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Level of Agricultural Education Advisory Council Implementation in Idaho Secondary Agricultural Education Programs

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Abstract

Advisory councils are community-specific and are major components of agricultural education programs. This descriptive study was conducted to further strengthen what is known about advisory councils and provide a basis for continued improvement in local programs. The specific purpose of the research study was to describe how Idaho agricultural education teachers perceived and used agricultural education advisory councils. Findings included that 90% (n=85) of Idaho agricultural education programs currently had an advisory council. Overall, respondents had positive perceptions of advisory councils, but felt that the opportunity exists for the advisory council to have more influence on the program. The notion that the agriculture teacher is the leader of the program's advisory council was also expressed. Future research is recommended to investigate the barriers to increasing the advisory council's influence and ways to enhance the role of the advisory council in the program. In addition, professional development programs that share best practices on advisory councils should be developed to assist teachers in increasing the effectiveness of their local program advisory councils.

Keywords: advisory councils; stakeholder support; program planning; agricultural education

"One of the most important characteristics of a local agricultural education program is the interaction between the program and the community served by the school" (Talbert, Vaughn, Croom, & Lee, 2007, p. 122). The quote taken from *Foundations of Agricultural Education* supports a common research-based belief of agricultural education instructors and teacher educators alike: Community support for agricultural education is vital to program quality and teacher effectiveness (Talbert et al., 2007; Roberts & Dyer, 2004). The belief that community support is a key component of successful programs stretches well beyond the boundaries of agricultural education and highlights the need for school wide community-school partnerships (Decker & Decker, 2003).

In agricultural education, advisory councils are the entities that bridge this gap between the community and the local school. Advisory councils, also known as advisory committees or boards, are a selected group of business, community, and school stakeholders who provide input on the planning, development, implementation, operations, and evaluations of a comprehensive agricultural education program (Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, & Ball, 2008). For the purpose of this study, an advisory council is not an FFA Alumni or other support group that was formed solely to

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raise funds for the program and FFA chapter. With time and effort, advisory councils can be effective in a program (Decker & Decker, 2003).

Decker and Decker (2003) stated, "a potential problem is that while the community's cooperation and collaboration are needed, they may not be easy to get" (p. 27). While this statement was made to blanket all school and community partnerships, research in agricultural education indicates that community cooperation is also a concern in the discipline. Dormody, Seevers, and Clason (1996) conducted a study on the teacher perceptions of adult organizations in secondary agricultural education. Part of the study was to determine the number of programs that utilized an advisory council nationwide. Of the purposeful sample of 218, 90% of the local agricultural education programs nationwide had an advisory council. Dormody et al. (1996) also found that advisory councils advised agricultural teachers on course content, assessing equipment and facility needs, and evaluating the agricultural education program 90% of the time.

Studies on individual states resulted in varying degrees of advisory council presence in agricultural education programs. Whaley and Sutphin (1987) found that only 77% of California agricultural education programs had an advisory council, while the remaining 23% were functioning without one and were not complying with the state standards. The researchers also reported that the advisory councils were composed of five to ten members and held two to four meetings annually. The advisory councils were effectively used for curriculum development, management of facilities, equipment selection and use, program evaluation and articulation with the school science curriculum (Whaley & Sutphin, 1987). While the study is dated, the results provided direction for future studies in advisory council research.

Two recent studies that were used extensively in the creation of the current research were conducted in Texas (Barbour, 2010) and Pennsylvania (Foster, Masser, & Sankey, 2012). Both studies sought to identify the utilization and perceptions of advisory councils in their respective states. Barbour (2010) focused on advisory council use by Texas agricultural education programs. With 1037 agriculture programs in Texas, a total of 278 were included in the sample for the study. Of the 162 programs that responded, 57% did not have an advisory council in place. Barbour recommended that advisory councils continue to serve as a communication link between the program and the community and to evaluate the program (Barbour, 2010).

