DYNAMICS OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF A RURAL SCHOOL BOARD IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

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ABSTRACT

This is a case study of the dynamics of the decision-making process of one rural school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The case study focused on a five member elected rural school board and the division superintendent. Four decisions of the board were studied. The researcher and the division superintendent identified the four decisions (cases) after a review of board meeting agenda items and board minutes from July 1, 1996, through June 30, 1999.

The researcher interviewed all board members and the superintendent and reviewed board minutes and other documents to gather data on the decision-making process by the board on the four selected issues. Data were entered into matrices for analysis.

Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Triangulation of the data served as a means of data validation. Conclusions and recommendations for future study and practice are included.

The major findings were that this board relied heavily on the superintendent for information, external and internal factors influenced the board during the decision-making process, and communication and information sharing were key to this board as it worked to make what it felt was the best decision on each of the four issues. During the decision-making process, this board, depending on the issue, used numerous decision-making process steps. These steps ranged from a minimum of seven to a maximum of eleven. The first step on each issue was becoming aware of the issue and the final step was voting on the solution to the issue.

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CHAPTER 1
CONTEXT AND DEFINITION OF THE STUDY

The primary function of school boards is to set policy and make decisions relevant to board policies. Rosenberger (1997) stated, "School board members have no individual power; they can only act as a group" (p. 3). School board members tend to be influenced by many external as well as internal factors and are not usually trained in or understand group dynamics. Becoming an effective decision-making group requires sincere commitment and effort by each member of the board in learning about the organization and the decision-making process of effective groups.

The school board can be looked at like any other social organization or system where a group of diverse individuals come together to make decisions. Veteran members of the board will encourage new members to learn procedures, or the new members will be encouraged not to become involved members of the board. The group will exert pressures on the new members to conform to the culture of the group (Rosenberger, 1997).

Socialization has been defined as "the process by which individuals selectively acquire the values and attitudes, interests, and dispositions, skills and knowledge – that is, the culture – current in the group of which they are, or seek to become, members" (Cistone, 1975, p. 56). This definition of socialization can be directly applied to school boards because these boards have many of the attributes contained in the definition of culture offered by Cistone. The socialization of the members of school boards has a major impact on how successful boards are in the decision-making process.

Lutz (1975) referred to school boards as socio-cultural systems. "School boards possess artifacts, resources, values, beliefs, roles, traditions, and a literature that assists in perfecting and transmitting these cultural components" (p. 65).

School boards display their culture through their interactions with each other and other board members on the local, state, or national level.

The concept of the school board as a socio-cultural system is made clearer by the following quote from Beals (1967): "Any group, no matter how specialized, no matter how undistinguished its characteristic behaviors, no matter how dependent it is upon other cultural systems, is a true cultural system if it possesses the decision-making capacity" (p. 3). Because school boards are decision-making bodies, it is clear that they are socio-cultural systems.

For a group to be effective in both social interaction and information processing, the group must be willing to constantly and consistently monitor and evaluate its development. Group members must be able or willing to learn and practice the art of effective interpersonal skills in a social setting. Additionally, the members of the group must be willing to learn and practice the tools of information sharing and information processing relevant to the problem being discussed to effectively be involved in the decision-making process. Poole and Doelger (1986) summed up the essence of group decision making by stating that this process is a "complex interplay and interweaving of ideas, preferences, and perspectives" where "premises and options are advanced and discredited, goals are proposed and elaborated, actors enter and withdraw from discussions, and decisions are tested, refined, modified, and confirmed" (p. 35). School boards and boards in general are complex groups. These boards are groups of individuals who are brought together for a common purpose – to make decisions for the benefit of the organization.

Model of School Board Decision Making

School boards do not make decisions in a vacuum. The decision-making model in Figure 1 illustrates the many external and internal forces that affect individual

board members, the board as a unit, and the superintendent during the decision-making process. The model clearly shows that individual members must interact with each other as the board addresses each specific issue. The interactions of each board member with the internal and external forces are important as the board involves itself in the decision-making process.

Depending on the issues facing the board, special interest groups may play an important role in the type and quality of the decision reached by the group. Constituents exert pressure on their board representative to persuade the member to vote either for or against a specific issue. These constituents may exert pressure on their representative to persuade other board members to vote a specific way on specific issues. Board members desiring to continue their tenure on the board may poll their constituents prior to voting to make sure they will vote in a manner that the constituents desire. This is done in hopes of solidifying votes for re-election

Individual board members bring their own hidden agendas to the board. These hidden agendas may be based on personal experiences with the school system or may be their ideas about how they feel the system should operate based on either their professional or business background. These hidden agendas of board members may be forced on the board or, depending on the status of the member proposing the issue, the issue may be freely accepted by the board.

The superintendent plays an important role in the dynamics of the board as it makes decisions on specific issues. The superintendent interacts with each member. This interaction may be in the form of providing information or clarifying data presented to each member. Depending on the relationship the superintendent has with each board member and the issue, the impact of the superintendent may be either negative or positive. Board members must also interact with the superintendent during the decision-making process.

FIVE MEMBER BOARD
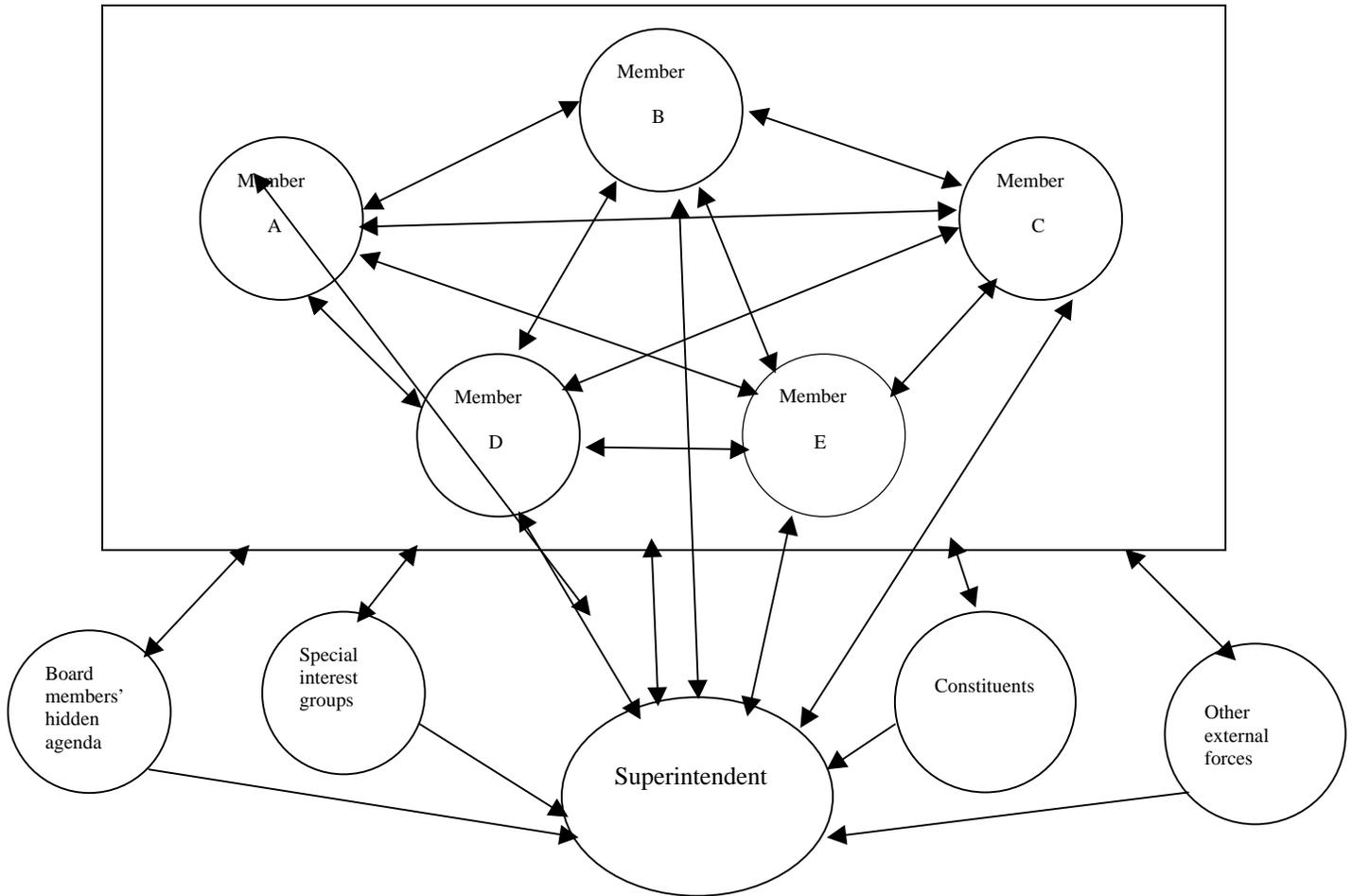
Figure 1. Conceptual model of school board decision-making showing the interaction between board members and other forces that influence the decision-making process.

Research Questions

The primary question for this case study is: What are the dynamics of a rural school board during the decision-making process? Sub-questions are: How do school board members become aware of issues? How does the superintendent become aware of issues? What forces influence the decisions reached by the board? What steps does the board use to reach its decisions? How long does it take a board to make decisions on issues it faces? What role does communication play in helping a board make decisions?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the dynamics of a rural school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia during the decision-making process. Based on findings and conclusions of this study, other rural school boards may be able to acquire a broader appreciation and understanding of the dynamics involved in the decision-making process of rural school boards with similar characteristics as the board in this study.

Definitions

Dynamics: The interaction among board members during the decision-making process.

Rural school board: An elected five-member body whose purpose is to make policy for the selected school division identified in this case study.

Decision-making process: The process by which the rural school board resolved four issues in the years 1996-1999.

External forces: Influences from board members or non-board members which had an impact on the decisions of the board.

<u>Internal forces:</u> Influences from constituents, professional organizations, governmental statutes, educational boards, and other agencies which had an impact on the decisions of the board.

<u>Issues:</u> The four cases used in this study that were before the school board for a decision.

<u>Time:</u> The number of hours or days used to make a decision on each issue.

<u>Awareness of issues:</u> Methods by which the board became aware of each issue.

<u>Steps in the decision-making process:</u> Steps used by the board to make a decision on each issue.

<u>Verbal communication:</u> Sharing information with the members of the board through discussions and oral presentations.

<u>Written communication:</u> Written information shared by the superintendent and others with the members of the school board.

Organization of the Study

This study has been organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the problem, purpose, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature relevant to the problem or question of this study. Chapter 3 contains the research procedures used in this study. Chapter 4 is a report of the results of the study. Chapter 5, the final chapter, is a summary of the results and conclusions. Recommendations for further research based on the findings of the study are included in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The decision-making process of groups and the impact of group dynamics on the decision-making process continue to be studied by researchers in the field of sociology and psychology. Numerous researchers have made notable contributions to the field of decision-making processes of groups and the role of group dynamics in this process. Theories of group decision-making, communication, information processing, and interaction between members of decision-making groups are the broad categories of literature that emerge as one looks at group dynamics and group decision-making.

Theories of Decision Making

This section contains information on the following theories, models, and topics related to group and board decision-making: (1) solution valence theory, (2) social judgment theory, (3) cognitive closure model of decision satisfaction, (4) muddling through model, (5) garbage can model, (6) rational decision making model, (7) silence and board decision making, (8) communication and information sharing and board decision making, and (9) brainstorming and board decision making.

Solution Valence Theory

The solution valence theory is thought of as a force exerted on the group by its members that moves the group towards or away from the adoption of a solution to a problem (Hoffman, 1961; Lewin, 1935). This theory suggests that increasing the valence by members of a group for a particular option or solution will greatly

increase the likelihood of adoption of a particular solution to the problem. The solution valence theory further suggests that each member of the group has valence for every solution. According to Guzzo (1982) "the likelihood that a solution will be adopted by a group is a positive function of its group valence" (p. 100).

The solution valence theory sets forth the concept that the best solution is the one which receives the highest valence from individual members of the group and the group as a decision-making body. Valence is viewed as how strongly the individual group member or group feels either for or against the possible solutions to the problem. Guzzo (1982) stated "… one or more members' valence for a solution may have signs opposite to the group's valence for that solution, even when that solution is the one adopted by the group" (p. 100).

Hoffman and O'Day (1979) found that "(1) the valence status of solutions will vary at different points in the group process, the solutions becoming more or less likely candidates for adoption by the group, and (2) the more valence a solution receives, the more the group is locked into that solution and resistant to entertaining new alternatives" (pp. 100-101). This implies that increasing valence values are associated with the greater likelihood of adoption of a solution and that once the group has shown favor to a solution, the group normally selects that solution. Hoffman also suggests once a solution has been accepted by the group and has passed the "adoption threshold" (p. 81), that solution is unlikely to be turned aside.

Further, in situations where there is favorable valence for a solution, and when alternative solutions are offered for consideration, such alternative solutions' weaknesses are negatively attacked. These negative attacks by members of the group contribute negative valence to the alternative solution.

Group members tend to bring valence for solutions to group decision-making meetings. The valence that group members bring to the decision-making

process can be either negative or positive depending on the amount of background information each member has on the issue requiring a solution. Findings from the studies conducted by Hoffman and O'Day (1979) reveal that decision-making groups working to reach a high-quality decision must first accurately "define the problem, be provided with high-quality and valid information, and use that information to support the adoption of the best solution" (p. 74). Therefore, the solution valence theory relies heavily on discussion, information sharing, and processing during the decision-making process.

Hoffman (1982) reported that "an individual's influence over the decision is only moderately related to his or her level of participation in the discussion, and a member's satisfaction with the group's solution is positively correlated with his or her valence for that solution" (p. 81). Hoffman also found that the more positive things a member says about the group's solution, the more committed that group member is to the solution.

<div align="center">Social Judgment Theory</div>

Social judgment theory is an explanation of how groups handle information. This theory focuses on the difficulty "inherent in the task of integrating complex, probabilistic information from a variety of sources to arrive at a decision" (Guzzo, 1982, p. 20). The social judgment theory is a framework for understanding the many causes of conflict and "misunderstanding" in the group decision-making process. It provides groups or leaders with a methodology for moving the group forward in the decision-making process. Further, social judgment theory measures the "subjects' uncertainty in terms of their performance on judgment tasks, including interpersonal learning and interpersonal conflict" (Hammond, McClelland, & Mumpower, 1980, p. 25).

Social judgment theory is intended to describe, not explain human judgment processes by providing a framework for understanding (1) group judgments and decisions, (2) interpersonal conflict, (3) interpersonal learning, and (4) learning under uncertainty. Social judgment theory provides decision-makers with an understanding of the interrelatedness of the subject (decision-maker), its environment, and the quality of the decision. Organizations using this model of decision-making must fully understand that the "decision-makers (subjects) and the environment must operate as a system, each with properties of its own. Each has surface and depth, or overt and covert regions …" (Brunswik, 1957, p. 5). Decision-makers operating under the social judgment theory must know the environment of the decision-making group and have enough information to make a decision.

Small groups of one to ten tend to lend themselves to decision-making using the social judgment theory. Such small groups as city councils, labor-management negotiators, state cabinet officers, and school boards have effectively used social judgment theory during the decision-making process regarding "policy applications" (Hammond et al., 1980, p. 132).

Cognitive Closure Model of Decision Satisfaction

The cognitive closure model of decision satisfaction is a framework for research on the relationships among need for closure, amount of information processing, and subjective certainty (cognitive closure) as factors which contribute to the satisfaction of group members involved in decision-making.

Closure in Decision Making

Small and Venkatesh (1995) explain the principle of closure or the "need for closure" in the decision-making process. According to them, closure is an attribute

that contributes to satisfaction and decision confidence. Closure allows the members of the group to reflect on the issue, summarize the discussion, and review the decision.

Those who study the impact of closure on the decision-making process look at satisfaction as important to individual members of the group and the group as a whole in the decision-making process. Small and Venkatesh (1995), in their study of the impact of closure on satisfaction with group decisions used the cognitive-motivational model of group member decision satisfaction. According to these researchers, "this model provides a theory-base linking motivation, information processing, confidence (signifying closure), and satisfaction" (p. 5). The cognitive-motivational theory of group member decision satisfaction is based on two perceived outcomes regarding decision satisfaction: "(a) if closure is desired or valued …, rendering such a judgment will promote positive affect in the decision maker and (b) in situations where closure is not desired or valued …, the decision maker will experience negative affect if forced to render a judgment" (p. 5).

This model relies heavily on sharing and processing of information by individual members of a group. Each member weighs the consequences of his or her actions against the information received and processed relevant to the situation about which the decision is to be made. To conduct the study, Small and Venkatesh (1995) used 81 undergraduate and graduate students who were enrolled in three college subjects. Three-member groups were formed by random selection. The researchers looked at the link between closure and decision satisfaction by "manipulating motivation in a laboratory environment using technology-based and manual methods" (p. 7). These researchers used "need for closure" as the independent variable and "confidence" as the dependent variable to analyze information on the number of ideas generated.

To test the cognitive-motivational model of group member decision making, Small and Venkatesh (1995) conducted a study in two stages. The first stage involved "manual methods," and the second phase involved a "technology-based group support system – VisionQuest TM" (p. 7). The researchers addressed two hypotheses: " (1) confidence and satisfaction (in decision-making) will be positively correlated, and (2) information processing variables (hypothesis generation and validation) will predict satisfaction through confidence and not directly" (p. 7). Two environments were used with the groups. The thirteen manual groups worked in a seminar room and had to sit at a conference table. The fourteen technology groups worked in the computer research laboratory. Each group had a different facilitator who served in a procedural capacity.

Small and Venkatesh (1995) reported that each group used "The Case of the Unhealthy Hospital" (p. 8), a case study widely used in management education. Slight modifications were made for purposes of the study. Each group utilized the "generate-evaluate-select model" for each decision- making session. After the sessions, data were collected and analyzed using multiple regression. Both hypotheses were supported at .05 level of significance. These findings supported two conclusions: "(1) confidence and decision satisfaction are significantly correlated, and (2) information processing variables are significant predictors of confidence, but not of decision satisfaction" (p. 12).

The findings of Small and Venkatesh (1995) provided a framework for the researcher in understanding the importance of information processing and decision satisfaction as he studied the dynamics of the decision-making process of the selected board. The findings on closure and decision satisfaction provided the researcher with information on the types of questions to ask when conducting interviews to collect data from board members and the superintendent. The knowledge gained by the researcher from the literature review also provided a

framework for the researcher in the development of the main question and subsidiary questions used during the interview process.

Muddling Through Model

Some groups or boards have been found to make decisions by using the "muddling through" process. Janis & Mann (1977) discuss "the art of muddling through" in the terms of "incremental improvement." According to Janis & Mann (1977), "When a problem arises requiring a change in policy, policy makers in government or large organizations generally consider a very narrow range of policy alternatives that differ to only a small degree from the existing policy (p. 33). This statement refers back to the "incremental improvements" concept that is part of the muddling through process. "Incremental improvements" are made on a small scale without looking at the long-term effects of the decision on the organization. Muddling through is a process used for putting out fires in an organization instead of charting a course to develop a stronger policy or decision and, in the end, a stronger more viable organization. Although "muddling through" is not a "rational" decision-making process, it has its place in group decision-making processes of organizations.

Muddling through, at times, allows harmony to be kept within an organization. It allows for decisions to be made on the fringe or margin and thereby not totally alienating a group or individual. One could possibly say that "muddling through" allows for a "win-win" situation for all concerned. Decision-making groups that utilize this process do not have the long-term interest of the organization in mind.

Garbage Can Model

Another non-rational decision-making process is the "garbage can" decision-making model. The "garbage can" model was created to describe decision- making processes in educational organizations (Kefford, 1994, p. 20). Kefford reviewed a case study of Wesley College in Australia, which was an investigation of the appropriateness of the "garbage can model of decision-making." As a result of his review, he implied that educational organizations have characteristics of "an organized anarchy" (p. 20). These characteristics are "ambiguous goals … and fluid participation" (p. 20). In using this model of decision making, the group makes decisions in one of three ways: (a) by oversight, (b) by flight, or (c) by resolution (Kefford, pp. 21 & 22).

Decision makers who use the garbage-can model travel the road of least resistance. According to Kefford, decision makers who follow this model probably will be long remembered for their tenure during periods of progress and peace. This could be another win-win decision-making model while at the same time not yielding the best decisions for the life of the organization.

Rational Decision-making Model

A school board, as a socio-cultural system, goes through several specific stages as it makes decisions. Studies by several individuals reveal that all groups or boards have some specific stages they follow as they engage in decision making. These stages may vary to some small degree, but are basically the same regardless of the nature or function of the group. McEwan (1997) offered "five basic stages of the decision-making process that groups employ: (a) figuring out that a decision is needed, (b) generating/exploring/researching the alternative solutions/choices that might be made, (c) making a judgment (yes or no regarding a single alternative) or a choice (comparing many alternatives), (d) acting upon the decision, and (e)

evaluating the decision" (p. 4). During these five stages members of the group are actively involved and discussing the issue as they make a decision.

Janis and Mann (1977) offered a different set of decision-making stages: "(a) apprising the challenge, (b) surveying alternatives, (c) weighing alternatives, (d) deliberating about commitment, and (e) adhering despite negative feedback" (p. 172). These stages were originally based on studies of individuals; however, Janis and Mann found that the five stages are also a part of the decision-making process of groups. Janis and Mann made it clear that all members of the group will not be at the same stage in their model at the same time.

The process of decision-making as it relates to school boards has been categorized into six steps. Amundson, Ficklen, Maatsch, Saks, and Zakariya (1996) defined these steps as "(a) define the problem, (b) gather information, (c) get the superintendent's recommendation, consider alternatives, (d) forecast consequences, (e) check proposed decisions against values, goals, and mission, and (f) decide, determine, settle, conclude, and resolve" (pp. 77-79). According to Amundson et al., (1996) when the school board follows the above steps, it is in an optimum position to make a decision that is in the best interest of the school district.

