeting should be scheduled at that time school board members can meet with the committee membership for clarifying any recommendations made by

the group. At this meeting, the school board would have the opportunity to thank individuals for their participation on the advisory committee. Advisory committee members should be formally recognized for their efforts. A follow-up letter or a certificate of appreciation should be sent to the membership of the advisory committee. This letter should thank them for their work and provide them with information on how the data they provided the school board was utilized. The school board may want to consider ending the group's work by formally recognizing them at a social function organized by the school board for the committee's members and their families.

Once the group has been recognized for its efforts, the school board should conduct a formal evaluation of the advisory committee process. The school board should determine if the information received from the group was worth the effort and determine if additional support should have been provided to the group. The school board should determine if the process needs improvement or changes need to be made to their procedures and guidelines. The School board should also seek to gather information from the participants on the advisory council in relationship to their perspectives on the projects and process. This information can be gathered through interviews, questionnaires, opinion polls, and surveys. The school board

may utilize its own school system personnel to conduct this evaluation or contract with an outside firm. Possibilities could include an administrator, who was not involved with the process, personnel from their own research and development office, or a special consultant.

With careful planning school boards can effectively utilize members of their respective communities. An effective involvement process can build strong support for the school board and its schools. It can give interested community members a viable means to be involved with the education of their children.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Possible areas for future study include the following:

1. An investigation of the number of tasks assigned to advisory committees and the impact this has on the effectiveness of the committee in reaching their objectives.
2. An investigation of approaches school administrations and/or school boards can utilize in supporting the work of advisory committees without appearing to influence their work.
3. An investigation of the various methods of evaluation used to determine advisory committee effectiveness and their effectiveness in

producing information to support any change.

4. An investigation of the nature of tasks assigned to advisory committees and the impact they have on the members' participation.
5. An investigation to determine how dependent or independent the advisory committee should be in its relationship to the school board.

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## **Appendix A**

### **CAC Member: Letter of Introduction**

Date:

Address:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ ;

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and am in the process of collecting data for my dissertation. The purpose of this study is to examine your perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the Citizens Advisory Committee's work . Your perceptions concerning the effectiveness of this work on the facilities studies are very important to fulfill the purpose of this study.

Enclosed you will find a short questionnaire and a permission form to sign to allow the use of this data and to conduct follow-up interviews. Please be advised that all data will be reported as a group response and that individuals will not be identified. Once this study has been reported and accepted, all interview notes and questionnaires will be destroyed. The results of this study will be shared upon request.

Please spend a few minutes to complete the questionnaire. You may choose not to answer any or part of any questions. Once you have completed the questionnaire please return it and the permission form in the self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed by \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_/.

Comments you have concerning this project are welcomed and may be added to the questionnaire. If you have any questions concerning this project please feel free to contact me at the following numbers:

Work...540-459-2941

Home...540-436-3003

Your assistance in providing this information is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully yours,

David K. Welling

## Appendix B

### Citizen Advisory Committee Questionnaire

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to the following questions;

1. Do you believe that advisory committees like the CAC play an important role in the operation of schools?

Please explain:

2. Did your participation on the CAC improve your understanding of the needs of the school system?

Please explain:

3. Did your involvement on the CAC give you an opportunity to share with others in your community about the needs of the school system?

Please explain:

4. Do you believe that your participation on the CAC was a worthwhile experience?

Please explain:

Please check the meetings of the CAC you have attended.

DATE	PURPOSE	ATTENDED
11-21-96	Tour/Northern Campus.....	_____
12-04-96	Tour/Southern Campus.....	_____
01-15-97	Consultant, VA TECH.....	_____
02-19-97	Superintendent's Visit .....	_____
03-27-97	Tour/Central Campus .....	_____
04-30-97	Site Review/Organization.....	_____
06-05-97	Site Reports.....	_____
09-03-97	Review Draft Recommendations.	_____
09-23-97	Finalize Report.....	_____
10-29-97	Meeting with School Board.....	_____

As part of the data collection process follow-up interviews will be conducted with a sample of the group. Please indicate if you would be willing to be interviewed.

\_\_\_\_\_yes      \_\_\_\_\_no

Please return this survey and the permission form in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

## Appendix C

### School Board Member Interview

School Board Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How effective was the Citizen Advisory Committee in completing the tasks assigned by the board?

probe....meet expectations....strengths and weaknesses of each task and final recommendations

2. How effective was using an advisory board made up of citizens to complete these tasks?

probe....training, education, guidelines, extra duties for administration

3. Were there any benefits by utilizing this advisory council?

probe....communication aspects...political support...community support

4. What was your overall reaction to the committee's recommendations?

Probe.... areas to improve...use again....kinds of activities

5. Were there any kind of guidelines or regulations established by the board for the CAC to follow?

Probe....kind....need....communicated...improvement

## Appendix D

### Citizen Advisory Committee Interview Questions

I will be asking questions to gather your perceptions about the work of the Citizens Advisory Committee in relationship to the facilities study and graduate survey. Please feel free to ask me to clarify any of the questions and to share any ideas or comments.