The 2011 study conducted by Foster, Masser, and Sankey (2012), which included 171 Pennsylvania agricultural educators, found that approximately 90% of the programs had an advisory council in place. On average, 11 members composed the advisory council and two meetings were held annually. The highest areas of influence were found to be the following: identifying the equipment, tools, and supplies needed for the program; reviewing courses of study; acting as a communication link; and evaluating the agricultural program. Based on the studies conducted in California, Texas, and Pennsylvania, the current study was designed to further the line of inquiry and understanding of advisory council utilization.

A review of related literature supports a continued focus on the in-service needs of teachers in the area of community support and advisory councils (Boone & Boone, 2007; Sorensen, Tarpley, & Warnick, 2010), which is particularly a concern for new and beginning teachers (Garton & Chung, 1996; Joerger, 2002; Layfield & Dobbins, 2002; Myers, Dyer, & Washburn, 2005). Cited studies above indicated that advisory council utilization and implementation varied across the nation, and that professional development on advisory councils has been inconsistent. Legislation in many states mandates the use of advisory councils in secondary agricultural education programs. Idaho requires that an advisory council be in place and meet regularly to discuss the planning and evaluation of the program (Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education, 2013). Without documentation of an advisory council meeting, Idaho agricultural education programs will not be approved, making them ineligible for state and federal funding.

Priority 5 and 6 of the 2011-2015 National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Education are addressed in this study. Priority 5 focuses on effective teaching and indicators of assessing the current state of these characteristics. Community support is vital to a

successful program so findings could assess the current state of community support in Idaho agricultural education programs. The findings offer potential on insight in fostering a positive collaboration between the agricultural program and the community, coinciding with the objectives of Priority 6 (Doerfert, 2011).

Conceptual Framework

The program planning process in agricultural education involves input from a wide variety of outside sources. As depicted in Figure 1, many of the influences include stakeholders in the program that are there to provide support and guidance. There is no starting point in the process but rather each component adds input at the same time that is relevant to each situation (Caffarella, 2002).

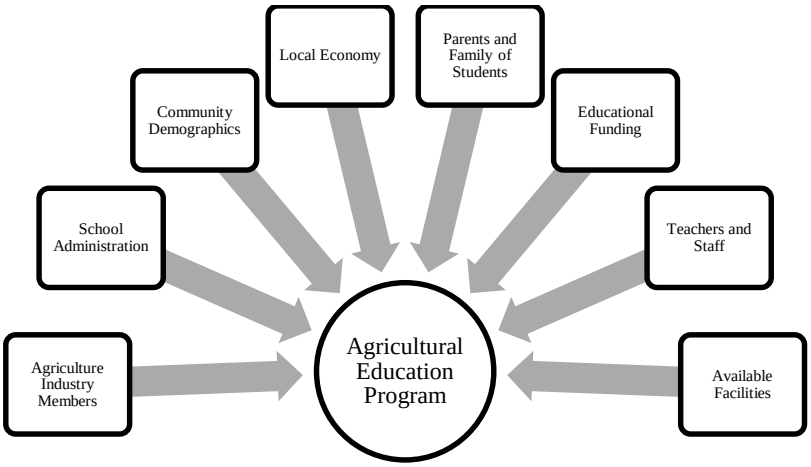

Figure 1. Interactive Model of Program Planning as it Relates to Secondary Agricultural Education Programs

Caffarella's (2002) Interactive Model of Program Planning encompasses many ideas from previous models of program planning. What sets the model apart is how the model is "interactive and comprehensive; people and places are acknowledged as important in the planning process; differences among cultures are taken into account in the planning process; and practitioners find the model useful and therefore a practical tool" (Caffarella, 2002, p. 20). The model has no real beginnings or ends and focuses on the influence people have on the program planning process. Decker and Decker (2003) stated how program planning that involves the community is a two way process where,

> diverse stakeholders in public education—students, teachers, school administrators, parents, business people, community groups and organizations, and members of the community—must be involved as participants, not merely as audiences, in discussions and actions on behalf of school improvement, increased student achievement, and strengthened families (p. 105).