Other Factors Affecting Group Decision Making

Additional research in the areas of group decision making and group dynamics has focused on the importance of such attributes as silence, communication and information sharing, brainstorming, composition of the group (male/female), group cohesion, recognition of expertise of group members, and the impact of subgroups. These attributes can have either a negative or positive effect on the decision-making process of groups.

Silence and Board Decision Making

Wasson (1996) identified silence as a factor that affects the formulation of policy or the acceptance of proposals during the decision- making process of groups. Wasson's opinion is that silence in a meeting, following a proposal or discussion, signifies "a negative evaluation of the proposal, thus inviting the proposal maker to alter his position" (pp. 1-2). Silence in a meeting may also signify the desire of other board members to avoid the proposal and thereby delay action or not take action at all. The absence of verbal communication in the business meetings that were part of her study suggested that silence indicated (a) thought in progress, (b) bafflement, or (c) disagreement.

When silence occurs denoting negative reception of a proposal, the dynamics of the group become more complex. Wasson (1996) summarized that at this time silence elicits "reversal actions" from other board members.

Communication and Information Sharing and Board Decision Making

Hirokawa (1990) suggested that communication or lack of communication during the decision-making process affects the quality of decisions. According to Hirokawa, "Communication is essential for decision-making efficacy because, among other things, it allows for group members to (a) pool their information and critical resources, (b) check for errors and reject incorrect suggestions, (c) exert positive influence over the decisional preferences of others, and (d) satisfy the requisites for successful decision making or problem solving" (pp. 190-191).

Hirokawa and Scheerhorn's (1986) findings reveal that the quality of a decision is contingent upon the interaction of the group members during discussion. Hirokawa and Pace (1983) discovered that effective and ineffective decision outcomes can be distinguished by four characteristics of the group's

communication: (a) the manner in which group members examine each others' opinions and assumptions, (b) the group's discussion of decision alternatives and choices, (c) the appropriateness of the underlying premises upon which decisions are based, and (d) the nature of the group's influence process.

Hirokawa (1990) offered the following insights into the importance of communication in the decision-making process of groups: "(a) the importance of communication for decision-making efficacy tends to increase as the unfavorableness of the task situation increases, and (b) the specific role that communication plays in facilitating group performance also varies according to the characteristics of the task situation" (pp. 200-201).

As important as communication has been shown to be to the decision-making process of groups, Hirokawa and Scheerhorn (1986) reported that groups make faulty decisions based on faulty communication. Faulty decisions, according to Hirokawa and Scheerhorn, can be traced back to any member or members of the group who have exerted pressure on the group through communication. This finding is similar to the findings of Gebhardt and Meyers (1995) who suggested that a subgroup could have a powerful effect on the decision of the group.

According to Propp (1997) Dewey's "problem-solving model reflects the importance of information at each step" (p. 425). The steps, as Dewey (1910) explained, are (a) the selection and statement of the problem, (b) the search for possible alternatives, and (c) the implementation of the best solution. These three steps are essential components of the information- seeking process, which inevitably will lead to a decision by the group. The sharing of information and the filtering of data occur throughout the decision-making process. In the absence of adequate and timely information the school board or any decision-making entity is ill equipped to enter into the decision-making process. The way a group utilizes and processes information directly influences the decision made by the group. The

quality of the information shared with the group ultimately determines the quality of the decision or the success or failure of the group.

Groups must take part in information sharing and processing in order to come to a decision on the issue. According to Propp and Julian (1994) "the use of verbal information probes may be an effective method of enabling groups to build an accurate information base, thus leading to higher quality decisions" (p. 151). The use of verbal information probes allows for more discussion of information relevant to the issue. Propp and Julian (1994) defined verbal information probes as "any utterance, either interrogative of declarative; that has the potential to stimulate examination of a message encountered in a social situation" (p. 146). These researchers offer several specific types of communication that could serve as verbal information probes (a) decision-makers requiring additional details in regards to recent information on the issue, (b) decision-makers challenge of information or new ideas a they are introduced, and (c) decision-maker questioning of information received prior to the meeting. The results of the study by Propp and Julian (1994) suggest that verbal information probes "may be one effective method of stimulating more rigorous examination of the information introduced by individual [group] members" (p. 150).

<u>Brainstorming and Board Decision Making</u>

The technique of brainstorming is equally as important as communication and information sharing to the decision-making process. Kramer, Kuo, and Daily (1997) and Diehl & Stroebe (1987) refer to brainstorming as an informal process which relies on four basic rules: (a) there is no evaluation of ideas from members of the group, (b) all members are encouraged to give wild ideas, (c) members can build or hitchhike on ideas of others in the group, and (d) the group is to generate many possible solutions for the problem. The process of brainstorming is useful in

leading groups to identify many alternatives while moving the group to the best possible solution to a problem.

Brainstorming is a mechanism which allows the group to overcome some negative group effects. One of the fundamental rules of brainstorming is that no idea is judged for its value in moving the group to a decision. This process allows members to feel secure. Brainstorming permits members to be proactive rather than reactive. Guzzo (1982) suggests that brainstorming can be used by a group to define a problem as well as to generate solutions.

School boards, corporate boards, or teams, provided they have been together for a period of time, have been able to use the technique of brainstorming to assist them in the decision-making process. The findings of Kramer, Kuo, and Dailey (1997) reveal that brainstorming used by groups organized for brief periods is not as effective in the decision-making process as it is for groups which have been together for a longer period. Brainstorming may be beneficial to school boards because boards tend to have the same members for one to four years or longer.

Board or Group Composition and Decision Making

Another factor that affects the decision-making process of a board is its composition. Rogelberg and Rumery (1994) found that all-male groups were able to handle more tasks and reach decisions quicker than all-female groups. However, decisions of female groups were of a higher quality than those of male groups.

Rogelberg and Rumery (1994) inferred that female groups "may have been more sensitive to the need of coordinating, integrating, and resolving discrepant points of view" while the male groups might have experienced "process loss" (p. 87). "Process loss" is the "inability of the group to coordinate and integrate divergent and complementary positions" (p. 87). Littlepage and Silbiger (1992)

explained the concept of "process loss" as the failure or inability of groups to reach their potential.

Rogelberg & Rumery (1994) studied the gender-diversity issue as it relates to decision making. The subjects included in this study were 177 male and 207 female students from a large eastern university. The subjects were between 18 and 21 years of age and were basically strangers to each other. To conduct the research, 96 four-person teams were organized and assigned specific tasks. Participants were randomly assigned to groups. The "winter survival exercise judgment and decision-making task" was used for this study. "There were seventeen all-female teams, 23 lone-male teams, 29 balanced-gender teams, 12 lone-female teams, and 15 all-male teams that were randomly formed" (p. 85) for the purpose of this study.

The winter survival problem required the participants to imagine being stranded in an isolated northern area following a plane crash. The participants had to rank order twelve items left after the crash that were needed for survival. "Performance on the winter survival exercise was defined as the sum of the absolute differences between the ranks assigned by participants for each item and those advocated by three wilderness experts. A low score (little absolute difference between the experts' ranks and the participants' ranks) indicated a highly effective decision. A higher score (large absolute difference between the experts' ranks and the participants' ranks) indicated a less effective decision" (Rogelberg & Rumery, 1994, p. 83).

Participants were to first complete the task individually and return it to the examiner. After all completed the individual task, groups were formed and were told to complete the same task as a group. The individual task completion was to take seven minutes and the team task completion was to take no more than 45 minutes.

Participants gave feedback on an eight-item survey designed to measure the level of cohesion in the group. The survey was given to the participants after completing the winter survival task.

The results of the experiment using the winter survival exercise revealed that individual males' scores on average were significantly better than individual females' scores. "Group decision quality differed significantly among the various teams $\underline{F}(4, 91) = 2.72$, $\underline{p} < .05$; however, time on task revealed no significant difference, $\underline{p} > .05$" (pp. 85-86). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on the interpersonal cohesion survey results. The ANOVA was statistically significant, $\underline{F}(95, 288) = 2.75$, $\underline{p} < .05$. This significant $\underline{F}$ value reveals that the between groups variance is greater than the within groups variance.

The findings of this experiment revealed that (1) "the lone-female groups out performed the all-male groups, (2) increasing the male gender ratio improved the quality of the decision, and (3) the heterogeneous gender combination took longer to complete the problem-solving task than homogenous gender groups" (p. 87). The experiment also found that "gender diversity significantly affected team decision quality but not interpersonal cohesion or time on task" (p. 87).

Group Cohesion and Decision Making

Festinger, Schachter, and Black (1950) described group cohesiveness as "the resultant forces which are acting on the members to stay in a group" (p. 274). Eddy (1985) defined cohesion as the mutual attraction among members of a group and the resulting desire to remain in the group. Festinger, Schachter, and Black found that, in general, highly cohesive groups set goals more easily and are more likely to achieve those goals. Mullen, Anthony, Salas, and Driskell (1994)

revealed that cohesiveness exerts a significant, but small, effect on the quality of group performance.

Janis (1972), in his theory of groupthink, asserts that cohesion has an important impact on the quality of the decision of the group. Groupthink, as defined by Janis, is "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (p. 9). What Janis meant by "groupthink" is that when members of a group make a decision based on friendships within the group, the decision-making process is not yielding the best decision. That is, the human resource maintenance task is favored over the performance task, that of making the best decision for the organization. Cohesion at this point causes "groupthink" and diminishes the effectiveness of the decision process. According to Janis (1972), "Groupthink is conducive to errors in decision making, and such errors increase the likelihood of a poor outcome" (pp. 11-12). It is important to note that every cohesive group does not become a victim of groupthink, but all cohesive groups may show signs of groupthink periodically. Park (1990) found supporting evidence for Janis' (1972, 1982) findings on the positive effect of cohesiveness on the quality of group decisions.

Mullen et al., (1994) examined the effect of cohesion on the quality of decisions. This examination was conducted using a meta-analytic integration of the research. The meta-analysis had two basic goals. The first goal was to provide a precise summary of the significance and magnitude of the cohesiveness-decision-quality effect. The second goal was to account for any variations in the cohesiveness-performance effect.

These researchers (Mullen et al., 1994) found numerous studies on cohesion and the quality of decisions. Selected studies had to have "adolescents or adults not sampled from abnormal populations and … a test of the effects of group

cohesiveness on [the] quality of group decisions" (Mullen et al., p. 195). Nine articles were selected for the meta-analysis. The "nine articles yielded seventeen separate tests of the cohesiveness-decision quality effect, representing responses from 1382 subjects" (Mullen et al., p. 195).

Mullen et al. (1994) looked at "antecedent conditions and group size" (p. 195). The antecedent conditions examined were those directly related to groupthink and whether they were "eliminated, neutral or unspecified, or exaggerated" (p. 195). Interpersonal attraction, commitment to task, and group pride were three other predictors that were studied. The researchers concluded, "Interpersonal attraction may contribute to groupthink, whereas commitment to task (and possibly group pride) may thwart groupthink" (p. 199). The researchers further concluded that their findings are partially consistent with Janis's theorizing on groupthink and decision quality.

<div align="center">Recognition of Expertise and Board Decision-Making</div>

Bottger (1984) and Libby, Trotman, & Zimmer (1987) strongly suggest that the recognition of expertise is important in making effective decisions. These researchers found that members of a decision-making group seek out individual group members who are well versed on areas being discussed to gather or clarify information on an issue prior to making a decision. The recognition of expertise allows the power base of the group to change depending on the decision that has to be made. "Expert power" does not always rest with the chair of the board who is the one who holds the position power. "Expert power" may rest with the board member or members who have the most knowledge about the topic.

Subgroups and Board Decision Making

   In all groups, there tends to emerge subgroups whose purpose is to dominate the decision-making process of the main group. Gebhardt & Meyers (1995) found that a subgroup is a strong force in the decision-making process and can ultimately determine the final decision. They found that consistency is a key variable in the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the subgroup. According to Gebhardt and Meyers, Nemeth found a first-half, last-half effect and concluded that for subgroups to be effective, they have to be consistent throughout the decision-making process. The first-half, last-half effect refers to the length of the discussion on an issue leading up to the final decision. This researcher found that subgroups whose members are consistent in their discussion throughout the information sharing and discussion phase of the decision-making process are in a much better position to have more influence on the final decision. Caution is offered to the steadfastness of subgroups to be consistent in their thoughts. Gebhardt and Meyers sent caution because the steadfastness or outspokenness of the subgroup may result in a "winning team but a poor quality decision" (pp. 164-165).

   Researchers (Mugny, 1982; Mugny & Papastamou, 1980) point out that in addition to subgroup consistency, subgroup flexibility is a factor that influences the decision-making process of a group. If a subgroup is unwilling to be flexible, the subgroup will probably be unlikely to change the majority and will be less likely to affect the group's outcomes due to its rigidity. According to Gebhardt and Meyers (1995), Moscovici and Lage "found that a consistent minority can influence a group at both the surface and private decision levels, but an inconsistent minority has no influence at all" (p. 150).

   Gebhardt and Meyers (1995) "…attempt[ed] to test and verify existing knowledge and theory regarding consistency in minority/majority influence under interactive, … reality-based conditions" (p. 149). Seventy-three female and male

undergraduates in a communications class at a large midwestern university participated in their study. Prior to participation in the study, none of the members of the group had received training in group communication skills or problem-solving techniques. The 73 participants were randomly assigned to groups. Two participants were absent from the session; therefore, thirteen groups of five and two groups of four participated in the study.

The researchers used items from three different Choice Dilemma Questionnaires (CDQ). These items were selected to "stimulate argument for both risky or cautious positions and … for studying subgroup consistency and influence" (p. 154). A total of 45 group discussions were held and later transcribed.

Four hypotheses were tested. The results of the study supported the four hypotheses. Gebhardt and Meyers (1995) concluded that consistency plays a key role in affecting group outcomes. They found that "subgroups whose members consistently (a) promoted a position and (b) agreed with fellow team members … better predicted final group outcomes than those subgroups whose members were inconsistent in voicing statements" (p. 162). Finally, these researchers found that subgroups whose members "consistently exhibited communication behaviors over time better predicted final group outcomes than those subgroups whose members inconsistently exhibited these statements over time" (p. 162). Gebhardt and Meyers stated, "Results from this study appear to support previous research regarding majority/minority influence" (p. 163).

Reflections on the Review of the Literature and the Development of this
Study

The dynamics of a decision-making group while involved in decision
making have an impact on the quality of a decision. The review of literature
revealed that very harmonious decision-making groups whose members have
similar opinions, engage in little discussion, and ask few questions tend to make
decisions of poorer quality than decision-making groups whose members ask
questions, engage in discussion, and bring different opinions to the board room.
The availability of accurate information, shared with all members of the decision-
making group in ample time for its members to review, is also crucial to the
decision-making process.

The review of literature related to group dynamics and the decision-making
process informed the researcher of the findings of other researchers in the field of
group dynamics and decision making and what these researchers have identified in
theory and practice as attributes of decision-making groups that yield high or low
quality decisions. The results of previous studies allowed the researcher to acquire
a knowledge base on group theory and decision making. The researcher used the
knowledge gained from the review of literature as he gathered and interpreted data
from board members and the superintendent and from the review of documents.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedures used in this study. Chapter three is divided into five sections: (a) application of the case method to the study, (b) description of the case site, (c) data collection methods, (d) data management, and (e) data analysis. Figures and tables relevant to the process of data collection are included.

Application of the Case Method to the Study

The study of the decision-making process of groups or boards lends itself well to the case study method of research. According to Kefford (1994) the case study method offers to the researcher who studies organizational decision making an approach which is consistent with the process being described and compatible with the theory of organizational choice underpinning the investigation. Stake (1995) argued that a good case study has the potential to "provide more valid portrayals, better bases for understanding of what is going on, and solid grounds for considering action" (p. 32). Patton (1990) informed the researcher of the value of the case study in qualitative research: "Case studies…become particularly useful where one needs to understand some special people, particular problem, or unique situation in great depth…" (p. 54).

Selection of the Case Site

The case site (a small, rural school division in Virginia) was selected for study for the following reasons: (a) The division was close to the researcher,

(b) all board members were elected, (c) the board members served as a decision-making body for at least three years, (d) the superintendent worked at the site as superintendent for six years, and (e) the board and the superintendent were willing to participate in the case study.

Description of the Case Site

The case site is located in eastern Virginia. According to 1996-1997 data, the average daily student membership was approximately 2000 in grades kindergarten through twelve (Virginia Department of Education, 1997). The local composite index (LCI) was .3046. The per pupil expenditure by funding source was $1,748.00, local; $3,066.00, state, including funds from the sales tax; and $410.00, federal (see Table 1). Based on 1990 census data, the median household income in 1990 for this site was $24,654. Major industries in the area were farming, forestry, light manufacturing, and fishing. Fifty-nine percent of the persons age 25 or older were high school graduates and 10 percent held a bachelor's degree or higher (United States Bureau of Census, 1991).

Table 1

Local Composite Index and Sources of Funding for the Study Site Based on 1996-1997 Data

Average daily membership			2,040
Local composite index			.3046
Per pupil expenditure by category			
Local			$1,748.00
State			$2,499.00
Sales tax			$567.00
Federal			$410.00
Total			$5,224.00
Racial breakdown			
	Black	49%	
	White	50%	
	Other	1%	

The participants were the five-members of the elected school board and the superintendent of schools at the site. The board had been together as a decision-making body for at least three years. At the time of the study, the board chair was Participant "C," and the vice chair was Participant "A." Descriptive data on each participant are in Table 2.

Table 2
Descriptive Data on the Participating Board Members and the Superintendent of Schools

Participant	Years of service		Educational level				Family income level			Religious affiliation				Gender		Election		Marital status		Child in public school in last 4 years?		Race	
Board members	A	E	E1	E2	E3	E4	1	2	3	P	C	E	O	M	F	O	U	M	S	Y	N	B	W
A	19	3	x					x		x					x		x	x		x			x
B	0	3	x					x		x					x		x	x		x			x
C	7	3	x					x		x				x			x	x			x	x	
D	0	3				x		x			x				x		x	x			x	x	
E	2	3			x			x			x				x		x	x		x			x
Superintendent	8	■				x		x				x		x				x		x			x

Key

Years of service	Educational level	Family income level [a]	Religious affiliation	Gender
A Appointed	E1 High school graduate	1 Low	P Protestant	M Male
E Elected	E2 Attended community college	2 Middle	C Catholic	F Female
	E3 Attended 4 yr. college	3 Upper	E Episcopal	
	E4 Post 4 yr. college		O Other	

Election	Marital status	Child in public school in last 4 years?	Race
O Opposed	M Married	Y Yes	B Black
U Unopposed	S Single	N No	W White

[a]Based on U.S. Census definitions and designations.

Identification of Decisions

Four decisions the board made between July 1, 1996, and April 30, 1999, were studied. The researcher and the division superintendent selected the four decisions after reviewing school board agenda items and board minutes for the period indicated. Decisions requiring board deliberation in two or more meetings were considered for selection. Selection of the four decisions from those meeting this criterion was based on the availability of data to address the research questions.

The first decision selected was the decision by the board to pay the retirement benefit for its employees over a two-year phase-in period. The board had wanted to pay this benefit for its employees for several years; however, due to the local fiscal impact, the board had not been able to do so until the option of a two-year phase-in period was considered.

The second decision selected was the decision of the board to participate in a regional governor's school. This decision allowed selected accelerated students from the division an opportunity to receive advanced math and science courses through an off-campus site. The board realized the need to provide additional higher-level courses for these high-achieving students.

The third decision selected was the decision by the board to participate in a regional alternative school. The board and superintendent, realizing that the school division was not fully meeting the needs of this segment of the student population, began to look at options to its in-house alternative education program. The regional approach was presented by the superintendent as a viable option for meeting the needs of students who required an alternative to the regular educational program.

The fourth decision selected was the decision of the board to develop a Discipline Review Committee of the board. The superintendent, realizing that considerable time was used by the board under its current procedures of reviewing discipline cases appealed by parents, presented this option to the board for consideration. The Discipline Review Committee of the board would hear appeals from parents instead of the entire board being a part of the process.

Data Collection Methods

This study was designed to determine the dynamics involved in the decision-making process of a rural school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Four issues on which the board made decisions were selected for study.

The researcher (a) interviewed board members and the superintendent, (b) reviewed board minutes, (c) reviewed formal and informal memos related to the issues, and (d) reviewed informational reports related to the issues (see Table 3).

Table 3
Methods Used to Collect Data on the Identified Cases

Methods	Source of data	Time frame
Interviews	Individual board members Superintendent	Throughout data collection phase of study: May 1999 – September 1999
Review of historical documents on each issue	Minutes of school board meetings from 1993-1999 relating to identified issues Formal and informal memos relating to identified issues Reports prepared for information on the issues	Throughout data collection phase of study: May 1999 – September 1999

<div align="center">Interviews</div>

The researcher requested written permission from each member of the board, the board as a decision-making body, and the division superintendent to conduct the research. Each board member and the division superintendent signed an Informed Consent Form to participate in the study. Assurances were made to keep the identity of the board and division superintendent confidential.

Development of Interview Protocols

Two interview protocols were developed, one for board members and the other for the superintendent. The interview protocols were constructed to allow the interviewee to give detailed responses to questions or respond to statements from the researcher. The questions were designed to allow the interviewer the opportunity to probe and ask more detailed questions about the issue or case being discussed. Questions used in the interviews are listed in Table 4. The questions were developed around the domains of information identified in the research questions. The domains are (a) how the board members became aware of the issue, (b) how the superintendent became aware of the issue, (c) the forces that influenced the decision on the issue, (d) the decision-making process steps for the issue, (e) the time used to make a decision on the issue, and (f) the role of communication in the decision-making process. Subsidiary questions related to the

Table 4

Interview Questions Categorized by Research Question and Interviewee

Research questions	Interview questions	
	Superintendent	School board members
How did the board members become aware of this issue? Domain: Awareness of the issue by board members.		1. Tell me how the board became aware of this issue. 2. If an individual or group brought the issue to the attention of you or the board, what was the role of the individual or group in the division or community?
How did the superintendent become aware of this issue? Domain: Awareness of the issue by superintendent.	1. Tell me how you became aware of this issue. 2. If an individual or group brought the issue to you, what was the role of the individual or group in the division or community?	
What forces influenced the decision reached on this issue? Domain: Forces that influenced the decision.	1. Describe the forces that influenced the board in reaching its decision on this issue. 2. Tell me how you personally think the forces you identified influenced the decision the board reached on this issue.	1. Describe the forces that influenced the board in reaching its decision on this issue. 2. Describe the forces that influenced you personally in reaching a decision on this issue. 3. Tell me how you personally think the forces you identified influenced the decision the board reached on this issue.
What steps did the board use to reach its decision on this issue? Domain: Decision-making process steps.	1. Describe the steps you think the board used to reach its decision on this issue.	1. Describe the steps you think the board used to reach its decision on this issue.

