

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The population, the process used to develop the survey and the methods of data collection and analyses are described in this chapter.

Population

The superintendents or persons delegated with primary responsibility for carrying out the personnel function in school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia with 5,000 students or less (ADM) as of the March 1996 were the population in this study. School divisions with more than 5,000 were excluded from the study. This was because in the larger school divisions, the personnel function tends to be more specialized and performed by identified positions. In the smaller divisions, the personnel function is performed more often by the superintendent or by another person whose primary duties have a close relationship with the specific personnel responsibilities. The other person may be an assistant superintendent, personnel director, principal, clerk or secretary, administrator (coordinator, supervisor, curriculum leader), administrative support person (director of finance, business manager, administrative assistant), director of instruction, multi-titled (person who holds multiple titles), or some other person not falling within one of the previous job classifications.

The population was identified from Table 1 of the 1995-1996 Superintendent's Annual Report for Virginia published by the Virginia Department of Education (pp. 1-2). This report indicated that there were 132 school divisions in Virginia and that 83 (62.8%) of them had 5,000 or fewer students. It was confirmed by cross checking the number of school divisions in state in the 1997-1998 Virginia Educational Directory published by the Virginia Department of Education (pp. 6-9) that Colonial Beach Schools was omitted. Therefore, the number of total school divisions in Virginia is 133. This changes the percentage rate of respondent to 62.4 percent. The 60 responding school divisions with their average daily membership as reported by the respondents in March 1997 are listed in Appendix A. Those school divisions with 5,000 students or less (ADM) not responding to the questionnaire are listed in Appendix B.

Virginia was selected as the state in which to conduct the study because of its convenience and the researcher's familiarity with many of the state superintendents, assistant superintendents, and personnel directors. The state was also selected because there are no licensure requirements for school personnel administrators and the findings could have implications for influencing movement in that direction. The findings of this study would have training implications through regional professional development seminars, workshops, and state conferences.

Content Validation of the Survey

A list of 65 job responsibilities as described by the Educational Research Service in cooperation with the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (1994) was used as the basis for identifying the job responsibilities for each personnel function. The ERS job responsibilities were checked for content validity against three noted authors: Castetter (1996), Rebore (1998), and Seyfarth (1996) (see Appendix C). A further check for content validity was conducted with 10 randomly selected personnel administrators in the Hampton Roads areas who are also members of the Tidewater Association of School Personnel Administrators (TASPA). The administrators were asked to check whether they were responsible for each of the 65 items. One hundred percent of the 10 respondents reported they were responsible for 63 of the items. The two responsibilities not held by all of the administrators were developing and distributing an employee newsletter, (80%) and developing and conducting employee attitudes and opinion surveys (70%). The results of the survey confirmed the analysis by the earlier validation (see Appendix D).

Survey Development

A survey was developed by means of a review of available literature pertaining to the school personnel function. The review included such sources as dissertations, professional journals from education associations, books from noted authors in the area of personnel management, and state and regional studies performed by state and

national personnel associations. Job responsibilities were compiled primarily from the Educational Research Services report (Educational Research Services in cooperation with the American Association of School Administrators, 1994) and the textbooks of Castetter (1996), Rebore (1998), and Seyfarth (1996).

After much review of the literature, the job responsibilities were grouped according to categories identified by Castetter (1996). The areas included:

1. Planning: A process undertaken to ensure a school division has the right number people, with the right skills, in the right place and at the right time.
2. Recruitment: The process of not just hiring to fill a position but rather acquiring the number and type of people necessary for the present and future.
3. Selection: A decision-making process in which one individual is chosen over another to fill a position on the basis of how well characteristics of the individual match the requirements of the position.
4. Induction: The process of placing an employee in an assignment and orienting him or her to the school community.
5. Appraisal: The process of evaluating the performance of all employees.
6. Compensation: The process of allocating resources for salaries, wages, benefits, and rewards in a manner that will attract and retain a school staff with skills.
7. Development: The process of teaching a sequence of programmed behaviors through training and education.