Please realize that you do not have to answer any or part of the questions and that you may end this interview at any time. Before we begin, may I have your permission to tape our conversation?

1. When the CAC was formed, do you think the members had a clear understanding of the projects to be completed?

Probe...why formed...membership/community...role of group...why participate

2. What kind of authority did you feel the group could exercise in completing the projects?

Probe...group influence...over community...school system...county government

3. Did you believe the group meetings were effective?

Probe...length of meetings...attendance issues...leadership...information gathered...consultants

4. Do you believe the communication during the group's work was sufficient?

Probe...announcements...minutes...meeting agendas...

5. Did you think the group had a need for feedback during their work?

Probe...if they felt they were heading in the right direction.

6. During meetings was everyone given an opportunity to share ideas, concerns, and suggestions.

Probe...differences valued...

7. Were priorities given to one project over the other? Probe...time spent on projects...their value

8. Was there a clear plan of action for the group to follow?

Probe...how they reached consensus...goals...measure their work...hidden agendas

9. Do you feel everyone in the group had equal responsibilities?

Probe...opportunity to lead...members duties... members contributions...guided in any special direction...

10. Did you feel satisfied with the recommendations of the group?

Probe...what will happen with the results...any other actions....

11. Do you feel that you have a greater understanding of the school system's needs as a result of the group's work?

Probe... will you share ...how

12. Did you feel satisfied with the way the group ended their work?

Probe ... any loose strings....recognition

Do you have any comments or questions?

Thank you very much for your time and help with this study. If I need to clarify any of these results may I call you to do any follow-up interview?

## Appendix E

# Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: A Qualitative Study to examine the effectiveness of a Citizens Advisory Committee.

Investigator(s): David K. Welling and Gerry Sokol who will be assisting in data collection

### I. The Purpose of this Research /Project

The purpose of this study is to collect and conduct an analysis on data concerning the perceptions of effectiveness held by the membership of a Citizens Advisory Committee and a school board in relationship to the work completed by the advisory committee. By studying these perceptions, the researcher hopes to identify practices that will assist groups such as these to successfully complete their tasks and also add to the body of research related to this topic.

The subjects involved in this study are the six members of the school board and the eighteen members of the Citizens Advisory Committee.

### II. Procedures

The procedures to gather the needed data will involve the use of a questionnaire that will be sent to the members of the Citizens Advisory Committee. The information from this questionnaire will be used to identify the representative sample of the Citizens Advisory Committee to be interviewed. Data from this questionnaire will also be used to identify the members' perceptions in relationship to the use of advisory committees and the views about their participation. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with the Citizens Advisory Committee sample membership at a location convenient to the interviewee utilizing an interview instrument developed by the researcher. The respondents will give their perceptions regarding the work of their committee on two tasks as requested by the school board. There are **no** conditions for the respondents to meet.

The members of the school board will be contacted by the researcher by letter to introduce the purpose of this study and to secure their permission to be interviewed. The purpose of these face-to-face interviews is to gather data concerning their perceptions of effectiveness of the work as completed by the Citizens Advisory Committee. This information will be gathered by an independent interviewer trained by the researcher. There are **no** conditions that are required of the respondents.

### III. Risks

There are **no** risks involved with this research. All information gathered by the researcher and his representative will be secured, and respondents will **not** be identified in the research report. All field notes and tapes will be secured by the researcher and destroyed once the study has been accepted. Information will be reported as a group result and recommendations to be based upon the result of the analysis of the collective body of data from the Citizens Advisory Committee and school board.

#### **IV. Benefits of this Project**

There are **no** tangible benefits to the subjects who participate in this study. Intangible benefits to the respondents may be from the knowledge that the contributions to this research would add to the body of research knowledge and that the results of this study could assist school systems and school boards who plan on the participation of lay citizens in advisory roles

There has been no promise or guarantee of benefits made by the researcher, and participation in this research is based upon the subjects' own free will.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The respondents will not be identified by name and results will be reported as a group response in relationship to the research questions, themes and categories. If permission is granted by the subjects to tape the individual interview sessions, the tapes will be stored in a locked safe located at the researcher's home. The only one to have access to these tapes will be the researcher. Tapes of school board members' interviews will be given to the researcher by the interviewer and secured like-wise. Once the researcher's report has been accepted by the researcher's committee, the tapes will be destroyed.