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Interview Questions Categorized by Research Question and Interviewee

Research questions	Interview questions	
	Superintendent	School board members
How long did it take the board to make its decision on this issue? Domain: Time used to make a decision.	1. In terms of hours or days, how much time did the board spend in reaching its decision on this issue?	1. In terms of hours or days, how much time did the board spend in making its decision on this issue? 2. Tell me how you personally think the board utilized its time in reaching its decision on this issue.
What role did communication play in helping the board to make a decision on this issue? Domain: Role of communication in the decision-making process.	1. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make its decision on this issue. 2. As superintendent what was your role in communicating with the school board as it worked to reach a decision on this issue?	1. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make its decision on this issue? 2. Tell me who communicated with the school board while the board was making a decision on this issue. 3. Explain how this person communicated with the board on this issue. 4. What was the role of this person or group in relation to the school board?

main questions for each domain were created to be used as probes depending on the responses to the main questions.

Content Validation of the Interview Questions

A panel of superintendents and central office administrative staff members reviewed the questions for the interview protocol. Superintendents in the regional planning district, which includes the selected case site, and central office administrative staff in the researcher's school division were asked to assess the interview questions in three areas: domain relevance, strength of association with the domain, and clarity of the item.

The first rating indicated which of the six domains the respondent felt the item best fit (time, information gathering, internal influences, external influences, communication, and decision-making process). The second rating indicated how strongly the respondent felt the statement was associated with the selected domain. The association rating ranged from one to four, where one represented a weak association and four represented a very high association. The third rating indicated how clearly the respondent felt the statement was written. The clarity rating ranged from one to three, where one meant "not clear" and three meant "very clear".

Data for the content validation of the questionnaire were entered into a computer database and the percentage of the respondents placing an item in each domain, and the mean clarity of each item was calculated. Tables were prepared for the results (see Appendix B). Revisions were made to the questions as suggested by the panel of experts and reflected in the validation data. Specifically, the following changes were made: (1) question one was changed from "how long did it take" to "how much time", (2) question two was changed from "reaching a decision" to "reaching its decision," (3) question three was changed from "how you personally" to "the board", (4) in question four the word "personally" was

deleted, (5) question five was deleted, (6) the words "and the school board" were deleted in question six, (7) question nine was deleted, (8) in question ten "these" was changed to "the" and "previously identified" was deleted, (9) question eleven was deleted, (10) question twelve was deleted, (11) in question fourteen "previously identified" was deleted, and (12) in question seventeen "previously identified" was deleted.

Administration of the Interview Protocols

The researcher conducted interviews in the conference room at the school board office and in the superintendent's office of the selected site. The researcher created a relaxed atmosphere for each interview. This was accomplished by meeting the interviewees prior to the first scheduled interview to develop a level of communication and familiarity between the researcher and the interviewee. The interview protocols contain the main research question and subsidiary questions for each research question. Subsidiary questions are the questions that were asked each interviewee based on the main research question. The interview protocols are in Appendix C.

Questions that were asked each school board member about each issue are:

Research question: How did the board members become aware of this issue?

Subsidiary questions:

1. Tell me how the board became aware of this issue

2. If an individual or group brought the issue to the attention of the board, what was the role of the individual or group in the division or the community?

Research question: What forces influenced the decision reached on this issue?

Subsidiary questions:

1. Describe the forces that influenced the board in reaching its decision on this issue.

2. Describe the forces that influenced you personally in reaching a decision on this issue.

3. Tell me how you personally think the forces you identified influenced the decision the board reached on this issue.

Research question: What steps did the board use to reach its decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. Describe the steps you personally think the board used to reach its decision on this issue.

Research question: How long did it take the board to make its decision on this issue?

Subsidiary questions:

1. In terms of hours or days, how much time did the board spend in making its decision on this issue?

2. Tell me how you personally think the board utilized its time in reaching its decision on this issue.

Research question: What role did communication play in helping the board make a decision on this issue?

Subsidiary questions:

1. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make a decision on this issue.

2. Tell me who communicated with the school board while the board was making a decision on this issue.

3. Explain how this person communicated with the board on this issue.

4. What was the role of this person or group in relation to the school board?

Questions that were asked the superintendent:

Research question: How did the superintendent become aware of this issue?

Subsidiary questions:

1. Tell me how you became aware of this issue.

2. If an individual or group brought this issue to you, what was the role of the individual or group in the division or community?

Research question: What forces influenced the decision reached on this issue?

Subsidiary questions:

1. Describe the forces that influenced the board in reaching its decision on this issue.

2. Tell me how you personally think the forces you identified influenced the decision the board reached on this issue.

Research question: What steps did the board use to reach its decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. Describe the steps you think the board used to reach its decision on this issue.

Research question: How long did it take the board to make its decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. In terms of hours or days, how much time did the board spend on reaching a decision on this issue?

Research question: What role did communication play in helping the board make a decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board reach its decision on this issue.

2. As superintendent what was your role in communicating with the school board as it worked to reach a decision on this issue?

<div align="center">Documents</div>

The researcher reviewed the following types of documents (a) official minutes of board meetings between December 6, 1993, and September 13, 1999; (b) formal and informal memos from the superintendent on the four cases; (c) informational reports; and (d) written correspondence from the superintendent relating to the cases.

Data Analysis

Data from interviews were analyzed using the "constant comparative" method as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Glaser and Strauss (1967) referred to the "constant comparative method of analyzing qualitative data as a process which combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained" (p. 134). Through using the constant comparative method for data analysis, data from the interviews and documents were clustered into specific themes.

The researcher followed specific steps in analyzing the data. These specific steps were:

1. Typed all field notes
2. Transcribed verbatim all taped interviews
3. Coded all types of data
4. Unitized data into units which had specific meaning
   a. Separated data on index cards by drawing a line between themes
   b. Coded each theme
   c. Coded each piece of data to indicate source
   d. Indicated in a word or phrase each unit's meaning
   e. Wrote each unit's meaning beneath notation on data source
   f. Cut apart identified units of data
   g. Pasted identified units on index cards
5. Reread data in files
6. Looked for recurring themes that emerged from interviews and documents
7. Listed on a large sheet of paper recurring themes
8. Combined themes to form conclusions

Validation Techniques and Data Archiving

Data were validated through triangulation, member checks, and reading and rereading transcripts. The process of triangulation involved the researcher reviewing data collected from interviews with board members and the superintendent and the review of documents and board minutes pertaining to each case. As the researcher analyzed data, the researcher looked for recurring themes across data sources. When the same data were found in more than one source, those data were treated as valid and used in the case study.

Transcribed interviews were sent back to each interviewee to be verified for accuracy. As members checked the write-up, they were asked to write, in marginal notes, any changes that needed to be made. The checks by members served as a second means of data validation. To further validate data for the study, the researcher read and reread transcripts to look for recurring themes and to check for accuracy in data analysis. Tapes, interviews that were transcribed verbatim from the tapes, and copies of memos are in the possession of the researcher and will be kept for a period of five years.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to identify the decision-making process of an elected, rural school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Four issues on which the board made decisions were selected for study. Six questions were addressed in this case study. The six questions were: (1) How did the board members become aware of this issue? (2) How did the superintendent become aware of this issue? (3) What forces influenced the decision reached on this issue? (4) What steps did the board use to reach its decision on this issue. (5) How long did it take the board to make its decision on this issue? (6) What role did communication play in helping the board to make a decision on this issue? The raw data related to each question are in five matrices (see Appendix A). Data were validated through a comparison of data from the interviews and documents (board minutes, superintendent's memos, and in some cases letters) and by sending the transcripts back to the respective respondents for verification. Each matrix contains data from the interviews and the documents reviewed.

In addition to the data gathered on each issue from each board member, the superintendent, and a review of documents, each matrix contains themes that emerged from the data. The results of the data analysis are presented as four cases of board decision making and a cross-case summary of findings.

In Appendix A the title of each raw data matrix contains the content of the questions asked of the respondents. Column one is the source of data, which is the individual board member, superintendent, board minutes, or memos. Each board member is represented as BM_a, BM_b, BM_c, BM_d, BM_e, respectively, and the superintendent as the superintendent. Column two is divided into four sub-columns, each representing one of the four identified issues. The cells in the matrix contain the responses from the respondents and raw data from the documents

reviewed. The last row of each matrix contains the themes that emerged from the data.

Tables 5 through 8 contain the interview questions and the themes related to each issue that emerged from the data. The issue is identified in the title of each table. Column one contains the questions asked each board member and the superintendent. Column two contains themes that emerged from the data.

A coding and citation system was used to reference the source and type of data. An example of this system of coding and citing data is BM_a, TA, p. 1, l. 17. In this example, BM_a represents board member A, TA represents transcript for board member A, p. 1 represents page 1 of the transcript, and l.17 represents line 17 of the transcript. The data will be available for five years following the completion of this study.

Table 5

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of the Payment of Retirement for Personnel

Interview question	Themes
1. How did the board become aware of this issue?	Through the local education association Through the superintendent of schools Through the Communications Committee Through informal communications between employees and a board member who was a former employee
2. How did the superintendent become aware of this issue?	Through the local education association Through the Communications Committee Through informal communications with a board member
3. What forces influenced the board in reaching a decision on this issue?	Surrounding counties were doing this for their employees Wanting to do this for all employees Understanding the need to do this for all employees Persistence of the local education association

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)
Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of the Payment of Retirement for Personnel

Interview question	Themes

4. Describe the steps used by the school board to make a decision on this issue.	Became aware of the issue
	   LEA Survey
	
	Sought information on
	   Cost
	   Legalities
	   Number of employees
	
	Sought information from
	   Local education association
	   Virginia Retirement System
	   Superintendent
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Received information from
	   Superintendent and staff
	   Virginia Retirement System
	   Local education association
	
	Verified information
	   Superintendent
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Sought approval
	   Board of supervisors
	   County administrator
	
	Discussed the issue
	   Budget time
	
	Communicated with
	   Board of supervisors
	   Virginia Retirement System
	   Among selves
	   County administrator
	
	Analyzed decision options
	
	Built consensus
	   Among board members
	   Board of supervisors
	   County administrator
	
	Voted on the option

(table continues)

Table 5 (continued)

<u>Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of the Payment of Retirement for</u>
<u>Personnel</u>

Interview Question	Themes

5. How much time did the board use to reach a decision on this issue?	Effective use of time
	
	Before board for a long time
	    Three to five years
	    Discussed at board meetings
	    During budget time

6. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make a decision on this issue.	Clarified concerns of board members
	
	Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information based on questions from
	    Board members
	    County administrator
	    Members of the board of supervisors
	    Representatives from the local education association
	    Citizens
	    Employees
	
	Allowed for interaction [discussion] between
	    Superintendent
	    Board members
	
	Allowed the board to consider alternatives and build consensus

Table 6

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of Participation in a Regional
Governor's School

Interview question	Themes
1. How did the board become aware of this issue?	Through a superintendent of schools from another school division Through a presentation from a consultant Through several speakers Through the superintendent of schools
2. How did the superintendent become aware of this issue?	Through a superintendent of schools from another school division
3. What forces influenced the board in reaching a decision on this issue?	The need to do more for the gifted students The interest of parents The interest of some of the teachers The interest of students The endorsement by other school divisions Presentations from another superintendent and a consultant

(table continues)

Table 6 (continued)

<u>Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of Participation in a Regional</u>
<u>Governor's School</u>

Interview question	Themes
4. Describe the steps used by the school board to make a decision on this issue.	Became aware of the issue 　　Superintendent Received information from 　　Superintendent 　　Presenters 　　　Consultant 　　　Other central office staff Discussed the issue 　　Superintendent 　　Among selves 　　With presenters 　　　Consultant 　　　Other superintendent 　　　Other central office staff Discussed 　　Location 　　Cost 　　Student selection criteria 　　Number of students Approved resolution of support Sought approval for study grant 　　State Board of Education 　　General Assembly Built consensus for support Voted to participate

Table 6 (continued)

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of Participation in a Regional
Governor's School

Interview question	Themes

5. How much time did the board use to reach a decision on this issue?	Lengthy process
	   Planning
	   Resolution
	   Grant application
	   Grant approval
	
	Planning for presentation
	   By staff
	   Two-to-three year process
	
	Board time spent on issue
	   Ten to twenty minutes per meeting
	   Fifteen or more minutes at various meetings
	   Ten to fifteen minutes in about three to four meetings
	   Three or four meetings

6. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make a decision on this issue.	Clarified concerns of board members
	
	Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information based on questions from
	   Board members
	   Parents of accelerated students
	
	Allowed for interaction [discussion] between
	   Superintendent
	   Board members
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Allowed the board to consider alternatives

Table 7

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of Participation in a Regional Alternative School

Interview question	Themes
1. How did the board become aware of this issue?	The superintendent of schools In-house staff Director of special programs Scuttle butt
2. How did the superintendent become aware of this issue?	Through department of education correspondence
3. What forces influenced the board in reaching a decision on this issue?	The need to do more for these students (students in need of an alternative environment) Concern from the community [local civic association] about the number of expulsions and the absence of assistance for these students Opportunity to provide counseling for the students Opportunity for vocational training The number of students kept growing Economical provision of services to the students Inservice training for teachers who would be working with the students

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of Participation in a Regional
Alternative School

Interview question	Themes

4. Describe the steps used by the school board to make a decision on this issue.	Became aware of the issue
	    Superintendent
	
	Received information
	    Presentation by superintendent
	
	Discussed the issue with
	    Superintendent
	    Among selves
	
	Discussed
	    Cost
	    Grant proposal and application
	    Need
	
	Analyzed options
	
	Approved grant proposal and application
	
	Sought approval of grant
	    Virginia Department of Education
	
	Reached consensus
	
	Voted for approval

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

<u>Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of Participation in a Regional</u>
<u>Alternative School</u>

Interview question	Themes

5. How much time did the board use to reach a decision on this issue?	Concern for years
	
	Board time spent on issue
	    Two or three meetings
	    Fifteen to forty minutes at meetings

6. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make a decision on this issue.	Clarified concerns of board members
	
	Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information based on questions from
	    Board members
	    Community civic organization
	    Citizens
	
	Allowed for interaction [discussion] among
	    Superintendent
	    Board members
	    Other central office staff
	    Citizens
	    Representative from local civic organization
	
	Allowed the board to consider alternatives

Table 8

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of the Formation of a Discipline
Review Committee

Interview question	Themes
1. How did the board become aware of this issue?	The superintendent of schools The assistant superintendent of schools
2. How did the superintendent become aware of this issue?	The board was spending much time on discipline matters
3. What forces influenced the board in reaching a decision on this issue?	The amount of time required by the board dealing with student discipline The concern by the minority population in the community for equal treatment of minorities by the school system

(table continues)

Table 8 (continued)

Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of the Formation of a Discipline Review Committee

Interview question	Themes

4. Describe the steps used by the school board to make a decision on this issue.	Became aware of the issue
	   Superintendent
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Received information from
	   Superintendent
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Discussed the issue
	   Legality
	   State code
	   Time
	   Composition of the committee
	
	Communicated with
	   Superintendent
	   Legal counsel
	   VSBA (Virginia School Boards Association) policy department
	   Assistant superintendent
	   Among selves
	
	Reached consensus
	
	Voted for approval

Table 8 (continued)

<u>Themes Emerging from the Data on the Issue of the Formation of a Discipline</u>
<u>Review Committee</u>

Interview question	Themes

5. How much time did the board use to reach a decision on this issue?	Relatively short amount of time
	    Two or three meetings
	    Two or three months
	
	Policy change
	    Two or three meetings

6. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make a decision on this issue.	Clarified concerns of board members
	
	Provided additional information based on questions from
	    Board members
	    Representatives from local civic organization
	
	Allowed for interaction [discussion] among
	    Superintendent
	    Board members
	    Assistant superintendent
	    Other central office staff
	
	Allowed the board to consider alternatives

Issue-by-Issue Findings by Interview Question

This section has been organized by issue and findings on each issue. Findings and supporting data by issue are included.

Issue: Payment of Retirement for Personnel

The school board had not been paying the retirement cost for its employees. The request to pay the retirement cost for employees had been presented to the board by representatives of the local education association for several years. The school board, concerned about the fiscal impact on the locality, worked closely with the local county administrator and board of supervisors to provide this benefit to its employees over a two-year phase in period.

School Board Awareness of the Issue

The data revealed that the board became aware of this issue in four specific ways: (a) the president of the local education association made a verbal presentation to the board during the annual budget development process, (b) the issue was discussed in the meetings of the school division's communications committee known as the communications committee, (c) the superintendent of schools made the board aware of the issue during the budget process, and (d) individual teachers, administrators, and some community members discussed the issue with a board member who was a former employee.

Presentation to the school board by the local education association. Virginia law does not permit collective bargaining and negotiations between school boards and local education associations; therefore, each year the local education association, through a representative, presents a list of requests to the school board. In the winter of 1995, not unlike other years, the representative of the local

education association came before the board and presented "… their wish list" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 2, ls. 5-9). The payment of the employee's contribution to the Virginia Retirement System was a top priority of the local association. It was such an important issue to the association that one board member said that it "… was always at the top of their lists" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 2, l. 1).

Discussion in the communications committee. The communications committee is comprised of representatives from each employee group, a school board member, and the assistant superintendent or superintendent. The communications committee meets three or four times during the school year. Concerns and suggestions from this group are presented to the board for action or consideration. Data revealed that the issue of payment of retirement by the school board for its employees was discussed in this committee.

The superintendent commented, "It was shared with me by a representative of the [education association] and through the communications committee" (Superintendent, TS, p. 2, ls. 6-7). He further commented, "One member of the board sits on the communication committee, so at least one board member heard about it prior to the formal presentation to the full board" (Superintendent, TS, p. 2, ls. 11-13). A comment from a board member shows that this issue was discussed in the meetings of the communications committee. This board member commented, "… it was discussed in the meetings of the communications committee …" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 6, ls. 4-7).

Discussion between superintendent and school board. The superintendent of schools made the board aware of this specific issue during the budget process. The budget process is the usual time that the superintendent makes the board aware of items to be included in the proposed budget for the upcoming school year. Because

the superintendent knew this issue was going to be presented to the board and because he knew board members wanted to consider this issue, he presented it to the board at this time. The superintendent commented that he included materials on this issue in the board packet and that, "It was shared with the board as an agenda item during the budget development process …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 3, l. 5).

Discussion between a board member and employees. One board member who was a former employee (teacher) in this division was approached by individual teachers, administrators, and some community individuals who voiced their opinion on the need for the board to approve paying the cost of retirement for all employees. This board member stated, "I was stopped in the community by individuals who said that we needed to do this. Teachers, former teachers, and administrators also talked to me about the need to do this [pay the employee share of the cost of retirement] …" (BM$_e$, TE, p. 6, ls. 9-13). Comments heard by this board member were shared with the full board during the decision-making process on this issue.

Superintendent Awareness of the Issue

The superintendent, realizing the importance of this benefit to all employees, informed the board of the issue. The superintendent became aware of the issue in three ways: (a) the local education association made the superintendent aware of the issue through its program of action, (b) the superintendent's representative on the communications committee informed the superintendent, and (c) this issue was also brought to the attention of the superintendent through informal verbal communications with a board member.

Superintendent's awareness of the issue through the local education association. Due to the open communication and level of mutual respect that existed between the local education association and the superintendent, the local education association representative made the superintendent aware of the request that would be coming to the board from the local education association. The superintendent stated, "It was shared with me by a representative of the [education association] …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 5, ls. 6-7).

Superintendent's awareness of the issue through the superintendent's representative to the communications committee. The superintendent's designee to the communications committee was the assistant superintendent. The assistant superintendent kept the superintendent aware of the discussions of this forum and informed him of the discussions related to the payment of retirement for employees.

Superintendent's awareness of the issue through informal communications with board members. Discussions between the superintendent and board members occur on a daily basis. If the superintendent initiates the discussion, the purpose is to keep the board members aware of issues relating to the school division on a daily basis. The same holds true if the board members initiate the discussion with the superintendent. Such was the case regarding the issue of payment of retirement for employees. Informal discussions between the superintendent and former and current employees, community members, and with the board member who represented the board on the communications committee served as a way to inform the superintendent of this issue.

Forces Influencing the Board's Decision

The board was informed by the superintendent and the local education association that it was the only division in the surrounding counties that had not provided this benefit to its employees. The following comments from board members reflect the feeling of the board on this issue: "Surrounding counties are doing it" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 3, l. 4). "Most other school divisions are doing this for their teachers" (BM$_d$, TD, l. 3, ls. 17-18). And, "… we were one of a few counties that did not provide that" (BM$_e$, TB, l. 8, ls. 5-6). In addition to the feeling of being one of the last school divisions in the area not providing this benefit to its employees, the board felt, "It was a benefit … they deserved" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 2, ls.15-16).

Another force was the esteem of the local education association in the eyes of the board. One board member stated, "Yes, they [the leaders of the local education association] are very respected. Everyone works together. The leaders … work well with the board" (BM$_a$, TA, l. 6, ls. 9-12).

A final and not inconsequential force was the feeling by at least one board member and the superintendent that the county board of supervisors and the county administrator were supportive of the payment of the employees' share to the retirement system. The superintendent commented, "There were constant discussions between the county administrator and me …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 7, ls. 11-12). Just as the superintendent kept his board aware of the discussions between the representatives from the retirement system and his staff, the county administrator kept his board aware of the discussions among the superintendent, the school board, and himself. This open communication created an atmosphere of oneness on this issue.

