CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

We live in a rapidly changing society, which has seen tremendous changes in economic and political systems, health, employment, values, cultural relations, and a host of other issues. We are also part of the technology revolution, which affects everything from the food we eat to the comforts of our home to the decisions we make about the future.

As a result of these changes, society has become more complex and diverse. Our student population is becoming more culturally diverse. There is an increase in the number of immigrants, and the number of students who are undernourished and living in or near poverty. It is imperative that our educational institutions provide the necessary programs and delivery systems to reflect the changes in society and the needs of the students who come to use the system.

One of the most challenging and important tasks confronting school administrators is bringing in teachers who are capable of providing the highest quality educational services now and in the future. In September of 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future published its report, What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future. The commission stated that within a decade every student in America will have access to a competent, caring, qualified teaching force in schools organized for success. The commission issued a challenge to the nation to put America on a path to serious, successful, long-term improvements in teaching and learning, that by the year 2006, (1) all children will be taught by teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and commitment to teach children well; (2) all teachers will have
access to high-quality professional development; and (3) both teachers and principals will be hired and retained based on their ability to meet professional standards of practice.

Responding to the Commission’s report, President Clinton, in his 1997 State of the Union Address, called on the American people to make sure that children in every classroom have a teacher who is talented, dedicated, and well-prepared. This serves to emphasize the importance of persons carrying out the primary responsibilities for the personnel function.

The lack of clearly defined roles and functions of the chief personnel administrator in small school divisions of 5,000 students or less becomes more acute than in larger divisions. As is often the case, the person responsible generally shares personnel duties with other major roles. In the Commonwealth of Virginia, 62.4 percent (83) of the 133 school divisions are in this category as reported in the 1996-1997 Virginia Department of Education Superintendent’s Annual Report. The Virginia Standards of Quality (SOQ), the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), and the Virginia Standards of Accreditation (SOA) will require the state teaching staff of the future to meet higher expectations in achieving math, science, technology goals, and more rigorous graduation requirements, thus making the functions of the chief personnel administrator more important in the performance of the major responsibilities of the position. Graduation standards will heighten the need for better-prepared staff members to help students become successful.

In Virginia, personnel functions are frequently performed by individuals ranging in position from superintendent to office clerk. In far too many cases, these individuals have relatively little training, have been placed in the position that is not their choice, or have come from professions outside of education with little understanding of what is involved with day-to-day operations of the educational process. The state does not require a person performing personnel functions to have a license. Yet, personnel
administrators are the individuals called upon to determine and fulfill personnel needs and maintain and improve services for entire school divisions.

A major component in the successful operation of any organization is personnel management. This aspect of school administration is rapidly becoming one of the more complex administrative functions. In 1911, Taylor called attention to people in the work situation as important factors in production. Taylor became known as the “father of scientific management” following the publication of his major work, *The Principles of Scientific Management*. Over the past several decades, the role of the personnel administrator in public school districts has grown in stature and importance to the total educational program. It is a broad and diverse role that requires the personnel administrator to have a strong understanding of specific expectations as a leader in the district. The pressures of the position are made more complex by the rising accountability standards imposed by public and governmental groups and entities, increased litigation, societal expectations, and the changing needs of the employed workforce of the future.

Personnel administrators are key figures in the effort to improve learning. Their role is to ensure the quality of the division staff. In order to do this, they must understand all accompanying role expectations and be willing to adapt personally and professionally in carrying out required tasks. The administrator cannot act properly without a clear mental and written picture of what the position entails. Professional success depends on the identification and acceptance of the tasks and their implementation.

Seyfarth (1996) emphasized, “No aspect of personnel management is the exclusive province of a single administrator. All administrators are members of the personnel management team” (p. 23). While the whole team is necessary for the performance of a broad range of responsibilities, a key person must serve to oversee their finality. As personnel functions become more sophisticated and complex, small school
divisions without a clearly defined personnel department are increasingly at a disadvantage. The requirements and expectations placed on the personnel role in smaller school divisions are the same as for larger, more diverse and specialized school divisions.

School divisions large enough to maintain a personnel department will generally assign specific personnel responsibilities to administrators within the office. In the absence of a separate personnel department, those responsibilities must be carried out in their entirety by administrators in the division who also possess other important administrative responsibilities. In such cases, it is incumbent upon the superintendent to ensure that the full range of personnel administration responsibilities have been identified and delegated to the appropriate administrators in the school system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the personnel responsibilities and preparation of the person designated with primary responsibility for the personnel function or the superintendent in small school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The study determined which of these responsibilities are performed, shared, or delegated and, if delegated, to whom.

Significance of the Study

The study will contribute information that superintendents and school boards in small school divisions can use to make personnel decisions regarding the hiring of persons to perform the job responsibilities. An examination of the current job training, job responsibilities, educational level, and school division demographics may serve to assist superintendents and school boards in employing a chief personnel administrator who possesses the skills necessary to manage the administrative and other operational duties of the school personnel office. The study will serve as a guide for identifying the
personnel function that should be performed in a small school division. Administrators in small school divisions, who have been assigned the task of carrying out personnel functions, will benefit from a greater understanding of what is involved with those responsibilities, their training requirements, and a minimum educational level requirement. Persons aspiring to the role of a personnel administrator will find the information collected valuable to that decision-making process. Finally, the Virginia Association of School Personnel Administrators (VASPA) and the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) will gain from the contribution of knowledge and understanding in the field through the addition of literature presented for publication in professional journals.

Research Questions

The study examined the following research questions:

1. What is the profile of the superintendent or the person with the primary responsibility for the personnel responsibilities in school divisions of 5,000 students or less?

2. Who performs what personnel responsibilities in school divisions of 5,000 students or less in Virginia?
   a. What is the level of responsibility that technology plays in handling these duties?
   b. What is the extent the responsibility will increase, decrease, or remain the same over the next three to five years?
3. What is the relationship between size of the school division and who performs personnel responsibilities?

4. What is the relationship between wealth of the school division and who performs personnel responsibilities?

Limitations of the Study

The data used in the study were collected through a survey mailed to the superintendents of 83 (62.4%) of the 133 school divisions in Virginia. The accuracy of the data depends upon each school division’s superintendent and staff accurately following the instructions contained within the survey.

While the school personnel function in each school division is basically the same, the terminology is not uniform in the profession or throughout Virginia. Therefore, some questions on the survey may be open to interpretation by the respondents.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions have been used.

**Average Daily Membership (ADM):** This term refers to the average aggregate days of membership as reported to the Virginia Department of Education in March of 1996-1997.

**Local Composite Index:** This term refers to the calculation used to determine the local fiscal ability of the school division. It is used to determined the local share of the Standards of Quality.

**School Personnel Function:** This term refers to the responsibilities that must be performed somewhere in the system if the school division’s mission is to be fulfilled.

**School Personnel Responsibilities:** This term indicates an activity or operation that gives direction to those responsible for the implementation of the responsibility.
Small School Division: This term represents a public school division in Virginia with 5,000 or less (ADM) students.

School Division: This term is used in Virginia to define that area designated by the state as under the supervision of a given local school board.

Overview of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter one contains an introduction, statement of the problem, statement of purpose, significance of the study, definitions, and limitations of the study. Chapter two contains a review of the literature relevant to the profession of school personnel management, how human resources have changed historically, and a description of the role and responsibilities of the personnel function in education. The design and procedures for the research are in chapter three, and the data are described in chapter four. Chapter five contains a summary, conclusions, discussion and recommendations for practice, and suggestions for future avenues of research.