#### **VI. Compensation**

There will be **no** compensation to the subjects of this research.

#### **VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Subjects can withdraw from this study at any time. You may choose to answer all, part, or none of the interview questions.

#### **VIII. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Educational Administration and the superintendent of schools in the district where the research is being conducted.

#### **IX. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

1. To answer each interview question to the best of my ability and knowledge.

#### **X. Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the *Informed Consent* and the conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

I **do** \_\_\_\_\_ **do not** \_\_\_\_\_ give permission to the interviewer to tape this or any other follow-up sessions.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any questions about this researcher or its conduct, I may contact:

David K. Welling (Researcher)

Dr. Glen Earthman (Faculty Advisor)

H.T. Hurd (Chair, IRB, Research Div.)

## Appendix F

### School Board / CAC Member Interview Protocol

#### I. Introduction/Purpose

Good \_\_\_\_\_(morning, afternoon, evening), I would like to thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to allow me to conduct this interview.

The purpose of this interview is to gather data concerning your views of the work of the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Before this interview is conducted I will need to review with you the following consent form. Hand participant the consent form.

#### II. Consent Procedures

Please follow along as I cover the information contained in this form. If you have any questions please feel free to ask me to stop and clarify the information. **Review consent form.**

### III. Interview

I will ask you to respond to several questions regarding the effectiveness of the Citizens Advisory Committee and information about their report. Before I begin, may I have your permission to tape our conversation? Do you have any questions? Begin interview process.

## **Appendix G**

### **IRB Request**

#### **Justification**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of a citizen advisory committee. It is anticipated that the research will reveal processes and procedures that will assist or impede like groups in the completion of their tasks. It is also anticipated that the data analysis will provide the researcher a basis on that to make recommendations to school administrators and school boards in the use of lay citizens on advisory committees.

To generate data for this study, it is necessary to collect information from school board members and the members of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The school board formed this ad hoc committee to review the school system's facilities and various means to gather information from the system's graduates. Their views and perceptions about the various processes, procedures, and outcomes of these tasks will provide information upon that an analysis will be made and results reported.

The recent movement to give citizens and parents a greater role in the decision-making process in school systems has led to the creation of advisory

committees. These school site councils, district advisory councils, or special ad hoc committees, many that have been mandated by law, are faced with the difficult challenge of making sound educational decisions. While research has demonstrated a need for the public's involvement in schools and has generated a wealth of information on how to utilize these groups, limited information is available on their effectiveness. It is the intent of this researcher to add to this body of knowledge by focusing on this aspect of advisory committees as well as identifying other areas for possible investigation.

### **Procedures**

The subjects from that information is needed are the six members of the school board and the eighteen members of the CAC. The researcher had no control over the selection of the school board members or the membership of the CAC. All members of these groups are adults and live in the school division's attendance zone. Permission to contact these members for the purpose of this study has been granted by the school division superintendent (copies included).

The members of the school board will be contacted by the researcher by letter. (Copy included). The intent of this letter is to introduce the study and its purpose, to explain the procedures to gather the data, and to secure permission from

the school board members to contact for the purpose of a face-to-face interview.

Since the researcher is employed by this board, procedures to utilize an independent interviewer have been established in the methodology of the research protocol.

Once permission has been secured from the school board members, individual interviews will be conducted that will last approximately one hour. The location and time of the interview will be coordinated between the individual school board member and the independent interviewer. The researcher's school will be made available for these interviews if necessary. The interview questions are based on the research questions developed for the purpose of this study and have been reviewed by experts in the field as well as field tested.

These questions center on the school board members' perceptions concerning the role of the CAC, satisfaction with the recommendations of the committee, and their views of the processes and procedures utilized by this advisory committee.

To gather data from the membership of the CAC two procedures will be utilized. An introductory letter will be sent to each individual member along with a permission form, and a questionnaire (copies included). The purpose of this letter is to introduce the study, to secure the individual's permission to contact them for an interview as well as to use the information they will provide on the

questionnaire. Attendance information at CAC meetings by members is needed to determine the sample of CAC members with whom individual interviews will be conducted. This data will be provided on the questionnaire along with responses to four questions designed to gather perceptions about advisory committees and their use. The second procedure to be utilized by the researcher to gather data will be through face-to-face interviews. These interviews will be scheduled at the convenience of the CAC members and conducted at the researcher's school building. Interviews are expected to last approximately one hour and will be centered on the perceptions held by the members concerning the effectiveness of their committee in completing the work requested by the school board. Topics to be covered during the interview will include their understanding of the requested tasks, meeting procedures and processes, and satisfaction with the recommendations made by their committee.