Steps in Making a Decision on the Issue

The school board used ten steps as it worked to reach a decision on whether to pay the employees' share to the Virginia Retirement System. The ten steps were: (a) becoming aware of the issue, (b) seeking information on the issue, (c) receiving information, (d) verifying information on the issue, (e) seeking approval from the county board of supervisors and the county administrator, (f) continuing discussion on the issue, (g) communicating with interested parties, (h) analyzing decision options, (i) building consensus around one option, and (j) voting on the option.

Becoming aware of the issue. The first step in the decision-making process on the issue was becoming aware of the issue. The board became aware of the issue through discussions with the superintendent, presentations by the local education association, and from employees and others talking to one of the board members.

Seeking and receiving information on the issue. Seeking and receiving information relevant to the issue were the second and third steps in the decision-making process on this issue. The board sought information on cost, legal issues, and number of employees that would be affected by the change. The superintendent provided information on cost and number of employees affected. Information on legal matters was provided by the board's attorney and representatives of the retirement system. The superintendent stated, "The board was given the information on the number of employees that would be covered under the retirement system, the cost to the division … ." (Superintendent, TS, p. 1, l. 6).

Verifying information on the issue. Verifying information was the fourth step in the decision-making process on this issue. In speaking about the

information received from the local education association representative, a board member said, "Of course, it was verified by someone … in this central office" (BM$_e$, TE, p. 9, ls. 4-5). Even though the board was willing to receive information from the local education association, it had the central office staff verify what was presented.

Seeking approval of the county board of supervisors and the county administrator. The fifth step was to seek approval from the board of supervisors and county administrator. For this particular issue, the county administrator was seen as a major player in the approval process. The county administrator and superintendent worked together in getting this issue passed not only by the school board but by the board of supervisors as well. Both the county administrator and the superintendent made their respective boards aware of the cost involved and how the county could pay for this benefit for all employees, both school and non-school, without being a financial burden on the locality. Two options were made available to the boards, and the fiscal effect of each on the locality was clearly explained to them.

Continuing discussion of the issue by the board. The sixth step involved continuing discussion of the issue among board members and the superintendent. According to the superintendent, as the budget process went forward, the board members continued to discuss how this benefit could be given to their employees. Board members discussed the options presented, reviewed each option for its financial impact on the county, and considered how each option would benefit employees.

Communicating with interested parties. Communicating with the members of the board of supervisors, representatives of the Virginia Retirement System, fellow board members, and the county administrator was the seventh step in the decision-making process on this issue. The superintendent "verbally communicated with the county administrator …", and [there was] "constant communication with the board, county administrator, and … VRS" [Virginia Retirement System] (Superintendent, TS, p. 5, ls. 10-14).

Analyzing decision options. The next step for this board on this issue was to analyze its options. Two options were available to the board: (1) begin full implementation of the employer paying the five percent retirement cost for employees, and (2) to phase in payment of the cost of retirement over a two-year period. The first year the board would pay three percent of the retirement cost per employee, and the second year the additional two percent per employee would be paid by the board. The options were developed by the county administrator and superintendent and were approved by representatives of the Virginia Retirement System as possible implementation options. According to the superintendent, both he and the county administrator agreed that, "Phasing in of the benefit [retirement benefit] over two years was the best option for the county due to the cost " (Superintendent, TS, p. 6, ls. 4-5). The superintendent presented the options to the board after consultations with the county administrator and representatives of the Virginia Retirement System.

Building consensus around one option. Consensus building was the ninth step in the decision-making process on this issue. After thorough discussion, analysis of the available options, and reviewing the financial impact on the locality, consensus was built among school board members, members of the board

of supervisors, and the county administrator around the best option. Open communication was key to this step in the decision-making process.

       <u>Voting on the option for the issue.</u> Once consensus was reached on one option, the board formally voted to pay the retirement cost for its employees to the Virginia Retirement System over a two-year phase in period.

Time Used to Reach a Decision on the Issue

This issue was before the board for at least four years before the board made its decision. The issue was first introduced during the 1993-1994 school year. The decision was made in the 1996-1997 school year. The board did not feel that it wasted time as it worked to make a decision. This is evident by such comments as, "I don't think we took an extraordinary amount of time" (BM_a, TA, p. 9, ls. 5-6), and "… so if you consider how many times we considered it between 1993 and the time we took action on the request and … the work that went on in the background regarding this request, it was probably very lengthy. But in this board room [we spent] maybe five to six hours over a period of time" (BM_b, TB, p. 5, ls. 18-19, p. 6, ls. 1-5) and "… we are not talking about a lot of hours. It was presented, we received updates, and we were kept informed so we could discuss and ask questions" (BM_d, TD, p. 7, ls. 1-4).

Role of Communication in Making the Decision on the Issue

Communication with the board (a) allowed for concerns from board members to be responded to by the appropriate staff, (b) served as a vehicle for sharing additional information with the board based on questions from internal and external agents, (c) allowed for interaction between the superintendent and board members and between board members, and (d) allowed the board, through

discussion, to consider alternatives, and build consensus around a solution to the issue.

Allowed for concerns from board members to be responded to by the appropriate staff. Discussions with the superintendent and the assistant superintendent provided a way for the concerns of board members to be addressed. Open communication between the administration and school board generated options to be considered in providing this benefit to eligible employees.

Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information with the board based on questions from internal and external agents. From interviews with the superintendent and board members, it is evident that a considerable amount of discussion took place as the school board worked to make a decision on paying the retirement cost for employees. Informal discussions were held between the superintendent and the county administrator regarding the fiscal impact on the county and implementation options. The superintendent orally communicated relevant information from his discussions with the county administrator to the school board at official meetings of the board and through phone calls to board members. Information was shared with members of the governing board during the official budget presentation by the superintendent and at informal discussions between the superintendent and the members of the governing board.

Members of the school board, after receiving information from the superintendent and other external agents, discussed the relevant information at official meetings of the board and at informal meetings between members of the board.

Allowed for interaction between the superintendent and board members and between board members. The amount of written communication regarding this issue is evident in the following comment from a board member: "… we always kill a lot of trees. There is always a lot of paper; communication by paper is [based on our] need [for] background information" (BM$_a$, TA, p.11, ls. 5-8). Communication regarding the cost and possible options for implementing the change was sent to the superintendent from representatives of the Virginia Retirement System. Additionally, the superintendent communicated with the local education association regarding the need for the school board to pay the cost of retirement for employees. This information was in the annual program of action prepared by the local education association and presented to the superintendent and the board. Written communication was also received from the office of the county administrator regarding this issue. The superintendent of schools shared orally and in writing relevant information with the board as it was received.

Allowed the board to consider alternatives, and to build consensus around a solution to the issue. Through discussions between and among school board members, members of the board of supervisors, the county administrator, and representatives of the retirement system the members of the board were able to build consensus around a solution for the issue. This open communication allowed the members to review the fiscal impact the options would have on the locality as well as the benefits to the employees.

Issue: Participation in a Regional Governor's School

The board was aware of the need to do more for the identified accelerated learners in the schools. Because of the small numbers of identified students in need

of accelerated courses and the desire by the board to better meet the needs of this population of students, the school board looked at the option of participating in a regional governor's school that would provide more challenging courses without creating a fiscal burden on the locality.

School Board Awareness of the Issue

Data revealed that the board became aware of this issue through the superintendent of schools and through presentations to the board by the superintendent from another school division, a consultant, and several speakers.

Board informed by the division superintendent. The division superintendent informed the board of this issue. A board member stated, "It was brought to our attention by the superintendent …" (BM_b, TB, p. 10, ls. 11-12). This statement reflected the feeling of other members of the school board.

Board informed by a superintendent from another school division, a consultant, and several speakers. The superintendent from a school division within the region presented the idea to the school board at a regular meeting of the board. This superintendent had done the initial research on the feasibility of a regional governor's school for the region. At this same board meeting, the superintendent who conceived the idea brought along with him a consultant that had been hired by the region to assist in the formation of the regional governor's school. A board member stated, "In the summer of 95, … superintendent of … came to the board with a presentation" (BM_a, TA, p. 11, ls. 13-15). This same board member stated, "… I … was with him and talked about participating in a regional program" (BM_a, TA, p. 11, ls. 16-17).

Superintendent Awareness of the Issue

Not unlike other rural school divisions, this school division and others within the region realized a need to do more for identified accelerated students at the secondary level during the regular academic year. In rural divisions in the Commonwealth, the numbers of students identified as accelerated are generally few in number. These rural divisions struggle to provide personal and rigorous academic opportunities in an effort to meet the needs of these students. To accommodate the needs of these individuals, the regional approach has been proven to be effective. A regional approach allows for a pooling of resources and staff in a more cost effective way to bring challenging academic offerings to these identified students.

The superintendent became aware of this issue while attending a regional superintendents' meeting. At this regional meeting, a superintendent from another division verbally brought the issue to the attention of the superintendents in the region.

Forces Influencing the Board's Decision on the Issue

The data revealed several forces influenced the board during the decision-making process on this issue. The forces were (a) need to do more for the gifted students; (b) interest from parents, some teachers, and of some students; (c) endorsement by other school divisions; and (d) presentations from another superintendent and consultant.

Need to do more for gifted students. The need "… to do more for … identified accelerated students" (Superintendent, TS, p. 14, ls. 5-6) was a major force that affected the board during the decision-making process on this issue. One board member stated, "… we have a gifted program, and being a former teacher I know what that meant. So I thought it was a grand time to have something really

special for those students that excel" (BM_e, p. 23, ls. 10-17). In addition to "need" being a force that positively affected the decision of the board to participate in the regional governor's school, the board became increasingly aware of the other school divisions in the region that had already endorsed the regional concept for gifted education.

Interest of parents, some teachers, and students. The interest of parents of identified gifted students, some teachers within the division, as well as some students caught the attention of the board. Some of the parents of identified gifted students and some teachers spoke to board members individually or appeared at the board meetings to voice their support for the regional school. Additionally, some of the students that would benefit from such an accelerated program also spoke in favor of the regional program. A board member commented, "The amount of interest in the community … " (BM_b, TB, p. 12, ls. 13-14). And another board member stated, "There was a desire on behalf of some parents, students, and some teachers because [the students] … were deserving of some kind of accelerated school" (BM_c, TC, p. 14, ls. 11-13).

Endorsement by other school divisions. The endorsement by the school boards within the region also had an effect on this board during the decision-making process on this issue. A board member stated, "Other divisions in the region had all ready agreed to participate and we did not want our students left out" (BM_d, TD, p. 13, ls. 6-7).

Presentations from another superintendent and a consultant. The presentation of information at board meetings by another superintendent and a consultant also positively affected the school board in making a decision on this issue. A board

member stated, "Yes, the appearance of [the superintendent and consultant] had a positive impact on the board" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 26, l. 10).

<u>Steps in Making a Decision on the Issue</u>

The school board used seven steps as it worked to reach a decision on whether to participate in a regional governor's school. The six steps were: (a) becoming aware of the issue, (b) receiving information on the issue, (c) discussing the issue, (d) communicating with staff, (e) approving a resolution and study grant, (f) building consensus on the issue, and (g) voting for approval.

<u>Becoming aware of the issue.</u> The board became aware of the issue through verbal and written communication from the superintendent. The superintendent stated, "I initially told the board about the concept of a regional governor's school …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 4, l. 5). Additionally, the superintendent commented that, "I provided each board member with a written description of the proposal …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 4, ls. 6-7).

<u>Receiving information on the issue.</u> After becoming aware of the issue by the superintendent, the board received information about the issue from the superintendent, presenters (a consultant, another superintendent, and the director of special programs for the school division). Following the initial presentation by the division superintendent, a consultant and a superintendent from another school division presented information to the board. According to one board member, "We had several speakers come in…" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 11, ls. 4-5).

Another board member stated, "In the summer of 1995, [Dr. Smith] superintendent of [XYZ] County, came to the board with a presentation. I believe

Dr. [Jones] was with him and talked to us about participating in a regional program" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 14, ls. 11-15).

This division has an employee who is responsible for programs for accelerated students and who had been in on some of the initial planning for the proposed program. This individual presented before the board on this issue and was able to respond to specific questions from board members.

Discussing the issue. The third step focused on discussing the issue. Data revealed that discussions took place between the superintendent and board members, among board members, and with the presenters (a consultant and the director of special programs). Discussions among board members focused on such issues as cost, transportation, the future such a program for their rural region, curriculum offerings, and selection criteria to be used to select students from the participating divisions. After all questions were answered to the satisfaction of each board member, the board moved to its fourth step in the decision-making process.

Communicating with staff. The fourth step in the decision-making process for this board on this issue was open communication with the staff that was working on the regional planning team to develop the program. A board member stated, "Over the years it was before the board, we talked and asked a lot of questions of the staff" (BM$_c$, TC, p. 15, ls 8-9).

Approving a resolution of support and study grant. The fourth step in the decision-making-making process was approving the local resolution of support for the regional program. The approval process also involved the board working with

the other boards in the region to seek approval for a study grant from the state board of education and the Virginia General Assembly.

Building consensus on the issue. Following the approval of the study grant, data revealed that through discussions the board worked to build consensus among board members for continuing support of participation in the regional governor's school.

Voting for approval. The final step in the decision-making process for the board on this issue was to vote to participate in the regional program after approval by the state board of education with funding through the General Assembly and local governing body.

Time Used to Reach a Decision

The board felt the decision-making process on this issue was lengthy. Time was extended because of deliberating the plan, adopting the resolution of support, completing the grant application, and approving the final grant. A review of board minutes and memos from the superintendent revealed that the issue was first presented during the 1995-1996 school year with final approval and classes beginning in the fall of the 1998-1999 school year.

The length of the process is evident in the comments of a board member who stated, "… The whole process took such a long time. It started in 1995, then it was 1996 before the General Assembly approved the money for the study. It didn't open until September 1998" (BM_a, TA, p. 21, ls. 11-18). Another board member stated, "… probably five eight hour days because you are talking months" (BM_b, p. 15, ls. 1-2). Still a third board member stated, "… it took a while longer than the other." "… Started in 1995 it took a while to go forth." (BM_d, p. 20, ls. 10-11).

Board members felt that the planning process of two to three years was the main factor contributing to the length of the decision-making process for this issue.

The actual amount of time spent in making the final decision on the issue was short in relation to the actual time the board was involved in discussions on the issue. One board member stated, "The final decision to sign the commitment agreement did not take very long. … About forty-five minutes" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 14, ls. 11-13). A second board member stated, "It's hard to put a time on it. There were fifteen or more minutes at various meetings depending on the questions" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 21 ls. 2-7). And, a third board member stated, "Of the two or three years hearing about and discussing the proposal, two or three meetings per year were probably used. Maybe about ten to twenty minutes per meeting…" (BM$_e$, TE, p. 28, ls. 9-15). The superintendent also stated, "The board spent about three meetings discussing the proposal" (Superintendent, TS, p. 18, ls. 14-15). Additionally, the superintendent stated, "In actual minutes, I believe the time spent was about ten to fifteen minutes at the meetings when the issue was on the agenda" (Superintendent, TS, p. 18, l. 17, p. 19, ls. 20-21).

Role of Communication in Making a Decision

Data on this question revealed that communication to the board (a) served as a way for the appropriate staff to respond to concerns of board members, (b) served as a vehicle for sharing additional information with the board based on questions from board members and parents of students who may be considered for participation in the program, (c) allowed for discussion between the superintendent and board members, and (d) allowed the board to build consensus for resolution of the issue.

Served as a way for the appropriate staff to respond to concerns of board members. Communication took place between the superintendent and the board. Members of the superintendent's staff discussed with the board the general concept of the regional governor's school. Through communicating with the board through presentations, staff members were able to respond to concerns from the board regarding this issue.

Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information with the board based on questions from board members and parents of students who may be considered for participation in the program. Teachers and parents verbally communicated with the board on this issue. A board member said, "If there hadn't been communication, we couldn't have known anything" (BM$_e$, TE, p. 29, ls. 5-6). The superintendent stated, "The presentations from me, the consultant, and the local director proved to be invaluable in clarifying concerns and answering questions from members of the board" (Superintendent, TS, p. 24, ls. 12-14).

Allowed for discussion between the superintendent and board members. The board members and the superintendent openly discussed information relating to this issue. This comment from a board member is representative of how the board viewed the importance of communication in the decision-making process; "… we could never have been able to reach a decision without communicating with each other" (BM$_d$, TD, p 23, ls 10-12).

Allowed the board to build consensus for resolution of the issue. As with the issue of the payment of retirement for eligible employees, this board strongly felt that communication allowed the board to consider alternative and to build consensus for resolution of the issue. Through candid discussions related to the

issue the board was able to consider all solutions and build consensus for the one solution that it felt would be in the best interest of the students.

Issue: Participation in a Regional Alternative School

The school division operated an in-county alternative education program that was not adequately meeting the needs of this special population of students. This school board looked at the concept of a regional alternative school as a way to provide better services to identified students needing an alternative learning environment.

School Board Awareness of the Issue

The board became aware of this issue through the superintendent, the director of special programs, and through "scuttlebutt." The superintendents in neighboring school divisions had been talking about a regional alternative school, and the superintendent brought the issue to the board.

School board awareness of the issue by superintendent. The concept of alternative education was not new to this board. This board had developed and implemented a local alternative education program for students who were not able to function successfully in a regular education program. The local, in-house program in its initial form served as a first step in providing an alternative educational setting for these specific students. However, as the numbers of students in need of an alternative educational setting increased, the board and superintendent was aware of the need to broaden the scope of the program to not only expand the educational components but to also include a well-developed

counseling component. Both the board and superintendent were aware of the need for increased supervision of this population of students.

The superintendent formally made the board aware of the opportunity to participate in a regional alternative school. A board member commented, "The superintendent brought the idea to us" (BM_d, TD, p. 1, l. 4).

School board awareness of the issue by the director of special programs. The division's director of special programs also informed the school board of this issue. This individual had the responsibility for overseeing programs for special populations of students within the division. One board member stated that the board was made aware of the issue not only by the superintendent, but also by "[Sallie Joe]" [the director of special programs] (BM_b, TB, p. 1, l. 8).

Board awareness of the issue through "scuttlebutt". Talk in the community was shared with the school board. According to a board member, "We would hear scuttlebutt and felt that we had to do something" (BM_c, TC, p. 2, ls. 4-5). The "scuttlebutt" in the community focused on the need for the school board to provide better supervision and counseling for this population of students.

Superintendent Awareness of the Issue

The superintendent became aware of the opportunity to develop a regional school for alternative education through written communication from the department of education. Additionally, the superintendent knew that the in-house program of alternative education was not adequately meeting the needs of the student population in need of an alternative learning environment. According to the superintendent, "… our in-house program was just not meeting the needs of this population of students" (Superintendent, TS, p. 22, ls. 10-11).

Forces Influencing the Board's Decision

The data revealed seven forces influenced the board as it labored to make a decision on this issue. The forces were: (a) the belief by board members that they needed to do more for these students, (b) the concern from the community, (c) the opportunity to provide counseling for the students, (d) the opportunity for vocational training, (e) the increase in the number of students needing an alternative placement, (f) the economical provision of services to the students, and (g) the inservice training for teachers who would be working with the students.

The belief by board members that they needed to do more for these students. Regarding need, a board member stated, "The need. There was a need. We have to do as much as we … [can] to help the children" (BM_b, TB, p. 22 ls. 14-15). A second board member stated, "We needed more that what we had right here in the county" (BM_e, p. 34, ls. 17-18).

Concern from the community. In reference to community pressure, a board member stated, "As I went to civic meetings, personally, not as a board member, … they [the members of the civic organization] voiced their displeasure about how the board was just kicking students out of school for no reasons" (BM_c, TD, p. 23, ls. 6-9). The superintendent stated, "There was some concern from the community that we needed to do more in this area of working with troubled youth" (Superintendent, TS, p. 27, ls. 7-8).

The opportunity to provide counseling for the students. Regarding counseling, a board member stated, "One of the components of the regional program was counseling services" (BM_a, TA, p. 27 ls. 1-3). A second board member stated, "There was going to be a counseling component…" (BM_e, TE, p. 36, ls. 12-13).

The opportunity to provide vocational training. The proposed location of the regional alternative school would be at a facility that also housed the regional vocational school. Therefore, the board felt that the students enrolled in the alternative school program should also be able to take the appropriate vocational classes while at the center. One board member stated, "With the regional vocational school being located on site over there, there was also the possibility that there would be some openings open to those children that were over there" (BM$_e$, TE, p. 37, ls. 1-3).

The number of students kept growing. This school division was experiencing an increase in the number of students that required an alternative learning environment. A board member stated, "…the number of students kept growing and growing" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 35, ls. 9-11).

Economical provision of services to the students. This school board understood the need to do more for the students who needed an alternative learning environment. The local program was not working to the satisfaction of the board in meeting the needs of the children because of the costs involved in hiring the necessary staff. The idea of a regional center would allow several school divisions to pool financial resources to provide the needed services to this population of students. A board member commented "… we saw an opportunity to provide other services that we could not provide at a local level" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 34, ls. 21-22). Still another board member stated, "… the regional program would be more economical to operate than our local program" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 33, ls. 18-20).

Inservice training for teachers who would be working with the students. A concern of this board was the need to provide appropriate inservice training for

teachers who would be working with this population of students. The inservice training would provide opportunities for the teachers working in the program to learn more effective strategies in working with troubled youth. The regional approach was seen as a way to economically provide the needed training for the staff.

Steps in Making a Decision on this Issue.

Board members used eight steps in reaching its decision on this issue of participation in a regional alternative school: (a) becoming aware of the issue, (b) receiving information, (c) discussing information received, (d) analyzing options, (e) approving grant application, (f) seeking approval of grant, (g) building consensus, and (h) voting for approval.

Becoming aware of the issue. The first step in the decision-making process on the issue of participation in a regional alternative school was becoming aware of the issue. The board became aware of the issue through discussions with the superintendent. The superintendent stated that [he], "… became aware of grant opportunities for local divisions to set up a regional alternative program. This [information] was shared with the board …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 1, ls. 4-7). Additionally, the general consensus of individual board members was that, "the superintendent [Dr. James] brought it to our attention" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 1, ls. 3).

