

OPINIONS AND USE OF CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCILS

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The use of citizens advisory councils in vocational agriculture has been in existence for many years. Many vocational agriculture teachers have found the knowledge and expertise of lay citizens to be helpful. A citizens advisory council established and well maintained will be a vital tool to each teacher and program.

The use of citizens advisory councils in Mississippi has been encouraged through policy since the passage of the 1968 amendments to the Vocational Education Act of 1963. The study being reported was designed to determine vocational agriculture teacher's opinions of and use of citizens advisory councils in Mississippi.

Methodology

A questionnaire consisting of three sections labeled "biographical," "general," and "citizens advisory council activities" was constructed, reviewed, and pre-tested. After revisions, a random sample of 100 Mississippi vocational agriculture teachers was drawn and questionnaires were mailed to each teacher in the sample.

Seventy-nine percent of the questionnaires were returned after two attempts to collect data from non-respondents. Data received were transferred to code sheets and analyzed by computer.

Results

Chi square analyses were used to determine whether or not significant differences existed between teachers who had councils and those who did not. No significant differences were shown in the independent variables of age, race, years of teaching experience, educational level, number of teachers in the department, type of school (area vocational center or comprehensive high school), and rural/urban characteristics of the area.

Analysis of variance was used to determine whether or not the independent variables significantly influenced the number

of meetings per year of the councils and the number of members per council. In both cases, no statistically significant differences were observed.

Other analyses revealed that seventy-two percent of the teachers had a citizens advisory council. These councils averaged two meetings per year, with an average membership of five.

The twenty-five vocational agriculture teachers or twenty-eight percent who reported they did not have a citizens advisory council were asked to indicate their reasons for not having one. The reasons most often reported are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

REASONS FOR NOT HAVING A CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Reason	Percent of Teachers*
County Board of Education serves the same purpose	27.2
New program, council not yet organized	22.7
Do not understand the purpose of advisory councils	13.6
Do not understand how to organize councils	9.0
Not approved by school principal	9.0
Not essential to my program	9.0
Prospective members are too busy to participate	4.5
County Board of Education will not approve	4.5
Have not had time to organize a council	4.5

*Percentages are based on respondents who did not have an organized council.

The last section of the questionnaire was designed to report how the vocational agriculture teachers used their citizens advisory councils. The teachers were asked to check each activity

the advisory council had been involved in during the past year and, on a one-to-five scale, rate the benefit of the activity to the program. A rating of one indicated that the activity was not beneficial to the vocational agriculture program, while a rating of five indicated that the activity was extremely beneficial. The activities most vocational agriculture teachers had their citizens advisory councils involved in are reported in Table 2.

The mean rating of the degree of benefit for the twenty-five activities ranged from 1.7 to 3.3. Therefore, the vocational agriculture teachers as a group felt that none of the activities fell into the "very beneficial" or "extremely beneficial" categories. It should also be noted that some of the activities are not generally recommended as being advantageous.

Summary and Conclusions

Data reported by the participants and analyzed by the researchers may be summarized as follows:

1. Seventy-two percent of the respondents had citizens advisory councils. This means that twenty-eight percent of the teachers of vocational agriculture in Mississippi are not taking advantage of some of the best help and advice available to them. Each vocational agriculture program must be based on planning which involves local community and business input.
2. Many of the teachers who used advisory councils had two or less meetings per year, which may indicate less than optimum involvement of the lay public.
3. The data indicated that a variety of independent variables (biographical data) did not significantly influence whether or not teachers had organized citizens advisory councils, the number of meetings per year, or the average number of members in a council.
4. The teachers indicated a variety of reasons for not having advisory councils. Many of the reasons revealed a lack of competence in the use of advisory councils and/or attitudes not conducive to effective use of councils.
5. Many teachers saw little benefit in advisory council involvement in a number of activities. This could indicate that learning experiences which might be

Table 2

MEAN RATING OF THE BENEFIT OF ACTIVITIES OF CITIZENS
ADVISORY COUNCILS BY VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE TEACHERS

Activity	Mean*
Assisting with the conducting of a survey	3.3
Determining the needs of my program	3.3
Influencing people	3.3
Publicizing my program	3.3
Making recommendations relative to program development	3.0
Studying the problems concerning vocational agriculture	3.0
Uniting the community behind a project	3.0
Helping obtain equipment	2.9
Determining employment opportunities	2.7
Improving communications between the board and taxpayers	2.7
Independent reporting to the public	2.7
Helping obtain supplies	2.6
Serving as speakers for classes or banquets	2.5
Recommending what to teach	2.4
Serving as chaperones	2.4
Assisting with the conducting of a survey	2.4
Recommending supervised occupational experience stations	2.3
Fund raising	2.2
Serving as judges in contests	2.0
Serving as supervised occupational experience stations	2.0
Assisting with training of judging teams	2.0
Policy development	2.0
Political concerns or affairs	2.0
Personnel matters of the school	1.9
Serving as substitute teachers	1.7

*Based on: 1 = not beneficial; 2 = of little benefit; 3 = beneficial; 4 = very beneficial; 5 = extremely beneficial.

conducive to positive attitude formation have not been sufficiently presented to teachers in pre- and in-service education programs.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected and the judgement of the researcher, the following recommendations are presented.

1. Teacher preparation programs in agricultural education should include necessary learning experiences to ensure that teachers know how to organize and use citizens advisory councils effectively.
2. Teacher preparation programs in agricultural education should have as a goal the development of positive attitudes toward advisory councils on the part of current and prospective teachers. Vocational agriculture teachers should believe that advisory councils are beneficial and, therefore, essential rather than just knowing that they are required.
3. Inservice educators, including state supervisory staff and teacher educators, should provide assistance when and where needed to help teachers organize and effectively use advisory councils.

Reference

Faulkenbery, J. David. "An Investigation of Vocational Agriculture Teacher's Opinions of and Use of Citizens Advisory Councils." Unpublished master's thesis, Mississippi State University, 1976.

NEW BUSINESS MANAGER

Bennie L. Byler has been named Business Manager for *The Journal* effective January, 1978. This position was approved by the Editing-Managing Board in December, 1977. Dr. Byler, formerly of Iowa State University, is a member of the faculty in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Mississippi State University. All subscriptions, address changes, and other correspondence regarding business affairs of *The Journal* should be mailed to:

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