The Interactive Model of Program Planning also encompasses the nonlinear approach that the program planning often takes. Instead of addressing one item at a time, program planners often work with a number of components of the model at the same time and in no particular order. The differences included in the model link it to the program planning organizational structure of Idaho agricultural education programs. According to Decker and Decker (2003), the individuals involved in program planning should be representative of the community. Each program is able to incorporate individuals that are represented of the community by using this model.

Purpose and Research Objectives

Advisory councils are essential for the operation and annual program approval of all Idaho agricultural education programs. In an attempt to build upon the previous research and educational policy, the purpose of the survey research was to describe how Idaho agricultural education teachers perceived and used agricultural education advisory councils. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. Determine the number of agricultural education programs that have active advisory councils.
2. Describe the composition of agricultural education advisory councils.
3. Describe the utilization of agricultural education advisory councils.
4. Describe agricultural educator perceptions of advisory council utilization, composition, and improvement.

Methods

The population of the study included secondary agricultural education instructors in Idaho. A census was conducted and no sampling procedures were employed; thus the results of the study should not be generalized beyond the population. A valid teacher directory was obtained from the agricultural education department at the University of Idaho and checked for accuracy. The resulting population was 119 agricultural educators, representing 82 different programs statewide. Every teacher was included in the study, including those in multiple teachers programs since part of the study involved perceptions of agricultural educational advisory councils. The study received approval from the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board prior to data collection.

The procedures outlined by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) served as the methodological framework for this descriptive study. The online survey tool *Qualtrics* was used for the participant notification and data collection process. All participants received a pre-notice email one week prior to the launch of the study. The following week, all participants were sent a confidential link to the online questionnaire via email. Four follow-up emails were sent to encourage participants to provide their responses. To increase the response rate, follow-up phone calls were made. Of the 119 participants, 95 responded to the questionnaire, resulting in an 80% response rate. The data were coded, compiled and analyzed using The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The research questionnaire was modified from previous studies in Texas (Barbour, 2010) and Pennsylvania (Foster et al., 2012). The questionnaire was modified to align with the objectives and agricultural education program of Idaho for this study. The first of these changes was that clarification was added to the beginning of the questionnaire, providing a definition of what an active advisory council was and was not in the context of the study. Additional items were also added to gain more information on the officer structure of the advisory council and to better describe the teacher perceptions of advisory councils. The resulting questionnaire was composed of nominal and summated scale items. Three summated scales were used to operationalize the three constructs of the study: current level of advisory council influence on the program as perceived by the agriculture teacher; the level of influence the advisory council should have on the program as perceived by the agriculture teacher; and agriculture teacher perceptions of agricultural education advisory councils.

Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was given to a panel of experts in the field of agricultural education to check for content validity. Cognitive interviews were also conducted with current and past agricultural educators as a similar population as the study's participants and who were not included in the study to provide face validity. According to Dillman et al. (2009), cognitive interviews allow the researcher to develop an understanding of how each question is being

interpreted, indicating if the participant is realizing the intent of the item. Appropriate changes were made to improve clarity.

To ensure reliability due to slight modifications of the instrument and being unsure if geographic area impacted population responses, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study was conducted in Washington because the population of agriculture teachers was deemed similar to the population included in the current study. Using SPSS, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed to measure internal consistency and test for reliability of the three constructs (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the constructs were as follows: the current level of advisory council influence on the program as perceived by the agriculture teacher was equal to .89; the level of influence the advisory council should have on the program as perceived by the agriculture teacher was equal to .92; and agriculture teacher perceptions of agricultural education advisory councils was equal to .70. All three reliability coefficients exceeded the acceptable levels to indicate the data should be reliable (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The data analysis and reporting was based on the recommendations of Boone and Boone (2012) for scale-type data.