Receiving information on the issue. The board was given information on the concept of a regional alternative education school by the superintendent and the director of special programs. For the board to be in a position to look at its options and to make a decision, information was provided to the board on initial cost and recurring costs to the locality, the location, transporting students, curriculum,

staffing, and opportunities for counseling and vocational education. The board was updated on all aspects of the proposed program as needed at board meetings. The superintendent updated the board both verbally and in writing.

Discussing information on the issue. As the board received informational updates from the superintendent, individual members discussed the benefits of the proposed program to the students. The discussions focused on the opportunities that students would have for counseling and the availability of vocational education classes for this special population of students. Discussions also focused on initial cost and recurring costs to the division, the impact the program would have on the regular education program, transportation for students, and location of the proposed program. One board member stated, "There was plenty of discussion and communication on this issue [Participation in a Regional Alternative School]" (BM$_c$, TC, p. 6, ls. 9-10). Still another board member commented, "Without communicating and discussing, we would not have been able to make a decision" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 7, ls. 3-4).

Analyzing options on the issue. The board, after receiving information from the superintendent and discussing the information among themselves and with the superintendent, began to analyze its options. The options were to either move to the regional concept of alternative education or to keep its current program, which it knew was not adequately meeting the needs of the students. This board was also mindful of the "scuttlebutt" in the community that more needed to be done to improve the alternative education program to better meet the needs of the students.

Building consensus. The process of consensus building was not lengthy for this particular issue. The board understood the need to do more for this population

of students. Additionally, the board and the superintendent knew that they could not provide the same services for this population of students through the local alternative education program that could be provided in a regional setting.

Approving grant application and seeking approval of funding grant. Because this proposal called for a regional program and would be funded through special funds appropriated by the General Assembly of Virginia, the board had to approve the completed grant application prior to submitting it to the department of education for review. Once the approval was given at from the department of education, the board received funding for the regional alternative school.

Voting on the issue. Understanding the need to expand the program, board members, once receiving word from the superintendent that the proposed alternative education program had been approved at the state level, took very little time in voting to participate in the regional alternative education program.

Time Used to Reach a Decision

A review of the data on this issue revealed the board was aware of the need to do more for these students for years. The first attempt at alternative education on a local level began in 1993. The initial local program was in place from the spring of 1993 to the beginning of the 1997-1998 school year. During this time, the board and superintendent were looking at ways to improve the program to better meet the needs of this population of students.

Although the board had been investigating alternatives to the current program since 1993, board members felt that the board spent ten to forty minutes at two or three meetings reviewing information prior to making a decision on this issue. The superintendent commented, "The board spent about three meetings

discussing this issue. Not the whole meeting was devoted to this, so about 30 to 40 minutes all total" (Superintendent, TS, p. 31, ls. 4-6). A board member stated, "We did not spend an awful lot of time. … We probably spent two or three meetings using about ten to fifteen minutes in discussion and asking questions" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 33, ls. 16-18).

Role of Communication in Making a Decision

Communication on this issue was used to (a) respond to concerns of the board; (b) share additional information with the board based on questions asked by board members, representatives from a community organization, and from citizens; (c) allow interaction [discussion] between the board and internal and external agents; and (d) allow the board to consider alternative solutions to the issue.

Respond to concerns from the board. "The superintendent verbally communicated to the board at our meetings" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 10, ls 5-6). "And it is through … communications … with us that it was determined … this facility was the best way to handle alternative ed" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 9, ls. 9-13). The board relied heavily on communications from the superintendent during the decision-making process on this issue. Communication from the superintendent and his staff provided a means for the concerns of board members to be discussed and answers provided. A board member commented, "Communication was as important on this issue as the others because we rely on the superintendent and his staff to keep us informed …" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 26, ls. 7-13).

Used as a vehicle for sharing additional information to the board based on questions from board members, representatives from a community organization, and from citizens. The superintendent stated, "Verbal concerns heard form individuals within the community and from a local civic group were also shared with other members of the board …" (Superintendent, TS, p. 34, ls. 8-11). A board member stated that he and the superintendent attended one community meeting to address the issue of the alternative school. This board member referred to discussions within the community as "scuttlebutt" (BM_c, TC, p. 10, l. 12). Information shared informally with a board member and the superintendent was brought back to the board. This information was discussed at the official board meeting and was considered, when appropriate, as the board was building consensus around a solution for the issue.

Allowed interaction [discussion] between the board and internal and external agents. Board members interacted with each other and the superintendent. The information shared with board members through discussions with both internal and external agents was discussed at the official meetings of the board and was considered by the board as it discussed the concept of a regional alternative school and how this type of school would benefit students needing an alternative learning environment. A board member commented, "We communicated with the principals, whole lots of people were involved in communicating. The high school principal, middle school principal, superintendent …" (BM_d, TD, p. 34, ls. 11-14).

Allowed the board to consider alternative solutions for the issue. A board member stated, "Had we not communicated with each other and discussed our problems and other alternatives we would not have been able to make the decision to go with the program that was proposed" (BM_d, TD, p. 32, ls. 10-13). As with the

other issues in this study, communication allowed the members to this school board to openly share concerns, react to each other's questions and comments, and consider the best alternative to providing an alternative learning environment for this population of students.

<div align="center">Issue: The Establishment of a Discipline Review

Committee of the School Board</div>

This school board had been using a considerable amount of time in hearing appeals by parents on student discipline matters. Aware of the amount of time used by the board in hearing appeals by parents of student discipline matters, the superintendent began to look at an alternative to the full school board serving as the appeals board. One viable alternative was for the board to establish a discipline review committee of the school board.

School Board Awareness of the Issue

The board became aware of this issue by the superintendent of schools and the assistant superintendent of schools. A board member stated, "Actually, that was brought to the board by the superintendent and the assistant superintendent" (BM_b, TB, p. 29, ls. 11-13). In this school division the assistant superintendent of schools appeared to have been the individual who handled policy revisions. This individual along with the superintendent met with the board and responded to questions from the board about this issue.

Superintendent Awareness of the Issue

       The superintendent of schools became aware of this issue through a memo from the department of education and through policy updates from the Virginia School Boards Association based on a change in the Code of Virginia. The change allowed the school board to form a committee of the board to hear appeals of discipline matters. Past practice had been for the entire board to hear such appeals.

Forces Influencing the Board's Decision

       The use of board time was the main force that influenced the board on this issue during the decision-making process. However, the concerns from a local civic organization [NAACP] were also a force that the board had to work with as it interacted to make a decision on this issue.

       Use of board time. Hearing the appeals of parents regarding student discipline decisions consumed a considerable amount of the board's time. One board member commented, "… it was just taking too much of the board's time each meeting in executive session" (BM_d, TD, p. 38, ls. 10-11). A second board member stated, "It was always extremely time consuming to hear discipline issues" (BM_a, TA, p. 34, ls. 7-8). And, a third board member stated, "Because that [hearing discipline matters] was a very time consuming thing…" (BM_e, TE, p. 48, ls. 1-2). The full board was hearing all appeals on discipline matters.

       Concerns from a local civic organization [NAACP]. The representatives of the local branch of the NAACP were concerned about the, "… need to make sure the children got a fair review …" (BM_b, TB, p. 49, ls. 32-34). The perception was that too many minority students were being either suspended or expelled from school. The same board member commented, "… the NAACP wanted to be able to

send representatives in here [closed session] with the children because they didn't feel like we were treating them fairly" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 50, ls. 3-6). The board discussed the concerns from this organization during the decision-making process on this issue.

Steps in Making a Decision

During the decision-making process for this issue, the board followed six steps. The steps utilized by the board were: (a) becoming aware of the issue, (b) receiving information, (c) discussing the issue, (d) communicating with specific individuals and individual board members, (e) reaching consensus, and (f) voting on the issue.

Becoming aware of the issue. The first step in the decision-making process for this board on the issue of developing a discipline review committee of the board was to become aware of the issue. The superintendent of schools made the board aware of the issue. A board member stated, "The superintendent brought it to our attention …" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 1, ls, 2-3). Along with the superintendent of schools making the board aware of the issue, the assistant superintendent of schools for this division was the individual who was responsible for keeping the board aware of any policy changes. Because this was a change in policy, the assistant superintendent of schools was also instrumental in making the board aware of this issue.

Receiving information. The second decision-making step was receiving information on the issue. The board received information from the superintendent and assistant superintendent. Concerns that board members had that required legal review were shared with the counsel for the board. After receiving responses from the attorney, the superintendent and assistant superintendent gave the appropriate

responses to the board. A board member stated, "… the superintendent gave us an outline and … some advice from [Robert Frank] legal stand points, …" (BMc, TC, p. 3, ls. 5-8).

Discussing the issue. The third decision-making step was discussing the issue. Discussions centered around any legal ramifications regarding changing procedures on how the board handled appeals and the amount of time the board was using in hearing appeals from parents on discipline decisions from the schools. There was much discussion on how the discipline review committee of the board would work. One board member commented, "We talked about how the committee would work. Legal concerns were clarified" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 30, ls. 3-6).

Communicating with specific individuals and individual board members. Communicating on the issue was the fourth step in the decision-making process on this issue. Verbal communication came to the board from the attorney for the school board through the superintendent. According to a board member, "… the superintendent communicated with the board; [through him] we got advice from our attorneys …" (BM$_b$, TB, p. 26, ls.8-10). Communication, both written and verbal, took place between the superintendent, the assistant superintendent and the policy specialist at the Virginia School Boards Association regarding the specific wording of the new policy. The board members communicated [discussed] among themselves on the necessity of the change to better utilize board time while at the same time ensuring that no one group of students or parents would feel disenfranchised.

Reaching consensus. The board, after much discussion and communication on the issue of establishing a discipline review committee of the board, reached

consensus on the composition, purpose, and function of this committee. For this board, consensus was reached by looking at the amount of time the full board was using to hear student discipline matters. The members of the board knew that the current method was not an efficient use of board time or board member expertise. Therefore, the general feeling of board members was to move forward with the recommended procedural and policy change. Open discussion was key to this step in the decision-making process.

Voting on the issue. After the board reached consensus on the composition, purpose, and function of the discipline review committee of the board, the issue was formally voted on by the full board. The board voted unanimously in favor of the establishment of the discipline review committee.

Time Used to Reach a Decision

The data revealed that deciding to establish a discipline review committee of the board would be a change in current board policy. Therefore, based on board policy, the decision would require at least two or more meetings. A board member stated, "… it was a change in policy so it took at least two meetings" (BM_e, TE, p. 6, ls. 12-14). A second board member stated, "… we had to deal with it at least two months. Two readings" (BM_a, TA, p. 38, ls. 16-17). The same board member stated, "We basically discussed it and decided that we were going to try this and just did it" (BM_a, TA, p. 35, ls. 4-5). School board minutes revealed that the issue was first discussed with the school board on July 7, 1999. The board voted to establish the committee on September 13, 1999.

Role of Communication in Making a Decision

Communication for this issue was used to (a) respond to concerns from the board; (b) share additional information with the board based on questions asked by board members, representatives of a community organization, and by citizens; (c) allow interaction [discussion] between the board and internal and external agents; and (d) allow the board to consider alternatives.

Respond to concerns from the board. Communications during the decision-making process was in verbal and written form. The superintendent and other members of his staff communicated with the board. A board member commented, "Without communicating orally or in writing, we couldn't have made this decision or any other decision" (BM$_e$, TE, p. 57, ls. 15-18). The superintendent stated, "As superintendent, I shared information with the board regarding format for the policy, legal responses from counsel, and how other divisions handle discipline issues at the board level" (Superintendent, TS, p. 39, ls. 13-17).

Share additional information with the board based on questions asked by board members, representatives of a community organization, and citizens. Regarding the importance of communicating with the board, with individual board members, among board members, and with representatives from a community organization and other interested citizens, the superintendent stated, "Again, as with other decisions, communication between the board members was key in helping them reach their decision on this issue" (Superintendent, TS, p. 40, ls. 6-8). The policy division of the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) provides assistance to local school divisions when policies are revised or new policies are needed. The superintendent and his staff worked with the policy specialist at VSBA to draft the revised policy.

Additionally, the superintendent discussed the proposed changes to the policy with the attorney for the school board as the final check to ensure the policy met legal requirements and would withstand any legal challenges from parents or community organizations. A board member stated, "From the legal standpoint, we followed the advice of our attorneys" (BM$_c$, TC, p. 35, ls. 18-19). Discussions between the board and representatives from the local civic association provided an opportunity for open dialogue regarding the concerns of the perceived unfair treatment of minorities in matters related to student discipline. A board member further stated, "Yes, yes, communication was very important" (BM$_c$, TC, p. 34, l. 4).

Allow interaction [discussion] between the board and internal and external agents. Interaction [discussion] between the board and internal and external agents was important to this board during the decision-making process on this issue. A board member stated, "… I can remember one meeting when we decided to go with the committee … . There were a lot of questions. There was quite a bit of discussion …" (BM$_d$, TD, p. 42, ls. 15-18). The following comment from a board member further emphasizes the importance of interaction [discussion] between the board and internal and external agents during the decision-making process, "The superintendent, the director of special programs …, and the assistant superintendent had input. Attorneys … advised us on the legal issues" (BM$_a$, TA, p. 40, ls. 8-12).

Allow the board to consider alternatives. Interaction [discussion] between board members and the various internal and external agents allowed the board to consider its alternatives to the establishment of a discipline review committee of the board. The board knew that it was spending a considerable amount of time

during its regular meetings and had a desire to be more efficient in its use of board time while at the same time meeting the needs of the students. The board also wanted to ensure all stakeholders that it was going to be fair in handling appeals through the committee review process.

<div align="center">Cross-Case Analysis of Findings by Issue and Research Question</div>

A cross-case analysis of findings by issue and research question is contained in this section. Cross-case findings by research question are discussed. Similarities and differences by issue are included.

Board's Awareness of Issues

The board became aware of the four issues from internal or external sources and through verbal or written forms (see Table 9). The board or individual board members received verbal information through discussions with the board and the superintendent and through presentations from other central office staff, a consultant, community members, representatives from an organized community group, and members of the local education association. On the four issues, verbal information came to the board from individuals within the community. Information to the board on two issues came from the same external agent. The local civic organization (NAACP) voiced concern to the board or individual board members on the establishment of a regional alternative school (issue three) and the establishment of a discipline review committee of the board (issue four). External agents (retirees, and representatives of the local education association) voiced their support for the payment of the costs of retirement for employees (issue one).

Table 9
 Board's Awareness of Issues

Method	Source	Issue[a]			
		1	2	3	4
Verbal	Internal	x	x	x	x
	External	x	x	x	
Written	Internal	x	x	x	x
	External				

[a]The issues were: 1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

Additionally, external agents (parents of gifted students) voiced their support for the regional governor's school (issue two). Internal agents (teachers and students) also voiced their support for the regional governor's school (issue two).

The issue of payment of retirement costs for employees brought comments to board members from community individuals because of the impact on the community. A considerable number of employees resided locally. The fringe benefit of having the employer pay the retirement cost would positively impact the financial standing of the family. This fringe benefit paid to employees would be attractive to future employees.

Written information to the board was in the form of memos from the superintendent. A consultant, other central office staff, and the local education association staff also shared written information with the board. The superintendent of schools for this board appears to play a key role in making the board aware of issues. The board received internal written communications on each issue. Written communication on the issues was used to clarify legal questions (issues one and four), provide data on costs (issues one, two, and three), restate new board policy (issue four), and present to the board previously stated information (issues one, two, three, and four).

Superintendent's Awareness of Issues

The superintendent became aware of the issues through memos from the department of education, correspondence from the Virginia School Boards Association, verbal information from the communications committee through his representative to that committee, through representatives of the local education association, discussions with board members, and discussions with other superintendents in the region (see Table 10). Additionally, the superintendent

Table 10
Superintendent's Awareness of Issues

Method	Source	Issue[a]			
		1	2	3	4
Verbal	Internal	x			
	External	x	x		
Written	Internal				
	External			x	x

[a]The issues were:1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

made the board aware of issues when he realized a need for a change that would benefit the school division.

Internal sources brought the issue of payment of retirement costs for employees (issue one) to the attention of the superintendent through verbal communication. An external source brought the issue of the regional governor's school (issue two) to the attention of the superintendent through verbal communication. The superintendent became aware of the issues of a regional alternative school (issue three) and a discipline review committee of the board (issue four) through written means from an external source.

Forces Influencing the Board's Decisions on the Issues

Both internal and external forces had an impact on the board as it worked to reach its decision on each of the selected issues (see Table 11). Internal forces are those forces within the board or from within the school division that had an impact on the decisions the board made on the issues. External forces are those forces from outside of the school division that had an impact on the decisions the board made on the issues.

Internal forces that impacted the decision-making process of this board were need, individual employees, and time. In three issues, need emerged as an internal force during the decision-making process. The need to provide a better alternative education program for a special population of students, the need to provide an opportunity for accelerated students to have the opportunity to take more challenging classes, and the need to provide a financial benefit to employees were key in moving the board to vote in favor of issues one, two, and three. On one issue, pressure from individual employees emerged as an internal force which affected the decision-making process of this board. Time was identified as the

Table 11

Forces Influencing the Board's Decisions on the Issues

Force	Issue[a]			
	1	2	3	4
Internal	x	x	x	x
External	x	x	x	x

[a]The issues were: 1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

major internal force that influenced the board to vote to have a discipline review committee of the board.

External forces that influenced the decision-making process of this board were a community civic organization, the local education association, community members, and decisions made in neighboring school divisions. Individual board members, though not representing the board, were contacted individually or received information about a particular issue from individual employees, "scuttlebutt" within the community, concern from the local chapter of the NAACP, or from having been a former employee with the school system. In this study, external forces also provided information to the board or individual board members on specific issues (issues one, two, three and four) while at the same time exerted pressure on the board to vote in favor of the issue before the board (issues one, two, and three).

Steps in Making a Decision on the Issues

Steps used by this board in the decision-making process ranged from a minimum of six to a maximum of ten (see Table 12). Becoming aware of the issue was the first step in reaching a decision on all four issues. Making a decision by voting approval, after reaching consensus on the issue, were the final two steps in all cases. Information gathering and sharing; discussions between the superintendent and the board, between board members, or among board members and communicating with staff and external agents were dominant steps used by this board during the decision-making process. On each of the issues, awareness of the issue, receiving information, discussing the

Table 12
Steps Used in Making the Decisions on the Issues

Issues[a]				
STEPS	1	2	3	4
Became aware of the issue	x	x	x	x
Sought information on the issue	x			
Received information	x	x	x	x
Verified information	x			
Discussed the issue	x	x	x	x
Communicated with staff and external agents	x	x	x	x
Sought approval	x	x	x	
Analyzed options	x		x	
Reached consensus	x	x	x	x
Made a decision (voted)	x	x	x	x

[a]The issues were: 1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

issue, building consensus, and voting approval were steps in the decision-making process.

On issues related to funding, the superintendent and the local county administrator freely shared information regarding the fiscal impact of solutions, if approved, on the locality. Additionally, the county administrator, at least annually, met with the school board regarding the financial status of the county. This annual meeting involved discussing with the board and superintendent long-range goals that would require local fiscal support. The issue of payment of retirement costs for employees was the one issue that revealed the close working relationship of the county administration with the school administration and school board.

Time Used to Reach a Decision on Issues

The amount of time the board and superintendent spent in the decision-making process on each issue increased depending on the complexity of the issue. The amount of time ranged from ten to fifteen minutes at three or four meetings to fifteen to forty minutes at tow or three meetings. One decision took three to five years (issue one). Board members, however, felt that the board used its time efficiently in making a decision on each issue (see Table 13).

Issues requiring the expenditure of local funds took more time than issues that did not involve the expenditure of local funds. Issues that involved working

Table 13

Time Used to Reach the Decisions on the Issues

Issue[a]				
Time	1	2	3	4
Beginning to end	Three to five years	Two to three years	Two or three meetings	Two to three meetings, two to three months
Discussion	During budget time	During budget time Ten to fifteen minutes or more at three or four meetings	Fifteen to forty minutes at the meetings	
Actual decision	Five minutes	Five minutes	Ten to fifteen minutes	Five to ten minutes

[a]The issues were: 1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

with other school divisions or seeking approval from state agencies also took more time than issues that only required school board action. The issue that required the least amount of time involved changing board policy regarding the establishment of a discipline review committee of the board. It is important to note that the issue regarding the payment of retirement costs for employees would not have taken as much time as it did if the county had had ample fiscal resources to implement the change without having a negative fiscal impact on the school division or the county as a whole.

Non-board meeting time was utilized in deciding each issue. Non-board meeting time is the time used by the superintendent and board members outside of the regular board meeting room. Non-board meeting time involved the superintendent, by phone or in person, answering questions from individual board members and community members on the issues before the board took action.

Role of Communication in Making Decisions

Communication was key to effective decision-making for this board. Through communication the concerns of board members were clarified and information was received or transmitted to, from, and among various groups. And, communication allowed this board to consider options before voting.

The review of data revealed that the board received input on two issues from representatives of a local civic organization. The input was directly or indirectly given to the board. On the issue of participating in a regional alternative school, the board received indirect input through a board member who attended meetings of the civic association. On the issue of the discipline review committee, representatives from the civic association appeared before the board to voice their concerns. A consultant appeared before the board to present and respond to questions regarding the issue of the regional governor's school. Additionally, the

board, on this issue, discussed in detail the concept of the regional governor's school with appropriate staff, the superintendent, and among themselves prior to making its decision. Citizens [parents] through discussions with the board or individual board members voiced their support for the establishment of a regional governor's school (see Table 14).

The role of communication was key in helping the board decide how to pay the cost of retirement for its full-time employees without causing a fiscal burden on the locality. As with the other issues studied in this case study, this board used communication for clarification of questions on how to provide the benefit to its full-time employees. Considerable interaction [discussion] took place between the key stakeholders prior to the board voting on which option to implement.