Permission to tape record the interview sessions of both the school board members and the membership of the CAC will be requested. The purpose of recording these interviews is to enable the interviewer to be free to observe the respondents' nonverbal behavior in relationship to the questions and to expedite the sessions. Tapes of these sessions will be stored in a locked safe at the researcher's

home and will be accessible only to the researcher for the purpose of transcribing the data for coding and analysis. These tapes will be destroyed after the researcher has successfully defended this study. During these interviews, the respondents are expected to answer the questions honestly and to the best of their ability.

### **Risks and Benefits**

There are no identifiable risks or benefits to the subjects of this study.

### **Confidentiality/Anonymity**

The results of the individual interviews will be accessible only to the researcher who will apply them to the process of open coding. The results of this data analysis will be reported as group perceptions. Individual respondents will not be identified in the study.

### **Informed Consent**

See attachments

### **Biographical Sketch**

**Researcher**        David K. Welling

As a practicing school administrator with a total of 22 years of experience in public education, I have had a wealth of experience working with parents, citizens, and school board members on various projects related to education. These include

curriculum committees, advisory boards, task forces, and special projects. These experiences have provided me the opportunity to assist, analyze, coordinate, interview, investigate, plan, and present findings to designated groups.

Educationally, I completed the required Orientation to Residency this past summer at Virginia Tech. The focus of this program was to prepare students to conduct educational research. I qualified for the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies in the area of Educational Administration from VA Tech during the 1997 Summer Session. A Master in Education Administration was earned from West Virginia Univ., as well as a B.S. degree in Elementary Education, from California State Univ., California, PA. My education has included classes in research methodology and statistics.

### **Assisting**

Assisting with this research project is Mr. Gerry Sokol, Director of Pupil Services, Jefferson County Schools, WV. Mr. Sokol is a practicing administrator with 25 years of experience. He also attended the 1997 Summer Orientation to Residency along with the researcher.

During this time he was made familiar with the proposed study and was requested to assist as an independent interviewer. A training session was held by the

researcher with Mr. Sokol that familiarized him with the purpose of the study, provided him with the project's history, and included a review of the related interview questions and probes. Included as part of the training, Mr. Sokol conducted three mock interviews. These sessions allowed him to practice asking the interview questions and taking field notes. These notes and sessions were reviewed by the researcher and modifications made where needed. Additional information about this study has been shared with Mr. Sokol on a continuing basis.

### **Advisor**

Advising the researcher is Dr. Glen Earthman, Department of Education Administration, VA Tech, Blacksburg, VA.

## **Appendix H**

### **School Board Letter of Introduction**

January 15, 1998

Address:

Greeting:

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the process of collecting data for my dissertation. The focus of this study is to examine the effectiveness of work performed by the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Your perceptions concerning their report and work are very important to fulfill the purpose of this study. Data will be collected through an interview conducted at your convenience by an independent interviewer, Mr. Gerry Sokol, Director of Student Services, Jefferson County Schools, WV. Mr. Sokol will contact you to schedule the interview.

Please be advised that all data will be reported as a group response and that individuals will not be identified in the report. Once this research has been presented and accepted by my committee, all interview notes, questionnaires and

tapes will be destroyed. The results of this study will be shared upon request.

Please fill out the enclosed contact form and return it in the enclosed envelope by February 2nd, 1998. If you have any questions about this study or the enclosed form please feel free to contact me at my home number that is or my work number; .

Respectfully yours,

David K. Welling

**Appendix I**

**Citizens Advisory Committee Member Permission Form**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Numbers: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the statements that apply:

I **do** \_\_\_\_\_ **do not** \_\_\_\_\_ give permission to Mr. David K. Welling to use the information I have provided on the questionnaire for his research project.

I **do** \_\_\_\_\_ **do not** \_\_\_\_\_ give permission to Mr. David Welling to contact me for the purpose of gathering information concerning the work of the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please Return this form and the questionnaire in the enclosed envelope.**

## Appendix J

### School Board Member Contact Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The best time to contact me is: \_\_\_\_\_ and  
place: \_\_\_\_\_.

Phone Numbers: Home: \_\_\_\_\_ Work: \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission to Mr. David Welling or Mr. Gerry Sokol to contact me in order to arrange an interview for the purpose of collecting data for Mr. Welling's research on the effectiveness of a citizens advisory committee.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return in the enclosed envelope.**