Results

Data collection yielded a response rate of 80%. Since a response rate greater than 75% was received, no further attempts were made by the researchers to address non-response error (Ary et al., 2006, p. 438; Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001; Tuckman, 1999, p. 267). The results are reported in order of the matching objectives that guided the study. A post hoc reliability coefficient was conducted on the 16-item construct on teacher perceptions of advisory councils to check for internal consistency on the target population. A Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .92 was found, which increased from the pilot study and exceeds the acceptable minimum for attitudinal research (Ary et al., 2006; Hair et al., 2006).

Objective One- Determine the number of active agricultural education advisory councils supporting agricultural education programs

Of the 95 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 89.5% (n = 85) indicated that they had an active advisory council in place for their program. The remaining 10.5% (n = 10) of respondents indicated that no active advisory council was in place. The 10 participants indicated the barriers to implementing an advisory council in their program. The top three barriers were: the instructor has not had time to establish an advisory council; the program is new and an advisory council has not yet been established; or another entity served the same purpose.

The number of programs with active advisory councils was also analyzed since teachers from multiple programs were all included in the study. With 82 programs in the state, 73 had at least one teacher respond to the questionnaire. Of the 73 responding programs, 87.6% (n = 64) indicated that an advisory council was in place with the remaining 12.4% (n = 9) indicating that no advisory council was in place. On two occasions, teachers from the same program reported opposite responses, with one teacher indicating an active advisory council was in place while the other indicated that an advisory council was not currently present for the program.

Objective Two- Describe the composition of agricultural education advisory councils of agricultural education programs

Only those participants who indicated that an advisory council was present answered the items pertaining to advisory council composition. The most frequent council size consisted of seven total members, six voting members and one non-voting (ex-officio) member.

The members of the council consisted of both community members and school administration. The top ten individuals that served on the advisory council are depicted in Table 1. Participants were asked to select all responses that applied to their advisory council.

Table 1

Top Ten School Administration and Community Member Roles Most Frequently Represented on the Agricultural Education Advisory Councils (n = 82)

Member Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Representatives of Local Agriculture Industries	78	95
Parents of Current Students	64	78
Parents of Past Students	59	72
Representatives of Local Non-Agriculture Industries	48	58
Former Students	43	52
School Personnel	32	39
FFA Alumni Members	31	38
School Principal	22	27
School Board Members	16	20
University/College Representatives	14	17

Note. Represents councils who have this role present on the council. For example, 95% (*n* = 78) of the 82 respondents indicated that representatives of local agriculture industries were represented on their advisory council. Other roles that are represented were selected by less than 10% of the respondents and are not summarized in table.

Objective two also addressed advisory council officer structure and leadership roles. Of the 82 respondents, 46% (*n* = 38) indicated that there were officers present. The 38 respondents with officers indicated all offices that were represented on the council. The results were as follows: president/chair (*n* = 37), secretary (*n* = 34), vice-president/vice-chair (*n* = 16), treasurer (*n* = 10), and president-elect (*n* = 3). The remaining 54% (*n* = 44) respondents indicated that officers were not in place on the council. For the leadership roles of the advisory council, the agriculture instructor was most frequently selected for the following roles on the advisory council: recruiting new members (96.3%, *n* = 79); preside over the advisory council meeting (48.5%, *n* = 48); record official meeting minutes (59.8%, *n* = 49); and prepare the meeting agenda (74.4%, *n* = 61).

Finally, 78% (*n* = 64) of the respondents indicated that their program did not have term length rules for the advisory council. The remaining 22% (*n* = 18) reported that term length rules were in place. The most frequent term length was three years and the members were eligible to serve multiple, subsequent terms.

Objective Three- Describe the utilization of agricultural education advisory councils of agricultural education programs

Those individuals who indicated that an advisory council was present answered the items used to address objective three. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of advisory council meetings held per year. The most common responses were that one (n = 30) or two (n = 30) meetings were held annually. The median response was that two meetings were held annually, ranging from one meeting every two years to nine meetings per year.

In describing the program of work utilized with their advisory councils, 51% (n = 42) of participants indicated that there was a program of work or other guiding document in place for the advisory council. The remaining 49% (n = 40) responded that no program of work or guiding document was in place. Similarly, 34.9% (n = 29) of the respondents with an advisory council present indicated that a constitution/bylaws was in place for the advisory council, with the remaining 54 respondents indicating that the advisory council was functioning without a constitution/bylaws.