Table 14

Role of Communication in Decision Making

Role of Communication	Issue[a]			
	1	2	3	4
Clarify concerns of board members	x	x	x	x
Share additional information with board based on questions from				
• Board members	x	x	x	x
• County administrator	x			
• Representatives of the local education association	x			
• Citizens	x		x	
• Employees	x			
• Members of the board of supervisors	x			
• Parents		x	x	x
• Representatives from local civic organization			x	x
Allow for interaction [discussion] between				
• Superintendent and board members	x	x	x	x
• Board members	x	x	x	x
• Other central office staff	x	x	x	x
• Consultant		x		
• Citizens	x	x	x	x
• Representative(s) from local civic organization			x	x
Allow board members to consider alternatives and build consensus	x	x	x	

[a]The issues were: 1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this case study was to identify the decision-making processes of rural school boards. Four decisions of a rural school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia were analyzed to identify the decision-making processes.

This chapter has four sections. Conclusions derived from the cross-case analysis of the four issues and related discussion are in the first section. Areas for further study are in the second section. Implications for practice are in the third section. A final summary is in the fourth section.

Conclusions and Discussion

The conclusions and discussion are based on findings in this study, the review of the literature, and the reflections and observations of the researcher. Conclusions for each research question are stated and followed by a discussion.

Conclusions on Board Awareness of Issues

The superintendent is the primary vehicle for making the board aware of issues. Although others may have had a role in making the board aware of issues, the one person mentioned across all four issues was the superintendent. One of the four issues (discipline review committee of the board) originated with the superintendent.

Both internal and external agents brought issues to the board. Internal agents are individuals employed by the division that inform board members or the board of issues they feel require action by the board. External agents are individuals outside the school division that inform board members of issues they feel require action by the board. In this study the local education association is identified as an external agent because it is an organized employee group. Internal agents who brought issues to the attention of the board were the superintendent, assistant superintendent, members of the communications committee, and teachers. External agents who brought issues to the attention of the board were community members, former employees, representatives of the local education association, and representatives of an organized civic organization (NAACP).

The school board becomes informed of issues through verbal (oral) and written means. Verbal (oral) means are through the superintendent and other individuals who present to the board or who informally inform individual board members of issues they feel require action by the board. Written means are written communications, either formal or informal, from the superintendent, a consultant, other members of the superintendent's staff, representatives from the local education association, or community individuals who present documents to the board.

<p style="text-align:center">Discussion for Board Awareness of Issues</p>

The superintendent is the gatekeeper to the board. He or she allows external and internal agents to present information to the board or to further clarify information on specific issues. The superintendent exercises considerable influence regarding who appears before the board. It is clear that the board relies heavily on information from the superintendent and looks to the superintendent for direction.

The superintendent, as the primary vehicle for sharing information with the board, keeps the board informed about upcoming or current issues. The

superintendent, through making the board aware of issues, has a major impact on what issues come before the board and what issues are pushed to the side and may never reach the board. As the key provider of information to the board, the superintendent affects the decision-making process by providing information to the board on issues before the board for a decision.

As the gatekeeper to the board, the superintendent exercises considerable influence over which internal and external agents officially present or otherwise share information with the board. The superintendent may hold discussions with potential presenters prior to placing them on the board's agenda. Exceptions occur when community members or employees share information with board members without the superintendent's knowledge. The superintendent's purpose for these discussions are to determine the appropriateness of the presentation, to make the individual aware of board procedures and presentation format, and to gain additional information to include with the board materials. If the superintendent determines that issues do not merit going before the full board, the superintendent's staff handles them. When issues are deemed by the superintendent to be appropriate for board action, they are presented to the board by the appropriate agent.

External agents may make the board aware of issues directly. These agents may contact a board member regarding issues they feel require a decision by the board. Mandates from the state board of education or the state legislature that require action by the school board are brought to the attention of the board by the superintendent.

The superintendent uses both verbal (oral) and written communication to make the board aware of issues. When the superintendent deems appropriate, internal and external agents are permitted to provide board members with written descriptions of issues and are permitted to orally present before the board. The

superintendent provides written documents to the board pertaining to issues requiring action. The majority of the communication to the board from the superintendent on issues is verbal (oral).

Such groups as this school division's communications committee play a key role in bringing issues to the attention of the board. This is easily accomplished if a member of the board sits on the committee. The board member can freely share issues with the board that are discussed at meetings of the committee. This mechanism worked well for the board in this study.

Memos and informal letters used by the superintendent to inform the board of issues appear to be effective. Board members review the documents and may call the superintendent for clarification or to offer input. Board members place considerable value on these discussions with the superintendent.

Conclusions on Superintendent Awareness of Issues

The superintendent becomes aware of issues through both internal and external agents and through verbal and written means. Vehicles by which the superintendent became aware of the issues in this study are in the box.

Internal agents
• Communications committee member
• Discussions with individual board members
External agents
• Superintendent within region
• Local education association
• Department of education memos

Discussion for Superintendent Awareness of Issues

The superintendent becomes aware of issues through the same means as boards (see Table 15). The superintendent became aware of the desire of the

Table 15

Superintendent's Awareness of Issues

Issue[a]									
	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Internal					External				
Written			x	x	Written	x	x	x	x
Verbal	x		x		Verbal	x	x	x	

[a]The issues were: 1 Payment of retirement for employees, 2 Participation in a regional governor's school, 3 Participation in a regional alternative school, and 4 Establishment of a discipline review committee.

employees for the school board to pay the retirement costs for employees through the superintendent's representative to the communications committee. Communications from such groups are a valued means of making the superintendent aware of issues. Such groups appear to be viable vehicles by which employees openly share their concerns with the administration and ultimately the school board. The superintendent in this study appeared to welcome the input from this committee in as much as it provided a means for him to hear concerns from the various employee groups. The concerns raised by such groups as the communications committee, when addressed by the superintendent, can create a better working climate for employees.

Discussions with individual board members help the superintendent become aware of issues. Individual board members hear concerns from constituents or from other members of the community who reside outside of the member's voting district. These concerns may be shared with the superintendent for investigation or action by the board. The superintendent relies heavily on this discussion with members of the board to get a better understanding or sense of how the community feels about the division.

The Commonwealth of Virginia does not recognize unions. However, in this division, there are very positive relationships among the local education association, the administration, and the school board. Communication is open. This open communication allows all members of these groups to candidly talk with each other about issues facing the division.

Virginia Department of Education memos serve as another means for making the superintendent aware of issues that require action by the board. These memos may provide guidelines for operational procedures or policy implementation based on new or existing legislation. As appropriate, information from these memos is shared and acted upon by the board.

Sharing of information at regional meetings of superintendents serves as another vehicle for informing the superintendent of issues that require board action. Presentations are normally made at these meetings by representatives of the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia School Boards Association, the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, the Virginia High School League, and other invited individuals who have something of educational interest to share with the superintendents in the region. The regional meetings provide a time for superintendents to share and discuss issues and seek input from colleagues for possible solutions to issues.

Conclusions on Forces that Influence Boards on Issues

External and internal forces influence boards in reaching decisions on issues. External and internal forces differ across issues. External and internal forces that influenced the board in this study are in the box on the next page.

Discussion for Forces that Influence Boards on Issues

External forces influence the decision-making process of boards. External forces appear to have a positive impact on boards. Boards are sensitive to the concerns of the external agents. However, boards are able to maintain their focus on what they feel are the interests of the division while at the same time being receptive and responsive to concerns from external forces.

External forces
- Community concern
- Local civic association concern
- Former employees' concerns
- Consultant
- Policies of school divisions within region
- Demand for fair treatment by minorities
- Local education association persistence

Internal forces
- Time required
- Need to do more for students or teachers
- Teacher interest
- Student interest
- Economics
- Acquisition of needed services for students

In this study, it appeared that each board member held high positive valence for each of the four issues. Based on interviews and review of documents, negative valence was not evidenced. According to Hoffman (1961) and Lewin (1935) each member of the group brings valence to the decision-making process. This valence can either be negative or positive depending on the background of the individual board member involved in making the decision.

The influence and persistence of the local education association and concerns from former employees were external forces that positively impacted the board on the issue of payment of retirement costs for employees. This board listened to their input regarding the issue and worked, within the fiscal capabilities of the locality, to provide this benefit to its employees. Policies of other school divisions within the region also were identified as external forces that had a positive impact on this board. Because of the geographical location of the region and the high level of communication between employees of school divisions within the region, it was relatively easy to learn what was being done in other divisions. Therefore, teachers, former employees, and the superintendent made the board aware of what other divisions within the region were doing.

Concern from a local civic association (the NAACP) emerged as an external force on two issues. On the issue of participation in a regional alternative school, the position of this organization was to ensure that minority students who were placed in the alternative school would receive an education equivalent to that received by students in the regular school program and that counseling would be provided to these students. On the issue of the discipline review committee, the local civic association wanted guarantees that minority students and their parents would have equal representation when the committee met to review appeals of discipline cases. The influence of the NAACP as an external force regarding these two issues is not exclusive to this board because of the widely held perception that

a high percentage of students suspended or placed in alternative settings is of minority status (male, African-Americans).

Internal forces also influenced this board during the decision-making process. As with external forces, the board was receptive to the desires or concerns of these groups or individuals, but it was able to effectively balance all input in making the decision that it felt was best for the division or the students.

The time required by the board in hearing appeals to student discipline cases and the boards' understanding of the need to do more for specific populations of students emerged as internal forces that positively influenced the board during the decision-making process. These two forces are board specific in that the board and superintendent recognized the need for change. The changes made provided better services to accommodate the needs of the students and a more efficient utilization of board time. Time was identified as an internal force because this board felt that it used too much time in reviewing student disciplinary appeals instead of utilizing its time on policy issues. The establishment of a disciplinary review committee of the board was a means by which the board was able to devote more time to other board policy matters.

During the decision-making process on the issues of payment of the retirement cost for employees, participation in a regional governor's school, and participation in a regional alternative school, the board was constantly aware of the fiscal impact of its decision on the locality. The economical impact of its decision on the locality was an internal force that influenced the board in making its decision on these three issues.

Conclusions for the Decision-Making Process Steps of Boards

Board decision-making is a multi-step process. The steps used by boards depend on the issue.

Discussion for the Decision-Making

Process Steps of Boards

Steps
• Awareness of issues
• Sought information
• Received information
• Verified information
• Sought approval
• Discussed issues
• Communicated with staff
• Communicated among selves
• Analyzed options
• Reached consensus
• Voted on the decision

A school board uses a variety of steps in the decision-making process. Depending on the complexity of the issue, this board used a number of decision-making steps (see the box). The more complex the issue the more steps the board uses in its decision-making process.

The decision-making process steps, as described by Janis and Mann (1977), McEwan (1997), and Amundson, et al. (1996),were similar to those used by this board. Janis' steps are: (a) apprising the challenge, (b) surveying alternatives, (c) weighing alternatives, (d) deliberating about commitment, and (e) adhering despite negative feedback. McEwan's steps are: (a) figuring out that a decision is needed; (b) generating, exploring, and researching the alternative solutions or choices; (c) making a judgment; (d) acting upon the decision; and (e) evaluating the decision. The steps offered by Amundson et al. are: (a) define the problem; (b) gather information; (c) get recommendation from the superintendent and consider alternatives; (d) forecast consequences; (e) check proposed decisions against values, goals, and mission; and (f) decide, determine, settle, conclude, and resolve.

Awareness of the issue was the first step in the decision-making process on each issue in this study. The board became aware of each issue from the superintendent or from other internal or external agents. Awareness of each issue was verbally (orally) communicated to the board at the board meeting and was presented to board members in writing in the board packet, which each board member received in advance of the board meeting. Once board members received their board packets, individual board members called the superintendent, as needed, for clarification of issues prior to the official board meeting. On the day of the board meeting, the superintendent contacted each board member by phone to determine if there were any questions regarding an agenda item. The discussion between the superintendent and the individual board member served as one final means of answering questions about agenda items prior to the official meeting.

The board seeks information from the superintendent on issues. Additionally, the board or individual board members seek information from external and internal agents that bring issues to the board or individual board members. In this study, the board willingly received information. However, the superintendent and staff verified some information before the board made its decision.

On two issues, the board in this study had to seek approval from other boards as an intermediate step prior to making its final decision on the issue. On the issue of payment of retirement costs for employees, the board sought approval from the board of supervisors and the Virginia Retirement System prior to making a final decision on the issue. On the issue of participation in a regional governor's school, the board sought approval from the Virginia Board of Education before proceeding with its decision-making process.

Discussions on the issues, after relevant information was provided to the board; communications with staff; and communications among members of the

board appeared to be key decision-making steps for this board on all issues. After the board had completed the above steps, it analyzed its options and worked, through open discussions, to build consensus around one option that it felt would be the best solution for the issue. Voting on a solution was the final decision-making step for this board on each issue.

The findings of Hammond et al. (1980) and Brunswik (1957) regarding the "social judgment theory" support the decision-making process of this board. The amount of discussion, information sharing and processing, and interpersonal board action positively impacted the decision-making process of this board. Further, findings of Small and Venkatesh (1995) on the impact of "closure and member satisfaction" were evident throughout the decision-making process of this board on each issue. Small and Venkatesh (1995) explained the principle of closure or the "need for closure" in the decision-making process as an attribute that contributes to satisfaction and decision confidence. Closure allows the members of the group to reflect on the issue, summarize the discussion, and review the decision. This board appeared to be very satisfied with each of its decisions relating to the four issues studied.

<div align="center">Conclusions for Amount of Time Used by

Boards to Make Decisions on Issues</div>

Boards use as much time as they feel is necessary to make a decision. The time expands as the complexity and uncertainty of the issue increase. The amounts of time used by this board are in the box.

Amount of time
• Range of two months to five years depending on the issue
• Lengthy process depending on the issue
• Ten to forty minutes per meeting when item was on agenda
• Two to three meetings per issue

Discussion for the Amount of Time Used by Boards

to Make Decisions on Issues

In this case, the board effectively used its time during the decision-making process. The element of time was difficult to narrow down to specific numbers of minutes or hours for each issue. However, once the issue was on the agenda for action, very little time was used to make the actual decision.

The amount of time used by this board in making decisions varied based on the complexity of the issue. The issue of payment of retirement costs for employees was a relatively simple issue on which to make a decision. However, due to the fiscal impact on the locality, a considerable amount of time was involved in planning for the implementation of this benefit so as not to overwhelm the taxpayers at one time. In order for the smooth implementation of the decision, a considerable amount of time was involved in discussions among the superintendent, county administrator, school board members, members of the board of supervisors, and the representatives from the Virginia Retirement System.

The issues of participation in the regional governor's school and regional alternative school also required the board to expend more time in making its decisions on the issues. A considerable amount of time was spent on seeking information about the proposals and discussions between board members and members of the administrative team. These two issues, like the issue of payment of retirement costs for employees required local fiscal effort and long-term commitment from the division. Further, unlike the issue of payment of the retirement costs for employees, these two issues involved developing working relationships with other school divisions, seeking approval from the Virginia Board of Education, and some funding from the Virginia General Assembly.

Student selection criteria for each program had to be developed and approved by each local school division participating in the programs. The

curriculum for each program had to be developed. And for the alternative school, the issue of counseling for students had to be resolved. The complexity of these two issues required the board to spend a considerable amount of time making its final decision to participate.

The establishment of a discipline review committee of the school board was a relatively easy issue for this board to resolve. Once the issues of the local civic organization were addressed, legal questions answered, and the policy rewritten, the time used by this board to make its decision was relatively short in comparison to the length of time used by the board to make the other decisions.

Conclusions on the Role of Communication in the
Decision-Making Process of Boards

Communication is important to boards during the decision-making process. Boards welcome communication and actively discuss information relating to the issue before the board for action. Communication between board members and the superintendent is seen as valuable in clarifying concerns relevant to issues as the

board considers options for resolving issues. This board used communication [discussion] with citizens, representatives from civic organizations, building administrators, other central office staff, and a consultant to become well informed while considering alternatives. The multiple roles communication in the decision-making process for this board are listed in the box.

Communication in decision-making
- Clarify and respond to concerns from board members
- Share additional information based on questions from
  - Internal agents
  - External agents
- Allows for interaction [discussion] among
  - Board members
  - Board members, superintendent, and staff
  - Citizens
  - Representatives from a local civic organization
- Allows the board to consider alternatives and build consensus

Discussion for Role of Communication in the

Decision-Making Process

This school board felt that communication is the key to its effectiveness in decision-making. In issues regarding funding from local resources, it is clear that communication [discussion and in written form] helped the board make decisions. The obvious open communication between the county administrator and superintendent and among and between boards is apparent from the interviews of individual school board members and the superintendent. The open communication and willingness to work together on a common goal were instrumental in effectively facilitating the decision-making process for this board.

Small & Venkatesh (1995) confirm the importance boards place on communication sharing and information processing in effective decision-making. According to Hoffman & O'Day (1979), boards that make informed decisions are supplied with high quality and valid information and use that information to support the adoption of the best solution. Based on the decisions by this board on the four issues, it appears that the board was provided with the appropriate information and the board used that information in its decision making.

The ease with which this board appeared to make decisions with effective and efficient use of time gave the appearance that the board is a victim of "groupthink" as described by Janis (1982). However, after further discussions with the superintendent, it is clear that behind-the-scenes communication was an effective means for bringing all board members up to equal comfort levels regarding specific issues. Consequently, when a matter is formally before the board for action, many of the concerns of board members are addressed by the superintendent well in advance. This leads to minimal discussion by the board at formal meetings. Therefore, the concept of "groupthink" was not founded.

Areas for Future Study

This study was conducted with a board that has been working together as a decision-making body with all five members for four years. The superintendent of this school division had served as its superintendent for eight years. Therefore, the board members had time to develop a good working relationship with each other and the division superintendent. One area for future research would be to study a board that has not been together for such a long period of time. Such a study may provide data on the relationship between board decision-making processes and the familiarity of board members with the ideas and modes of behavior of their peers.

Because the board studied in this case did not exhibit any signs of disagreement, a study of how boards resolve differences on issues might be useful in understanding board decision making. Further, a study of boards with a history of conflict would further understanding of board decision processes.

Additional data are needed on the amount of time boards spend in making decisions on issues and how boards spend time while involved in decision-making. While this board appeared to have used its time effectively, additional studies would probably give more insight into this component of decision-making. Of particular interest are the issues of problem complexity and uncertainty as they affect the amount of time boards spend in decision making.

An area that requires further study is the role of male and female board members in the decision-making process. Research suggests that male and female members of a decision-making group interact differently and make different types of decisions on the same issues (Rogelberg and Rumery, 1994). This was not examined in this study.

Implications for Practice

School boards should have an understanding of and consider the dynamics involved in the decision-making process when they are faced with making a decision on an issue.

School board members should have an understanding of how issues are brought to their attention. School board members find out about issues from the superintendent, employees, constituents, and citizens. Board members should understand that because the superintendent is the agent that officially brings issues to the attention of the board for action, the issues they decide might have a definite bias. Unscrupulous superintendents could control the issues coming before the board.

School board members should have an understanding of the role of valence in the decision-making process. School board members should understand that each board member brings his or her feelings or opinions to each issue before the board for action. These feelings or opinions may have either a positive or negative impact on how the board member interacts with other members of the board during the decision-making process. The level of valence [feelings for or against an issue] board members bring to the decision-making process may be based on personal experiences or the feeling that he or she has to represent the feelings of constituents or other parties that may have a vested interest in the final decision.

School board members should have an understanding that communication is important to the quality of the decision made by the board. Communication allows board members to interact through discussion to seek answers to questions, share individual opinions on issues, and seek consensus on a solution to the issue. Effective board decision-making relies heavily on accurate and timely information shared with members of the board by the superintendent or members of the superintendent's staff.

School board members should have an understanding of the multi-step process involved in effective decision-making. School board members, during the decision-making process, go through a variety of steps prior to the final vote on the solution to the issue. The first decision-making step is becoming aware of the issue and the final decision-making step is voting on the solution. Board members, depending on the complexity of the issue may or may not go through each of the identified steps during the decision-making process. More complex issues require board members to include more of the decision-making process steps while working to reach a decision on complex issues.

School board members should have an understanding of the amount of time required by boards to reach decisions on issues. Depending on the issue, boards may make decisions at one meeting in just a few minutes or over several meetings. The complexity of issues affects the amount of time required to make a decision. The more complex the issue, the more time required to make the decision. Additionally, board members need to understand that board policy also impacts the amount of time used by the boards to make decisions on specific issues.

Summary

This case study focused on the decision-making process of a rural school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Four Issues were selected and interview questions were developed for board members and the superintendent. Based on the review of literature and findings, conclusions were derived regarding the decision-making process of school boards.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Raw Data Matrices for Interviews

and Document Reviews

Table A1

Raw Data Matrix: How the Board Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[a]	"About five years ago the [education association] came to the board with its presentation about what they would like to see in the budget regarding teacher benefits, and it was always at the top of their lists. So it's really the [education association] that continually brought it to the board."	"In the summer of 95, [[b]Dr. Smith], Superintendent of [XYZ] County, … came to the board with a presentation. I believe Dr. [[c]Jones] was with him and talked to us about participating in a regional program."	"[[d]Dr. James] brought it to our attention."	"The superintendent brought it to our attention as something we might want to consider doing."
BM[b]	"The teachers through the [local education association] made it a yearly request and asked that we consider that." "They had a representative come to the meeting. They call it their wish list. They would present their wish list."	"It was brought to our attention by the superintendent, [[d]Dr. James], who was approached by another superintendent from an adjoining school division… ." "We had several speakers come in … ."	"The superintendent and [[e]Sallie Joe]." "The superintendent."	"Actually, that was brought to the board by the superintendent." "The assistant superintendent [[f]William Pill].