8. Justice: The process of making arrangements to protect personnel from threats that affect both their productivity and self-actualization.
9. Continuity: The process of keeping the system continually staffed with competent personnel.
10. Information: The process of using data to perform the operation of the other personnel responsibilities.

The first section of the survey was designed to collect information about the personnel function in school divisions, with a specific emphasis on whether the job responsibility was performed, shared, delegated, or not performed. In each case where the respondent did not solely perform the job responsibility, the respondents were asked to identify the specific job title of the person who did. Data were requested from the person responding whether they foresaw the level of responsibility for the personnel function increasing, decreasing, or not changing over the next three to five years. Finally, the respondents were asked to assess the level of technology used in performing the responsibility as either high, moderate, low or none at all.

The second part of the survey was designed to collect demographic data relative to the population. The third part of the survey was intended to identify the areas of personnel function in which respondents desired additional training. The fourth section of the survey requested the average daily membership and the local composite index of the division. The question on average daily membership was miss-worded as follows: Please list your division average daily attendance (ADM).

Respondents may have reported either average attendance or average daily membership.

A first draft of the completed survey was sent to 10 personnel administrators across the Commonwealth of Virginia representative of school divisions with student populations of varying sizes for assistance in validating the instrument (see Appendix E). Feedback was provided by seven members of the survey group (see Appendix F for results). The dissertation chair and committee provided further suggestions for alterations during the prospectus. The committee chair provided final review and approval of the survey. A copy of the final survey is in appendix G.

Collection of Data

A cover letter (see Appendix H) and survey were mailed to 83 superintendents or persons who were identified by title with the primary responsibility for the personnel function in the selected school divisions. These persons were identified through the 1997-1998 Virginia Educational Directory (Virginia Department of Education, 1997). In an effort to minimize non-response, the researcher included a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the initial mailing. Two follow-up mailings were sent along with phone calls to aggressively encourage non-responding divisions.

The first mailing was conducted on February 12, 1998. Each questionnaire was assigned a number to be used to identify non-respondents. The cover letter provided an explanation of the exact nature of the study along with an emphasis on why it

would be beneficial to each small school division to participate. By March 4, 1998, 28 questionnaires had been returned. This represented a 33.7 percent return rate.

On March 5, 1998, a personal appeal was made to all non-responding school divisions by phone. The non-respondents were asked to fax the information, if that was more convenient. Many had misplaced the original form and requested a second one to be sent to them. This was done the same day. By March 11, 1998, a total of 54 (65 %) questionnaires had been received.

A second mailing was sent on March 13, 1998, to non-respondents regardless of the reason provided for non-receipt of the questionnaire. A third round of phone calls was made the week of March 16-20, 1998, to those not responding by March 17, 1998.

A third mailing followed during the week of March 30, 1998, through April 3, 1998, for respondents who had not returned the questionnaire by March 27, 1998. By April 6, 1998, six additional questionnaires had been received. Thus, the final response to the survey was 60 (72.3%).

The survey return rate may be attributed to a number of factors. Dillman (1978) noted that there is no adverse effect on the response rate for mail questionnaires up to 12 pages or those that contain less than 125 items. The number of responses requested for this survey were between 234 and 277. Other factors were the time of the year; many non-respondents expressed how busy they were and that there attention was on the budget process.

Method of Analysis

All data provided by respondents were entered into an Excel program for later loading into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This is a descriptive study that used frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations in tables to show results.

Following the description of the school divisions and the respondents using frequencies, percentages, means, medians, standard deviations, and ranges, the data were arranged in tables by item to show (1) whether the job responsibility was performed, shared, delegated, or not performed; (2) the title of the person responsible for the job responsibility; (3) the extent of change anticipated over the next three (3) to five (5) years; and (4) the level of technology currently used in performing the job responsibility. The data were then disaggregated in tables to show the relationships of school division wealth, respondent education, and school division size to the person responding to the survey.

Summary

The methodology used in the completion of this study was described in this chapter. Attention was given to the population of interest in the study, survey development, collection of data, and the procedure used to prepare and analyze the data. Results are presented in Chapter IV.