Respondents were also asked to indicate whether or not the school board approved the advisory council. Of the 80 individuals that responded to the item, 16 indicated that the school board approved the advisory council. The remaining 64 (80%) of respondents specified that the school board did not approve the advisory council.

Of the participants with an advisory council in place, 34.5% (n = 29) indicated that the council also served as the program's FFA Alumni, parent support group, livestock show board, fundraising group, or other entity. The remaining 55 respondents reported that the advisory council did not serve multiple purposes.

As summarized in Table 2, the perceived influence of the advisory council by respondents as well as the amount of influence the advisory council should have on the program as perceived by respondents was collected to describe if the advisory councils are influencing the program in adequate ways. The top five areas with the highest level of current influence are bolded in Table 2. Respondents felt that the advisory council should have more influence on the program in 12 of the 14 areas.

Included in Table 2 are also the mean discrepancy scores between the levels of influence the advisory council currently had as perceived by the teacher verses the amount of influence the advisory council should have on the program. The comparison between the two items summarizes the difference between perceived level of influence and the level of influence teachers felt the council should have on the program. The overall mean for the current level of advisory council influence was 50.9 (SD = 12.6) and the overall mean for the level of influence the advisory council should have on the program was 55.6 (SD = 11.1). The difference between the level of influence the advisory council should have, as perceived by the agriculture teacher, and the current level of influence the advisory council had on the program was 4.7.

Table 2

Rank Order of Perception Discrepancies between the Influence that SHOULD be present and Influence Currently Present by the Advisory Council

Rank[a]	Program Areas	Level of Influence Council CURRENTLY Has[b]		Level of Influence Council SHOULD Have[b]		Mean Discrepancy[c]
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
1	Hiring new instructors or teachers	30.9	28.7	44.4	26.3	13.5
2	Assisting with Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) program activities (i.e. Placement, supervision, etc.)	45.7	28.9	57.1	27.8	11.4
3	Providing recommendations to the local governing school board	**55.6**	29.5	66.0	28.3	10.4
4	Acting as a communication link between the general public and the program	**68.0**	23.5	77.5	24.2	9.5
5	Approval of working, travel, or other budget funds	20.4	19.7	27.2	22.0	6.8
6	Identifying the facility needs	**58.2**	24.2	64.9	21.3	6.7
7	Identifying the equipment, tools, and supplies needed for the program	55.1	25.4	61.5	25.3	6.4
8	Reviewing instructional materials	41.0	27.1	46.5	24.8	5.5
9	Approving courses of study	49.7	25.4	54.9	24.3	5.2
10	Reviewing courses of study for content relevance and accuracy	52.3	27.3	57.0	26.6	4.7

Table 2 continues

Table 2 Continued

Rank[a]	Program Areas	Level of Influence Council CURRENTLY Has[b]		Level of Influence Council SHOULD Have[b]		Mean Discrepancy[c]
		M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
11	Assisting with FFA Chapter activities	55.4	29.5	57.0	28.6	1.6
12	Determining courses to be offered	**56.7**	19.7	57.2	21.6	0.5
13	Evaluating the agricultural program	55.0	26.4	54.2	27.0	-0.8
14	Determining the objectives of the agriculture program	**57.6**	20.7	54.4	21.8	-3.2

Note. a: The items are ranked from highest discrepancy score to the lowest. b: Means are based on a 100 point summated scale, ranging from 0 = No Influence to 100 = Extreme Influence. c: Differences represent the mean level of influence of what councils should have on the program minus the mean level of influence of what councils currently do have on the program.