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. Smith was the superintendent of another school division. [c]Dr. Jones was the consultant. [d]Dr. James was the superintendent of the school division studied. [e]Sallie Joe was the director of special programs for the school division studied. [f]William Pill was the assistant superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A1 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: How the Board Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[c]	"The [education association] and the word in the community. I mean the teachers, administrators, and the like."	"Here again, going from memory, [[b]Dr. Smith] came in … and informed us of the regional governor's school." "The former superintendent from Fairfax came in and made a pitch." "The superintendent concurrently had some communications with us. He put it on the agenda and kept making us aware of the need."	"Well, I am sure it was through both, through a memo and at a formal meeting." "We would hear scuttlebutt and felt that we had to do something."	"The current superintendent brought the idea to the board after he realized how many cases the board heard and how much time we used at board meetings."
BM[d]	"The teachers through the [local education association] had requested this for three to five years or more. Request came to the board by way of a presentation to the school board by the [education association], as well as members who served on the Communications Committee along with representatives from each employee group." " … it was discussed in the meetings of the communications committee."	"[[d]Dr. James] mentioned it to us first. Then [Dr. Smith] came to talk to us." "Dr. [[c]Jones] came to talk with us."	"The superintendent brought the idea to us. There was talk among the superintendents in the other counties of the region before coming to the board." "The board was concerned that something needed to be done."	"And so that was when the superintendent brought it to our attention… ."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. Smith was the superintendent of another school division. [c]Dr. Jones was the consultant. [d]Dr. James was the superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A1 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: How the Board Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[e]	"The major things that I remember hearing about this came from of course [dDr. James]." The concern was presented to him by the education association."	"I think it was [dDr. James], a long time ago."	"I think we became aware oh, oh, [dDr. James]."	"I think [bDr. Smith] brought that up to the school board."
	"I was stopped in the community by individuals who said that we needed to do this. Teachers, former teachers, and administrators also talked to me about the need to do this for the employees."	"[dDr. James] brought the idea to the board because it was presented to him by a fellow superintendent in the area at some meeting."	"Everything that I remember about it came from in-house."	"I can tell you who brought it to his [the current superintendent] attention only because I chaired that committee … and that was our attorney … [fRobert Frank]."
	"The [education association] has presented it in front of the board."	"I know somebody came to the board and I don't have any idea who it was."		"The issue was placed on the agenda for discussion purposes. The assistant superintendent [eWilliam Pill] worked with the superintendent and us [the board] on this policy."
		"There was somebody from [XYZ] County… ."		
	"The board was officially made aware of this request through [dDr. James]. But the [education association] was an integral force in also making the board aware of this issue."	"That's right, I remember the name, [bDr. Smith] … ."		

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. Smith was the superintendent of another school division. [d]Dr. James was the superintendent of the school division studied. [e]William Pill was the assistant superintendent of the school division studied. [f]Robert Frank was the attorney for the school division studied.

Table A1 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: How the Board Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Super-inten-dent	"It was shared with the board as an agenda item during the budget development process. The board packet contained a written description of the proposal." "One member of the board sits on the communications committee, so at least one board member heard about it [request for payment of cost of retirement by employer] prior to the formal presentation to the full board."	"I placed the item on the agenda of the board meeting for discussion." "A brief description of the proposal was included in the board packet." "Board members were given relevant documents as they were developed by the superintendents in the region."	"We knew our in-house program was just not meeting the needs of this population of students."	"I shared this issue with the board out of concern for the amount of time the full board was using in hearing discipline matters." "The issue was placed on the agenda for discussion purposes." "A brief description of the proposal was included in the board packet."

(table continues)

Table A1 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: How the Board Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Themes	Through the local education association Through the superintendent of schools Through the communications committee Through informal communications between employees and a board member who was a former employee	Through a superintendent of schools from another school division Through a presentation from a consultant Through several speakers Through the superintendent of schools	The superintendent of schools In-house staff Director of special programs Scuttlebutt	The superintendent of schools The assistant superintendent of schools

Table A2

Raw Data Matrix: Board Minutes Relating to Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Board minutes	December 6, 1993 "… President of the [local education association] presented to the school board budget proposals for the 1994-95 school year. … Provide all employees an increase of 5%. This could be done by either paying the employees VRS [Virginia Retirement System] contribution or 5% across the board raise" (p. 3860). December 12, 1994 "… President of the [local education association] … discussed … budget proposals for 1995-96. … the school board adopt a budget … which provides VRS (Virginia Retirement System) contribution paid for by the board" (p. 3933).	April 3,1997 "[The consultants] were present to request that the board adopt a resolution to show support for the regional governor's school" (p. 4106). September 8, 1997 "[The local Director of Special Programs] updated the board on the … planning process. … and that the board needed to adopt a resolution at the October meeting" (p. 4141). October 6, 1997 "[The local Director of special programs] presented a resolution for the regional governor's school" (p. 4146). November 10, 1997 "[The local Director of special programs] updated the board on the regional governor's school. She stated that 12 counties have passed the … resolution…" (p. 4152).	August 12, 1996 "[The superintendent presented to the board] a resolution requesting the board of supervisors to add funding to the budget from a grant for the [regional alternative school]" (p. 4060). November 11, 1996 "[The superintendent] read to the board a letter from Richard La Point, Superintendent of Public Instruction, regarding the composition of the board of the regional alternative school" (p. 4076). December 9, 1996 "[The assistant superintendent] informed the board that he had met with the [regional counseling center] … to discuss counseling services for students … in the regional alternative education program" (p. 4083). May 11, 1998 "[The superintendent] read to the board a letter [regarding] tentative allocations for the 98-99 regional alternative education project …" (p. 4190).	July 7, 1999 … Reviewed with the board policy changes" (p. 4280). September 13, 1999 "On motion of [a board member] and seconded by [a board member] motion was carried to adopt the following policies as presented … Disciplinary Committee – BCEA …" (p. 4288).

(table continues)

Table A2 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Board Minutes Relating to Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Board minutes	December 11, 1995 "[The superintendent] informed the board of a possible rate increase for 1996-97" (p. 4009). January 15, 1996 "[The local education association president] discussed with the board … budget proposals for 1996-97. … The school board adopted a budget which provides all employees with the VRS [Virginia Retirement System] contribution paid For by the school system" (p. 4021). January 6, 1997 "[Local education association president] discussed … budget proposals for 1997-98. … the school board pay the employees share of VRS [Virginia Retirement System] … If it is not possible" (pp. 4086-4087).	December 8, 1997 "[The local Director of Special Programs] updated the board on the regional governor's school. She stated that on November 17 a presentation was made before the state board of education on the governor's school. On December 16 the state board will vote to either approve or disapprove the program" (p. 4158). January 12, 1998 "[The local Director of Special Programs] informed the board that the state board of education approved the regional governor's school at its December 16 meeting" (p. 4163). March 9, 1998 "[The superintendent] stated the budget includes … funding for the regional governor's school" (p. 4171).		

(table continues)

Table A2 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Board Minutes Relating to Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Board minutes	March 10, 1997 "[Local education association president] stated the [local education association] is working with the VEA [Virginia Education Association] on Getting VRS (Virginia Retirement System) … over a period of two years." November 10, 1997 "[The division superintendent] read to the board a letter from Tayloe Murphy concerning funding of VRS (Virginia Retirement System) … over a two year period." January 12, 1998 [The local education president] requested … provide all full-time employees with paid retirement."			

(table continues)

Table A2 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Board Minutes Relating to Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee

Board minutes	March 9, 1998
	    "[The superintendent] informed the board the budget includes … 3% raise for all … or phase in VRS [Virginia Retirement System]" (p. 4177).
	
	December 7, 1998
	    "[The local education association president requested that] the school board fund the remaining 2% of the employee's share of retirement" (p. 4232).
	
	January 11, 1999
	    "[The superintendent] stated that the 99-2000 school board budget will include … phasing in the remaining 2% of the employees' share of VRS [Virginia Retirement System]" (p. 4239).			

(table continues)

Table A2 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Board Minutes Relating to Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Board minutes	March 8, 1999 "[The superintendent] stated that the 99-2000 school board budget will include … phasing in the remaining 2% of the employees' share of VRS [Virginia Retirement System]" (p. 4252).			
Memo			Notice of approval of program	
Other	Superintendent's notes November 6, 1997	Resolution of January 2, 1998	Program Proposal	

Table A3

Raw Data Matrix: How the Superintendent Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Super-inten-dent	"It was shared with me by a representative of the [education association] and through the communications committee." "The board member that sits on the communications committee also shared the discussion with me." "… my representative to this communications committee discussed this matter with me after a meeting of this group." "… and as I talked with members of the board, this issue came up because of contact they had had with employees and some individuals in the community." "One member of the board sits on the communication committee, so at least one board member heard about it prior to the formal presentation to the full board." "It was always an issue with the board member who was a former employee."	"A fellow superintendent made me aware of the issue through a presentation at a regional superintendent's meeting."	"… through a memo from the department of education."	"I became aware of the option of having a discipline review committee to handle discipline matters through a memo from the department of education and through policy updates from the Virginia School Boards Association."

(table continues)

[a]Superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A3

Raw Data Matrix: How the Superintendent Became Aware of Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Themes	Through the local education association Through the communications committee Through informal communications with a board member	Through a superintendent of schools from another school division	Through department of education correspondence	The board was spending much time on discipline matters

Table A4

Raw Data Matrix: Forces That Influenced the Board in Reaching a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[a]	"Yes, they [education association] are very respected. Everybody works together. The leaders that they elect work well with the board." "We knew that we wanted to do this for all of the employees. It was the right thing to do."	"Anything that we can do as a board or I can do as an individual board member that enhances … the quality of education that we are able to provide in our county is for the benefit of the students. I mean that's my goal, that's my mission." "Yes, the appearance of [bDr. Smith] and [cDr. Jones] had a positive impact on the board." "It goes right back to what's best for your students."	"… We saw an opportunity to provide other services that we could not provide at a local level." "One of the components of the regional program was counseling services. … In a small school division you are limited to [counseling] services, [and] staff persons to help with that." "The need and the number of students kept growing and growing." "All of these [the above] influenced the board in making its decision."	"It was always extremely time consuming to hear discipline issues … ."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. Smith was the superintendent of another school division. [c]Dr. Jones was the consultant.

Table A4 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Forces that Influenced the Board in Reaching a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM_b	"… It was a benefit that we felt they deserved." "Surrounding counties are doing it. We were probably one of the last counties to do this. We thought that they deserved it and that it was a benefit they should have." "Being a working person my-self, I could understand why they wanted the benefit paid. It was something a majority wanted."	"I would say the main thing was need." "The amount of interest in the community to have such a program and the other areas that have had such a program. [I] felt it was a very good idea."	"The need. There was a need. We have to do as much as we … [can] to help the children."	"The need in the community, the need to make sure the children got a fair review, and, I guess, legally." "Two representatives from the NAACP came and wanted these meetings confidential." "But the NAACP wanted to be able to send representatives in here with the children because they didn't feel like we were treating them fairly."
BM_c	"I think by constantly keeping it before us it wasn't going to go away. And, consequently, as the economy went well I think the county was able to absorb it financially." "I am not going to say no one in the community didn't say to me, "Oh, it would be nice to have this"."	"There was a desire on behalf of some parents and students and some teachers because they felt that there were some students here that were deserving of some kind of accelerated school."	"Scuttlebutt, in the community … and the parents." "As I went to civic meetings, personally, not as a board member, … they [citizens] voiced their displeasure how the board was just kicking students out of school for no reasons." "At times, they [citizens] would ask to be considered [to be heard] at the board." "On one occasion the superintendent and I went to a community meeting to talk about the proposed school and answer questions."	" The element of time."

[a]BM = board member.

Table A4 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Forces that Influenced the Board in Reaching a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM$_d$	" We felt the time had come for this for our employees." "Most other school divisions were doing this for their teachers."	"We felt that something needed to be done for the gifted students… ." "Other divisions in the region had all ready agreed to participate and we did not want our students left out."	"The need to provide more supervision of the night … or evening students assigned to our local program." "We were told that the regional program would be more economical to operate than our local program."	"… it was just taking too much of the board's time each meeting in executive session."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member.

Table A4 (continued)
Raw Data Matrix: Forces that Influenced the Board in Reaching a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[e]	"Ah, [[b]Joe Jones … [c]Sally Doe] came to my house to talk to me about that along with some other issues that were brought up." "I don't think any other force was needed because the board realized that they have to maintain good teachers in the county." "I mean they had to be competitive with the surrounding counties." "And we were one of a few counties that did not provide that." "The governing board was getting pressure from their employees."	"Well, I think we are bending over backwards all the time for students in need." "I mean we have a gifted program and being a former teacher I know what that meant. So I thought it was a grand time to have something really special for those students that excel."	"In my opinion, we needed more than what we had right here in the county." "The site location away from the other schools and students …full time instructors that were responsible for their lesson plans and everything." "There was going to be a counseling component… ." "The people over there were suppose to have inservice on how to deal with the type of student that they would be dealing with." "With the regional vocational school being located on site over there, there was also the possibility that there would be some openings open to those children that were over there."	"Because that was a very time-consuming thing."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Joe Jones was an employee in the school division studied. [c]Sally Doe was an employee in the school division studied.

Table A4 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Forces that Influenced the Board in Reaching a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Super-inten-dent	"I felt that this was something that we needed to do for all of our employees. We were one of the last divisions in the state to offer this benefit to its employees." "There were constant discussions between the county administrator and me on this issue and how it would financially impact the county."	"As superintendent, I knew that we needed to do more for our identified accelerated students. This issue was a means to achieve that goal."	"I felt that we were putting too many students on the street due to expulsions or long-term suspensions. The in-county alternative education program was not meeting the needs of identified students." "There was some concern from the community that we needed to do more in this area of working with troubled youth."	"Too much of the board's time was used in hearing discipline cases."

(table continues)

[a]Superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A4 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Forces that Influenced the Board in Reaching a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Themes	Surrounding counties were doing this for their employees Wanting to do this for all employees Understanding the need to do this for all employees Persistence of the local education association	The need to do more for the gifted students The interest of parents The interest of some of the teachers The interest of the students The endorsement by other school divisions Presentations from another superintendent and Consultant	The need to do more for these students (students in need of an alternative environment) Concern from the community [local civic association] about the number of expulsions and the absence of assistance for these students Opportunity to provide counseling for the students Opportunity for vocational training The number of students kept growing Economical provision of services to the students Inservice training for teachers who would be working with the students	The amount of time required by the board dealing with student discipline The concern by the minority population in the community for equal treatment of minorities by the school system

Table A5

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[a]	"The bottom line is if you can find the money, Doc, then let's do it." "Our county administrator comes to the board at least once a year to talk to us about long-range goals and plans." "They found the money and we said, 'Let's roll.' "	"We discussed it with our superintendent. We rely very heavily on the expertise of the superintendent and all of the central staff." "In the summer of 95, [[b]Dr. Smith], Superintendent of [XYZ] County, … came to the board with a presentation. I believe [[c]Dr. Jones] was with him and talked to us about participating in a regional program." "If they say we ought to jump, then we say tell me why, then we jump if we agree." "I have always felt that the board is only as good as the persons they hire to work for them. If I am part of the process that hired the person, then I fight with that person, then I have hired the wrong person." "We talked about things like where it would be held? What could it cost? What's the cut-off for participation and numbers of students? What's the percentile cut-off." "Doc would tell us if it's going to cost x number of dollars."	"It was discussed between the divisions in the region, and if you agreed, you signed on the bottom line." "The superintendent, [[d]Dr. James] brought it to our attention." "We relied on the expertise of the superintendent, and we saw advantages to moving it from this setting to that setting." "We wanted to now about cost, how students would get there, and of course the counseling was a much needed part, so we wanted to know about that."	"Just communicating back and forth. You know the chain of command."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. Smith was the superintendent of the neighboring school division who presented before the school board. [c]Dr. Jones was the consultant. [d]Dr. James was the superintendent of the division studies.

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[b]	"It was a request for many years, and many years we looked at it." "I guess the first step was to look at if we could afford it." "The second would be if the board of supervisors would endorse that. Then we looked at how we could do it, whether we could do it." "We looked at our options as to how we could do it and made a decision on it when we came to a point in time when we could afford it." "We knew it was a needed benefit. And because we were one of the few school divisions in Virginia that weren't paying it, that put a little extra force on us."	"We got the information, we reviewed the information, and we reviewed it at a board meetings." "We had presentations from staff. [b]Sallie Joe did a lot of work with it." "We had several speakers come in." "The planning grant really established a need for it, and it showed us how many kids we had that could benefit from this program." "The amount of interest in the community to have such a program and the other areas that have had such a program felt it was a very good idea."	"We had a presentation from [[c]Dr. James]. We looked at the figures. We looked at what was available." "We applied for a grant in order to do this, and we got the grant. We got some adjoining counties to join in with us and voted to establish it."	"I think the state code was given to us and an opinion from VSBA [Virginia School Boards Association] letting us know if this new policy met all of the legal criteria." "Dr. James, the superintendent, communicated with the board; we got advice from our attorneys on the proposal for the committee of the board."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Sallie Joe was the director of special programs for the division studied. [c]Dr. James was the superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[c]	"I think the first thing we were told was that it was a five percent funding issue." "We were told to give this raise that it would probably be better to do it in phases." "We were told that by phasing it in it would not be such a shock to the treasurer and board of supervisors." "We were given surveys. The [education association] sent out a flier or survey form with information on it. Who all was interested and if we could afford it." "I think the county administrator came to advise us as to the cost to the county and how much tax rate would be required to fund the request."	"I believe through the guidance department some surveys were done to see who was interested and willing." "You know talking about only ten to twelve students, so the funding issue was not a large issue." "Over the years it was before the board, we talked and asked a lot of questions of the staff."	"Well, here again, we knew there was a need. We heard this for years and years and years. We had discussed this concern for a long time. There was plenty of discussion and communication on this issue." "We felt that if we could save them and help them, it was something we should try to do … ." "We got word from the superintendent on how much it would cost, approximately." … We thought that was reasonable." "I am sure the superintendent probably presented that to the supervisors. Once we determined that we could afford it, we voted to do it."	" Once the superintendent gave us an outline and I believe some advice from [[b]Robert Frank], legal stand points, we followed that advice." "That's pretty much how we made our decision to go along with that concept."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Robert Frank was the attorney for the board of the school division studied.

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM$_d$	" … Of course, we discussed this during the time of the budget. We wanted to know the cost. And that was one of the reasons we looked at a period of two years phasing it in." "Each time the board discussed it, we looked at the cost. We looked at the preliminary work." "We worked with the board of supervisors and the county administrator and decided to phase it in over a two year period, if permitted." "Most other school divisions were doing this for their teachers."	"We had concerns about it. That's why [[b]Dr. Jones] came to talk to us about it." After [[b]Dr. Jones] came out, that was one of the steps that convinced us. He showed or told us what had been done in other areas of the state."	"As the years passed, from 1995 up to this time, there were different kinds of problems." "We were told that the regional program would be more economical to operate than our local program." "We did a lot of talking and discussing the proposed program. Without communicating and discussing, we would not have been able to make a decision."	"Each meeting there was something. It could have been something small. It took so much time." "We talked about how the committee would work. Legal concerns were clarified." "We discussed the composition of the committee."

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. Jones was the consultant.

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM$_e$	"Well, as far as the desire to do it, I think the [education association] gave us all the research information we needed. Of course, it was verified by someone here in this central office." "I think the assistant superintendent is probably the one that presented to us … how much it would cost." "… but the school board has to work closely with the board of supervisors of course." " Of course, we talked about it a lot. We were handed a lot of information to read on our own."	"All this information was presented to us." "Both written and live presentations. They had things to show us and not just talk." "Then we had to do some kind of resolution. I know we had a resolution to support and a resolution to commit and that meant funding."	"All right, there was the initial presentation. We had received copies of the proposals for the grant … ." "After the grant was approved, there was some kind of planning session where a special committee went over how they were going to do it [implement the program]." "There was discussion about scheduling in vocational courses and who was going to teach these students."	"There was a presentation." "We talked about it." "It was a change in policy so we had to get legal advice."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member.

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Super-inten-dent	"The board was given the information on the number of employees that would be covered under the retirement system and the cost to the division." "I verbally communicated with the county administrator regarding cost to the county and phase-in options." "… constant communication with the board, county administrator, and contact at VRS [Virginia Retirement System]." "Phasing in of the benefit over two years was the best option for the county due to the cost." "The board of supervisors and county administrator supported a bill to allow the school board and county to assume the employee's share of the VRS [Virginia Retirement System] over a two to three year period."	"I initially told the board about the concept of a regional governor's school after returning from a superintendents' regional meeting." "I provided each board member with a written description of the proposal and the board approved a resolution of support for the proposed school." "The planning grant was approved by the General Assembly." "There were several presentations … Consultant spoke to the board, and the local coordinator [of the programs for gifted students] presented to the board." "The board discussed the proposal and wanted to know procedures for selection of students, cost, transportation, and time." "After all concerns were addressed, the board voted to participate."	"The board saw a need to do more for this group of students." "I became aware of grant opportunities for local divisions to set up a regional alternative program. This was shared with the board and other superintendents in the region." "After much discussion about the need of such a program, we [superintendents] agreed on the concept and presented a plan to our respective boards." "Because of the already known need, my board was ready to try a broader approach to serve students who were disrupting the learning environment for other students while at the same time keeping these students engaged in an academic setting." "The board approved the grant which was submitted for review and approval by the appropriate state education agency."	"The board used too much time in hearing appeals regarding discipline cases." "The discipline committee approach was offered to the board by me as a means to reduce the amount of time used by the board in handling discipline matters." "Legal advice was offered by the board's legal counsel regarding time lines and correct wording because this was a change in policy and procedures." "The board, after having their concerns addressed, approved the new policy change putting in place the discipline committee."