The top five items with the highest discrepancy between the amount of influence that the council should have and the amount of influence the council has were hiring new instructor or teachers, assisting with SAE program activities, providing recommendations to the local governing school board, acting as a communication link between the general public and the program, and approval of working, travel, or other budget funds

The final item addressed how advisory council meetings and functions were funded in Idaho. Sixty-two (75.6%) participants that had an advisory council present in the program specified that that advisory council operated without any funds. The remaining 20 respondents indicated that the advisory council did receive funds to conduct activities. Fourteen of the 20 indicated that the advisory council raised its own funds through the use of auctions, events, or collaborative events with the FFA Alumni chapter for the program. Four of the 20 selected that the funds came from the FFA chapter funds. The final two answered that funds came from the general school and program funds.

Objective Four- Describe agricultural educator perceptions of advisory council utilization, composition, and improvement

A 100-point summated scale ranging from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 100 = Strongly Agree was used to measure the construct on the Idaho agricultural education teacher perceptions of advisory councils. Sixteen items operationalized the construct. The overall mean score for the summated scale was 69.6, ‘Agree’ on the 100-point summated scale. The mean scores for each item are summarized in Table 3 and are ranked from highest to lowest level of agreement.

Table 3

Rank Order of Teacher Perceptions of Advisory Council Characteristics

Rank[a]	Item	*M*[b]	*SD*
1	The members of an agricultural education advisory council should represent the local industries found in the school district.	83.1	15.5
2	Communication between the agricultural science and technology instructor(s) and the advisory council members is important.	82.9	19.3
3	I have a positive perception of agricultural education advisory councils.	81.1	20.9
4	Every program should have an advisory council.	78.2	24.2
5	An advisory council adds stability that protects the agricultural program during school and administration changes	77.9	22.5
6	Advisory councils are important to the overall success of agricultural programs.	73.5	21.9
7	I could use my advisory council more than I do currently.	72.8	22.2
8	A written set of goals and objectives is needed to guide the activities of the advisory council.	70.3	22.5
9	It is the agricultural science and technology teacher's responsibility to ensure that the advisory council meets regularly.	68.7	24.7
10	The recommendations made by the advisory council should result in changes to the agriculture program.	63.2	20.4
11	An FFA chapter will constantly improve because of the work done by an agricultural education advisory council.	62.5	25.1
12	An SAE program will constantly improve because of the work done by an agricultural education advisory council.	57.0	25.5
13	It is the advisory council's obligation to present recommendations or the agricultural program to the school board.	56.7	27.0
14	Advisory councils should be used to determine curriculum decisions.	55.3	21.7

Table 3 Continues

Table 3 Continued

Rank[a]	Item	*M*[b]	*SD*
15	Changes to the agricultural education program should originate from advisory council recommendations.	54.6	21.6
16	Advisory councils are not helpful in conducting a successful agricultural education program.	24.0	21.0

Note. a: The items are ranked from highest to lowest based on the item mean. b: Averages are based on a 100 point summated scale ranging from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 100 = Strongly Agree. The identifiers were as follows: 0 – 19 = Strongly Disagree, 20 – 39 = Disagree, 40 – 59 Neither Agree nor Disagree, 60 – 79 = Agree, and 80 – 100 Strongly Agree.

Discussion and Implications

The results were consistent with prior research conducted across the nation. Specifically, approximately 90% of the respondents and 87.6% of programs indicated that an active advisory council was in place, which aligns with the nationwide average as determined by Dormody et al. (1996), as well as the Pennsylvania study (Foster et al., 2012). Even though approximately 90% of Idaho agricultural education programs had an advisory council, community support is a vital aspect of every program and should be included in every effective program (Decker & Decker, 2003; Roberts & Dyer, 2004; Whaley & Sutphin, 1987). Those programs that do not have an advisory council in place are also not in compliance with the state standards and therefore, funding may be in jeopardy (Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education, 2013). Programs without an advisory council face the threat of operating without funding as well as the loss of research-based benefits that community support can offer.

Teachers from two programs reported conflicting information about the status of their program's advisory council. This anomaly suggests that teachers have varying opinions on whether or not the program advisory council was active. It also suggests that teachers do not often discuss the program's advisory council, implying that the advisory council is not at top priority of the program.

The barriers to implementation were associated with the fact that the teacher did not have time to organize an advisory council yet or that the program was new and was organizing a council. Unlike the barriers reported by Foster et al. (2012), none of the respondents indicated that an advisory council was not needed or that the program was not approved by the state. Rather, the respondents indicated that they planned to develop an advisory council in the near future. These results are positive and predict that all programs are attempting to establish an advisory council, even if one is not current in place to guide the program.

In terms of the composition of Idaho agricultural education advisory councils, individuals from both the community and school served as members on the council, which was most frequently composed of seven members. Representatives of local agriculture industries, parents of current students, parents of past students, representatives of non-agriculture industries and former students comprised the top five stakeholders present on the council. The inclusion of a variety of stakeholders is consistent with Caffarella (2002), which identified the important role individuals have on the program planning process. Also, Decker and Decker (2003) highlighted how advisory councils should involve a cross-section of the school and community, but remain a manageable size.

Interestingly, half of the advisory councils had a structured set of officers to guide the council. The agriculture teacher was selected most often for recruiting new advisory council members, presiding over the meetings, recording official minutes, and preparing the meeting agenda. The data brings up the question of: who leads the advisory council, the members or the agricultural teacher? Furthermore, will an advisory council continue to exist if the instructor is no longer present? There are unsettling indications that advisory councils may only be present solely because they are required by the state and not because of the benefits cooperation between community stakeholders and the program can offer. In this case, advisory councils might not gather the opinions and recommendations of the community on the various aspects of the program.

The Idaho Division of Professional and Technical Education (2013) outlines the necessary component of a program that must be met to be an approved program and received state funding. In regards to advisory council use, programs meet this requirement if, "the program has a diverse business and community advisory committee that meets regularly to provide input on program improvement, curriculum and work-based experiences. Minutes are kept" (p. 2). Unlike the requirements in some states, there is no set number of meetings that must be held. The researchers concluded that one meeting per year was the most common, with the median being two meetings. With only one or two meetings occurring per year, the researchers question if the advisory council is in place only as a compliance item or if teachers value the meetings with the community stakeholders.

Decker and Decker (2003) stated that advisory councils should "state the goals clearly and precisely" (p. 128). The goals provide a distinct roadmap that can be followed by the advisory council and serve as a guiding entity, yet only 51% (n = 42) of respondents had a program of work or other guiding force, which is consistent with research conducted in Pennsylvania (Foster et al., 2012). Similarly, only 20% of the programs with an advisory council had a constitution/bylaws, often of which is used to clearly outline organization and officer duties, goals, and procedures.

Potential exists that agricultural education programs are not capitalizing on the benefits a clear vision and explicit framework a program of work and constitution/bylaws can offer. Teachers did respond in agreement to the questionnaire item, "a written set of goals and objectives is needed to guide the activities of the advisory council". The discrepancy with the number of councils being guided by a written set of goals and procedures and the belief that council these items are needed could indicate a need for further professional development, research into advisory board implementation, or that teachers are attempting to implement more guiding documents but may not have achieved this at the time of the study.

Respondents also indicated that the school board did not approve 80% of the advisory councils. Advisory councils are designed to provide recommendations to the board and to serve as an official steering group for the program (Decker & Decker, 2003; Idaho Division of Professional-Technical Education, 2013; Whaley & Sutphin, 1987). Without the approval of the school board, the advisory council could be viewed as a booster organization and lose the influential power it was designed to offer to the agricultural education program.

Advisory councils were reported to have the highest level of influence on acting as a communication link between the general public and the program, identifying facility needs, determining the objectives of the agriculture program, determining courses to be offered, and providing recommendations to the local school board. When reviewing data on the level of influence the advisory council possesses versus the level of influence it should have, agricultural educators desired more influence for their advisory council on 12 of the 14 items. The overall mean for the level of influence the advisory council should have on the program (M = 55.6, SD = 11.1) was also higher than the current level of influence (M = 50.9, SD = 12.6) as perceived by the agriculture teacher. Since this was a census, the use of inferential statistics was not needed to determine significance. Rather, the observed difference in the two levels of influence indicates that a discrepancy exists among Idaho agricultural education advisory council level of influence.