(table continues)

[a]Superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee

Themes	Became aware of the issue
	   LEA survey
	
	Sought information on
	   Cost
	   Legalities
	   Number of employees
	
	Sought information from
	   Local education association
	   Virginia Retirement System
	   Superintendent
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Received information from
	   Superintendent
	   Virginia Retirement System
	   Local education association
	
	Verified information
	   Superintendent
	   Assistant superintendent
	
	Sought approval
	   Board of supervisors
	   County administrator
	
	Discussed the issue
	   Budget time
		Became aware of the issue
		   Superintendent
		
		Received information from
		   Superintendent
		   Presenters
		     Consultant
		     Director of special
		     programs
		
		Discussed the issue
		   Superintendent
		   Among selves
		   With presenters
		     Consultant
		     Other superintendent
		     Director of special
		     programs
		
		Discussed
		   Location
		   Cost
		   Student selection criteria
		   Number of students
		
		Approved resolution of support
		
		Sought approval for study grant
		   State Board of Education
		   General Assembly
			Became aware of the issue
			   Superintendent
			
			Received information
			   Presentation by superintendent
			
			Discussed the issue with
			   Superintendent
			   Among selves
			
			Discussed
			   Cost
			   Grant proposal and application
			   Need
			
			Analyzed options
			
			Approved grant proposal and application
			
			Sought approval of grant
			   Virginia Department of
			   Education
			
			Reached consensus
			
			Voted for approval
				Became aware of the issue
				   Superintendent
				   Assistant superintendent
				
				Received information from
				   Superintendent
				   Assistant superintendent
				
				Discussed the issue
				   Legality
				     Change in policy
				   State code
				   Time
				   Composition of the committee
				
				Communicated with
				   Superintendent
				   Legal counsel
				   VSBA [Virginia School
				   Boards Association] policy
				   department
				   Assistant superintendent
				   Among selves
				
				Reached consensus
				
				Voted for approval

Table A5 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Steps Used by the School Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee

Themes	Communicated with
	    Board of supervisors
	    Virginia Retirement System
	    Among selves
	    County administrator
	
	Analyzed decision options
	
	Built consensus
	    Among board members
	    Board of supervisors
	    County administrator
	
	Voted on the option
		Built consensus for support
		
		Voted to participate		

Table A6

Raw Data Matrix: Amount of Time Used by the Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[a]	"I don't think we took an extraordinary amount of time." "It was just a matter of saying yes we can do it. Voting yea or nay, do you want it? So there was no major big discussion or brew ha ha." "Very effectively. We rely very heavily on the recommendations of the superintendent and the people we employ."	"Well, the whole process took such a long time. It started in 1995, then it was 1996 before the General Assembly approved the money for the study. It didn't open until September of 1998." "We were continually getting updates when there was real information. It may have been on the agenda ten or more times. There was never any monumental or marathon type of discussion."	"Well, it didn't really take an awful lot of time." " …the actual amount of time the board discussed this at meetings was about two or three meetings." "It took about ten to fifteen minutes to make the actual decision to participate once we had all the facts."	"Well, it didn't really take – basically it came up and we discussed it. We might have carried it over for a month. We basically discussed it and decided that we were going to try this and just did it." "… we had to deal with it at least two months. Two readings."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member.

Table A6 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Amount of Time Used by the Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[b]	"… so if you consider how many times we considered it between 1993 and the time we took action on the request and a lot of the work that went on in the background regarding this request, it was probably very lengthy. But in this board room maybe five to six hours over a period of time."	"The final decision to sign the commitment agreement did not take very long. I would say about 45 minutes." "Up until that time we had gone through the planning stages, the grant application, presentations, and were constantly updated at the board meetings." "Probably five eight hour days because you are talking months."	"About six months."	"About two months."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member.

Table A6 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Amount of Time Used by the Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM$_c$	"The time factor is probably two or three meetings."	"… within three to four meetings."	"This is an issue that has been before the board a long time." "I would say two or three meetings to make the final decision."	" I would say it took us three or four meetings to adopt. We had to get advice from [b]Robert Frank [attorney for the board], on legal standpoints. We followed that advice."
BM$_d$	"… so we are not talking about a lot of hours. It was presented, we received updates, and we were kept informed so we could discuss and ask questions." "Maybe two or three hours total."	"Well, it took a while longer than the other. "… started in 1995. It took a while to go forth." "It's hard to put a time on it. There were fifteen or more minutes at various meetings depending on the questions."	"We did not spend an awful lot of time. In fact, we may have spent less time." "All of us could see the need." "We probably spent two or three meetings using about ten to fifteen minutes in discussion and asking questions."	"Again, I can remember one meeting when we decided to go with the committee of the board, there was quite a bit of discussion. Maybe an hour at this particular meeting. We needed to know the legality of our decision."
BM$_e$	"Every since I have been on the board we have been working on it." "I came on the board in 1993. … the final decision was made in 1997." "I think it was really [a] cut-and-dried issue. I think we all appreciated the need."	"…. about two or three years. And it just started this year." "Of the two or three years hearing about and discussing the proposal, two or three meetings per year were probably used. Maybe about 10 to 20 minutes per meeting when it was on the agenda."	"We spent about two or three meetings making the actual decision." "The issue had been a concern of the board for several years."	"I believe that [b]William [assistant superintendent] presented it to us. We talked about it." "… it was a change in policy so it took at least two meetings. We had to get legal advice from our attorney."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Robert Frank was the attorney for the school board studied. [c]William Pill was the assistant superintendent for the school division studied.

Table A6 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Amount of Time Used by the Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Super-intend-ent	"This issue was brought before the board for at least five years before the board was able to seriously consider approval and possible funding alternatives." "The actual time used by the board regarding this issue, once the governing board endorsed it and the bill was passed by the General Assembly, was approximately ten to fifteen minutes during the budget finalization process."	"This issue was introduced to our regional superintendents in 1995 by a fellow superintendent." "The planning grant was approved by the General Assembly, and the feasibility study for the region began in the spring or fall of 1996." "The board spent about three meetings discussing the proposal." In actual minutes, I believe the time spent was about 10 to 15 minutes at the meetings when the issue was on the agenda."	"The board spent about three meetings discussing this issue. Not the whole meeting was devoted to this, so about 30 to 40 minutes all total."	"… looking at all of the discussion and review of legal advice from counsel [attorney for the board] … probably about 30 to 40 minutes all total." "It appeared on the agenda at least three to four times throughout the course of time leading up to the actual decision."

(table continues)

[a]Superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A6 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Amount of Time Used by the Board to Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee

Themes	Effective use of time
	
	Before board for a long time
	    Three to five years
	    Discussed at board meetings
	    During budget time
		Lengthy process
		    Planning
		    Resolution
		    Grant application
		    Grant approval
		
		Planning for presentation
		    By staff
		    Two-to-three year process
		
		Board time spent on issue
		    Ten to twenty minutes per meeting
		    Fifteen or more minutes at various meetings
		    Ten to fifteen minutes in about three to four meetings
		    Three or four meetings
			Concern for years
			
			Board time spent on issue
			    Two or three meetings
			    Fifteen to forty minutes at meetings
				Relatively short amount of time
				    Two or three meetings
				    Two or three months
				
				Policy change
				    Two or three meetings

Table A7

Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issues			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[a]	"Ah, well, we always kill a lot of trees. There is always a lot of paper; communication by paper is [based on our] need [for] background information." "Most of our communicating is sitting here one to one." "We pretty much talk it out like civilized people and come to a decision." ".… [[b]William, the assistant superintendent] has a lot of input."	"Just discussing it amongst ourselves and determining there was value to the program." "The communication was verbal and written. It came from the superintendent and [[c]Sallie Joe, the director of special programs]."	"We work very closely with the courts system, social services, and the community services board to bring together all the resources available … ." "The superintendent verbally communicated to the board at our meetings."	"You have to rely on the facts. And if we get something and we are not ready to make a decision on it, the superintendent might say, " Well I recommend that." Well, just because he recommends doesn't mean that we will do it. We have to have time to read the materials and ask questions." "The superintendent, the director of special programs [[c]Sallie Joe], and the assistant superintendent [[b]William] had input. Attorneys [[d]Robert Frank] and [[e]Jan Sue] advised us on the legal issues." "Doc [the superintendent] always likes for these people to come to the board at least once a year on a regular basis like that."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]William Pill was the assistant superintendent of the school division studied. [c]Sallie Joe was the director of special programs for the school division studied. [d]Robert Frank was the attorney for the board of the school division studied. [e]Jan Sue was an attorney for the board of the school division studied.

Table A7 (continued)

<u>Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue</u>

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[b]	"Very important. We had to go to the board of supervisors for the funding, and it was a lot of communications. A lot of people working behind the scenes to get this accomplished." "The superintendent communicated with the board."	"I think a very important role when you consider it started in [XYZ] County. It started with eight divisions and ended up with fifteen." "… we got a copy of the planning application … . They reviewed all of the legal documentation, the forms, the consent."	"Communication was as important on this issue as the others because we rely on the superintendent and his staff to keep us informed on how things are going and what changes need to be made." "And it is through their [superintendent and his staff] communication and presentations with us that it was determined that this facility was the best way to handle alternative ed." "Had we not communicated with each other, and discussed [the information relevant to the issue] how we could we have arrived at a decision, how could we have gotten the program."	"The superintendent communicated with the board. We got advice from our attorneys on any legal issues in setting up this committee." "I believe the director of special programs [[b]Sallie Joe] and the assistant superintendent [[c]William Pill] also verbally shared information with the board on this issue."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Sallie Joe was the director of special programs for the school division studied. [c]William Pill was the assistant superintendent for the school division studied.

Table A7 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM[c]	"First of all we have a communications committee. And here again, the [education association] is instrumental. They have a representative on this committee." "This committee listens to their concerns and they continually put that before us."	"Discussing and talking among each other was really good … ." "If we had not talked about the issue, we would not have been able to clearly understand what was being asked or proposed." "Over the years it was before the board, we talked and asked a lot of questions of the staff." "There was consensus that this was a good thing to do."	"The superintendent was very supportive. We had communications from groups coming to us. And that was verbal." "Sometimes presentations before the board." "Sometimes phone calls between some of us [board members or board member and the superintendent] and sometimes in writing." "Scuttlebutt, in the community … and the parents." "Plenty of communications – we had it."	" Input from the superintendent, VSBA [Virginia School Boards Association], school board policy manual helped us make a decision. From the legal stand point, we followed the advice of our attorneys." "Yes, yes, communication was very important." "You know, certain issues, certain board members are contacted and certain members are not contacted."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member.

Table A7 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM$_d$	"Had it not been for seeing the need and openly discussing the situation with each other, we would not have been able to accomplish that." "By both boards harmoniously, we were able to accomplish what we wanted." "Communication played a great role." "Most of the communications was verbal. But the letters written went to the General Assembly." "We had written information in our board packets."	"Well, we could never have been able to reach a decision without communicating with each other." "It was both, verbally and in written form."	"We communicated with the principals, whole lots of people were involved in communicating. The high school principal, middle school principal, superintendent, and superintendents from other school systems." "Communication played a great role." "Had we not communicated with each other and discussed our problems and other alternatives we would not have been able to make the decision to go with the program that was proposed" "Oh, yes, we had teachers come to the board to talk with us. We talked with those teachers concerning problems that occurred." "One board member who attended a civic meeting with the superintendent shared with the board concerns from this group."	"Again, I can remember one meeting when we decided to go with the committee of the board. There were a lot of questions. There was quite a bit of discussion. Maybe an hour at this particular meeting. We needed to know the legality of our decision."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member.

Table A7 (continued)
Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
BM$_e$	"[[b]Dr. James] the superintendent, [education association] representatives, and some teachers talked to me about this issue." "There was some discussion on the board."	""If there hadn't been communication, we couldn't have known anything." "It was through communication that we got all of the necessary information to see if this would be an effective means of education for our gifted students." "… [[b]Dr. James] the superintendent shared with us all the information … ."	"It's a hundred percent communications all the way around. … right down to communication with the community." "We knew that there were people out there that were thinking we should try to … develop something that would make the situation better for the children."	"Well, I think it is very important … ." "Without communicating orally or in writing, we couldn't have made this decision or any other decision."

(table continues)

[a]BM = board member. [b]Dr. James was the superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A7 (continued)

Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Super-inten-dent	"The [education association] provided information to the board and to me." "Since the decision involved a major commitment of funds for the county, it was important to have open communication with the county government and the school board." "Communication with the representative from VRS [Virginia Retirement System] helped to clarify any concerns of the board regarding benefits and cost." "The communications committee, of which a board member is a member, discussed this matter each year for the past five or more years at budget time."	"Communication was very important in helping the board make its decision on this issue." "The presentations from me, the consultant, and the local director proved to be invaluable in clarifying concerns and answering questions from members of the board." "Discussions among members of the board helped other board members understand the concept and raise concerns that may not have been thought of by other members."	"All members of the board voiced their concern over finding a better alternative for students who needed a more structured learning environment." "Verbal concerns heard from individuals within the community and from a local civic group were also shared with other members of the board." "Communication allowed each member of the board to voice their opinion about the current alternative education setting and the proposal for the regional setting."	"Everyone agreed that too much time was being used by the full board in hearing discipline issues." "Again, as with other decisions, communication between the board members was key in helping them reach their decision on this issue." "As superintendent, I shared information with the board regarding format for the policy, legal responses from counsel, and how other divisions handle discipline issues at the board level." "At least two members of the board had verbal communications with community members that may have had some impact on how we developed the policy and set up the committee."

(table continues)

[a] Superintendent of the school division studied.

Table A7 (continued)
Raw Data Matrix: Role Communication Played in Helping the Board Make a Decision on Each Issue

Source[a]	Issue			
	1 Payment of retirement	2 Regional governor's school	3 Regional alternative school	4 Discipline review committee
Themes	Clarified concerns of board members	Clarified concerns of board members	Clarified concerns of board members	Clarified concerns of board members
	Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information based on questions from Board members County administrator Members of the board of supervisors Representatives from the local education association Citizens Employees	Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information based on questions from Board members Parents of accelerated students	Served as a vehicle for sharing additional information based on questions from Board members Community civic organization Citizens	Provided additional information based on questions from Board members Representatives from local civic organization
	Allowed for interaction [discussion] between Superintendent Board members	Allowed for interaction [discussion] between Superintendent Board members Assistant superintendent	Allowed for interaction [discussion] among Superintendent Board members Other central office staff Citizens Representative from local civic organization	Allowed for interaction [discussion] between Superintendent Board members Assistant superintendent Other central office staff
	Allowed the board to consider alternatives and build consensus	Allowed the board to consider alternatives	Allowed the board to consider alternatives	Allowed the board to consider alternatives

[a]Superintendent and board members.

Appendix B

Content Validation of the Interview Protocol

Content Validation Instrument for the Interview Protocols for School

Board Members and Division Superintendent

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this content validation instrument is to assist the researcher with

the development of questions for an interview guide to be used in interviewing

school board members and a division superintendent. The questions for the

interview guide are designed to gather data on the dynamics of a rural school board

during the decision-making process.

<u>Instructions</u>

<u>Step 1.</u> Please review the items and circle the most appropriate domain for each
item. The domains and definitions are:

<u>Domain</u>	<u>Definition</u>
1. Time	The number of hours or days used to make a decision on a given issue.
2. Information gathering	The process by which the board, individual members of the board, or the superintendent received and shared information on a given issue.
3. Internal forces	Influences from board members or non-board members which had an impact on the decision on the case.

4. External forces

Influences from constituents, professional organizations, governmental statutes, educational boards, and other agencies.

5. Communication

The manner by which information was shared among board members and the superintendent on each issue.

6. Decision-making process

The steps used by the board to reach a decision.

Association Ratings

Step 2. Please indicate how strongly you feel the question or statement is associated with the domain you have selected by circling the number of your response in the column labeled "Association." Use the following scale:

(1) Very weak   (2) Weak   (3) Strong   (4) Very Strong

Clarity Rating

Step 3. In the column labeled "Clarity," please indicate how clear you think the question or statement is. Use the following scale:

(1) Not clear   (2) Somewhat clear   (3) Very clear

Question	Domain	Association	Clarity
1. In terms of hours or days, how long did it take for the board to make a decision on this issue?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Question	Domain	Association	Clarity
2. Tell me how you think the board utilized its time in reaching a decision on this issue?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
3. Tell me how you personally became aware of this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
4. If an individual or group brought the issue to you personally, what was the role of the individual or group in the school or community?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
5. In terms of hours or days, how long did you personally spend on deciding if this issue had to be brought before the school board?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
6. Tell me how you personally and the school board became aware of this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
7. Describe the forces that influenced you personally to take the issue to the school board for action.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Question	Domain	Association	Clarity
8. If a group or individual brought the issue to the attention of the school board, what was the role of the individual or group in the division or the community?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
9. In terms of hours or days, how long did the school board spend on reaching a decision on this issue?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
10. Describe how you think these forces (previously identified) influenced the board in making its decision on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
11. Describe the steps you personally used to decide if this issue needed to be brought to the attention of the school board for a decision.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
12. How did communi-cation play a key role in helping the school board reach a decision on this issue?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Question	Domain	Association	Clarity
13. As superintendent, what was your role in communicating with the school board as it worked to reach a decision on this issue?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
14. Explain how this person (previously identified) communicated with the board on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
15. Describe the forces that influenced the school board in reaching its decision on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
16. Describe the steps the school board used to reach a decision on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
17. What was the role of this person or group (previously identified) in relation to the school board?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
18. Tell me who communicated with the school board while the board was making a decision on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
19. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make a decision on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Question	Domain	Association	Clarity
20. Tell me how you think the forces that you identified influenced the decision the school board reached on this issue.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Table B1
Content Validation of the Interview Protocol: Classification of Items Into Domains by Experts (N=15) and Mean Clarity Rating

Item[a]	Expected Domain	Domains[b]												Clarity
		1		2		3		4		5		6		
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
1	1	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.0
2	1	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.0
3	2	0	0	8	53	0	0	0	0	7	47	0	0	2.5
4	4	0	0	8	53	0	0	7	47	0	0	0	0	2.5
5	1	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.0
6	2	0	0	12	80	0	0	0	0	3	20	0	0	2.6
7	3	0	0	0	0	7	47	8	53	0	0	0	0	2.4
8	2	0	0	0	0	7	47	8	53	0	0	0	0	2.5
9	1	15	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.0
10	4	0	0	0	0	8	53	7	47	0	0	0	0	2.7
11	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100	3.0
12	5	0	0	2	13	0	0	0	0	13	87	0	0	2.9
13	5	0	0	4	27	0	0	0	0	11	73	0	0	2.6
14	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100	0	0	3.0
15	3 or 4	0	0	0	0	8	53	7	47	0	0	0	0	2.4
16	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100	3.0
17	3 or 4	0	0	0	0	9	60	6	40	0	0	0	0	2.6
18	2	0	0	7	47	0	0	0	0	8	53	0	0	2.4
19	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	100	0	0	3.0
20	3 or 4	0	0	0	0	8	53	7	47	0	0	0	0	2.5

[a]The questions are in the content validation instrument in Appendix B

[b]The domains are : 1 Time, 2 Information gathering, 3 Internal forces, 4 External forces, 5 Communication, 6 Decision-making process

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol

School Board Member

Introduction

The purpose of this interview is to collect data from you on how you think

the school board reached its decisions on four selected issues. I will ask you

specific questions about the decision-making process of the board. Depending on

your answer, I may ask follow-up questions to allow me to get a better

understanding of what you are telling me. The division superintendent and I have

identified the cases that I will ask you questions about. I will tell you more about

the identification of the cases in a few minutes.

Identification and Introduction of the Issues

As previously mentioned, the division superintendent and I selected each

case after a review of board minutes and agenda items for the 1996-1997, 1997-

1998, and 1998-1999 school years. The first issue that we will talk about is the

decision by the board to pay the retirement benefit for its employees.

Research question: How did the board members become aware of this issue?
Subsidiary questions:
1. Tell me how the board became aware of this issue.

2. If an individual or group brought the issue to the attention of the board, what was the role of the individual or group in the division or the community?

Research question: What forces influenced the decision reached on this issue?

  Subsidiary questions:
1. Describe the forces that influenced the board in reaching its decision on this issue.
2. Describe the forces that influenced you personally in reaching a decision on this issue.
3. Tell me how you personally think the forces you identified influenced the decision the board reached on this issue.

Research question: What steps did the board use to reach its decision on this issue?

  Subsidiary question:
1. Describe the steps you think the board used to reach its decision on this issue.

Research question: How long did it take the board to make its decision on this issue?

  Subsidiary questions:
1. In terms of hours or days, how much time did the board spend in making its decision on this issue?
2. Tell me how you personally think the board utilized its time in reaching its decision on this issue.

Research question: What role did communication play in helping the board make a decision on this issue?

  Subsidiary questions:
1. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make its decision on this issue.
2. Tell me who communicated with the school board while the board was making a decision on this issue.
3. Explain how this person communicated with the board on this issue.
4. What was the role of this person or group in relation to the school board?

Interview Protocol

Superintendent

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this interview is to collect data from you on how you think

the school board reached its decisions on four selected issues. I will ask you

specific questions about the decision-making process of the board. Depending on

your answer, I may ask follow-up questions to allow me to get a better

understanding of what you are telling me. You and I have identified the cases that I

will ask you questions about. The first issue that we will talk about is the decision

by the board to pay the retirement benefit for its employees.

Questions that were asked the superintendent:
  Research question: How did the superintendent become aware of this issue?
    Subsidiary questions:
        1. Tell me how you became aware of this issue.
        2. If an individual or group brought this issue to you, what was the
            role of the individual or group in the division or community?

    Research question: What forces influenced the decision reached on this
                        issue?
      Subsidiary questions:
          1. Describe the forces that influenced the board in reaching its
              decision on this issue.
          2. Tell me how you personally think the forces you identified
              influenced the decision the bard reached on this issue.

Research question: What steps did the board use to reach its decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. Describe the steps the board used to reach its decision on this issue.

Research question: How long did it take the board to make its decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. In terms of hours or days, how much time did the board spend on reaching a decision on this issue?

Research question: What role did communication play in helping the board make a decision on this issue?

Subsidiary question:

1. Describe the role you think communication played in helping the board make its decision on this issue.
2. As superintendent what was your role in communicating with the school board as it worked to reach a decision on this issue?

VITA

VITA

Randolph Hayes Latimore, Sr. is currently employed by the public schools of Lancaster County Virginia in the capacity of Division Superintendent. He has held various teaching and administrative positions, including elementary and middle school teacher, elementary school principal, middle school principal, and administrative assistant to the superintendent. In addition to the professional positions, the researcher has served as a presenter at middle school conferences and a consultant to other school divisions.

Dr. Latimore earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Social Sciences from Virginia State University, a Master of Education Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study (CAGS) from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

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