The researchers now pose the questions: Why do the advisory councils not have the desired amount of influence? Is it a lack of understanding of the role by the council, a lack of understanding by the agricultural educators on how to lead adults in facilitating change, or are there other factors that contribute to this incongruence? Additionally, a majority of advisory councils were operating without funds to conduct activities. Does the lack of funding contribute to the discrepancy between the current and desired levels of influence?

Two items had a discrepancy score close to zero: evaluation of the agricultural program and determining the courses to be offered. Phipps, Osborne, Dyer, and Ball (2008) stated that, "the primary functions of an advisory council are to: 1) assist in the planning decisions of agriculture education programs and 2) oversee the evaluation of agricultural education programs to ensure that the program's goals are achieved" (p. 83). A discrepancy score of zero indicated that the respondents felt that the level of influence by the advisory council in these two areas is at the desired level. This is a positive indication teachers are satisfied with the fact that advisory councils are influencing programs in two essential areas.

Finally, perceptions of Idaho agricultural education instructors of advisory councils were measured. An overall mean of 69.56 was reported for the construct of teacher perception for advisory councils, which indicated that teachers agreed with the statements on the various aspects of an advisory council. The top five perception items were as follows: the members of an agricultural education advisory council should represent the local industries found in the school district; communication between the agricultural science and technology instructor(s) and the advisory council members is important; I have a positive perception of agricultural education advisory councils; every program should have an advisory council; and, an advisory council adds stability that protects the agricultural program during school and administration changes.

The top five perceptions are consistent with prior research on community support and advisory councils (Foster et al., 2012). Decker and Decker (2003) cited the importance of having a representative group of stakeholders that provide input from all aspects of the community. Phipps et al. (2008) also echoed the importance of all programs having an advisory council and its ability to influence the various aspects of the program.

Recommendations

While the study substantiated some previous research findings, further research questions were also inspired. First, additional research is needed to identify barriers that need to be overcome to increase the effectiveness of the utilization of agricultural education advisory councils. Since advisory councils are only one type of support group that exists for agricultural education programs, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the functionality of other school and community partnerships. In addition, further research investigating what guides the work of advisory councils is recommended. Respondents felt that a guiding set of objectives and goals is needed. However, over half were operating without a program of work or constitution/bylaws. The source of this difference should be researched further to inform professional development on developing an effective program of work and constitution/bylaws.

The results of the study also provide strong recommendations for professional development. It is recommended that teacher educators improve the coursework on starting and maintaining an effective advisory council. Teacher educators also must articulate the benefits of community and program partnerships. While the aspects may be currently present, the results of this study and previous literature indicate that all teachers still are not utilizing advisory councils to their full potential for evaluation and program improvement. State staff could also encourage the productive use of an advisory council rather than reinforcing advisory council use solely as a compliance item.

Finally, professional development for practicing teachers on advisory councils is strongly recommended. Best practices on increasing the advisory council's influence on the program, the

composition of the council, and the benefits of a clear guiding document should be shared with all teachers. Professional development in all areas should address the notion that the teacher is empowered as the leader of the advisory council and works in close cooperation with the advisory council members, as opposed other models where the teacher is waiting for others to take action. Also, the advisory council must be viewed as a vital component of the program and not just as a booster organization. The importance of having the advisory council approved by the board should also be articulated during professional development. By having the approval of the school board, the advisory council becomes an approved entity of the program, which increases its power and effectiveness.

The results indicate a strong sense that advisory councils are not being utilized to their full potential. If agricultural education is to remain a viable part of our nation's schools, community support must continue to be a part of the conversation of agricultural educators nationwide. Only through continued research and professional development on stakeholder support will the discipline be able to resolve the issues experienced by agricultural educators, allowing all programs to reap the benefits community support can offer.

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