The varied functions of local vocational advisory councils

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The past decade has seen a renewed interest in and resurgence of vocational education programs at all levels—middle-school, secondary and post-secondary. Accompanying this growth has been an increased emphasis on having local advisory committees or councils to assist these programs.

Advisory councils, in general, may provide immeasurable and invaluable assistance to teachers, principals and other administrators with respect to many programs—perhaps the most critical of these programs is in the area of vocational education. There are few limitations to this assistance except those inherent in the extent to which individual members are willing and able to become involved. Citizen involvement in public education has been a tradition in our country. Through citizen involvement with professionals in planning and evaluating educational programs, both the quality and the equality of opportunity of these programs are enhanced.

Involvement of citizens also enhances public support for further and stronger educational programs.

The Congress also realized the wisdom and necessity for citizen involvement, as evidenced by Sec. 105(g) of the recently signed "Educational Amendments of 1976," which states:

(1) Each eligible recipient receiving assistance under this Act to operate vocational education programs shall establish a local advisory council to provide such agency with advice on current job needs and on the relevancy of courses being offered by such agency in meeting such needs. Such local advisory councils shall be composed of members of the general public, especially of representatives of business, industry, and labor; and such local advisory councils may be established for program areas,
schools, communities, or regions, whatever the recipient
determines best to meet the needs of that recipient.
(2) Each State board shall notify eligible recipients within
the state of the responsibilities of such recipients under
the provisions of paragraph (1); and each state advisory
council shall make available to such recipients and the
local advisory councils of such recipients such technical
assistance as such recipients may request to establish
and operate such councils.

As the federal law suggests, advisory councils may
range in scope from program area councils to school
councils, to local administrative agency councils or to
educational district councils. Generally, the program area
advisory councils would be more likely to deal with "nitty-
gritty" kinds of things whereas local educational agency
or district councils would be more likely to concern them-
theselves with more general issues. However, persons on any
vocational advisory council may be asked to provide
leadership, advice, or assistance in any number of areas or
ways.

In general, however, the primary function of any ad-
visory group at any level is to provide guidance or
assistance to teachers and/or administrators.

Program area advisory councils should have as their
members key employers and employees who are
engaged in work in the program area. It might also be ad-
visable to include a recent graduate and a currently
enrolled student. Program area councils should assist in
determining needs for new programs and advise on
course content. Their expertise should be involved in
establishing realistic standards for the program and in
periodic program evaluation.

School advisory councils are the liaison between the
vocation education program of the school and the
business and industrial community which it serves. Mem-
ership on these councils should vary to meet the needs
of individual situations, but it should include at least one
person knowledgeable of the needs of each of the
school's program areas. School advisory councils should
assist in determining the vocational education needs of
districts. They may provide assistance in assessing
the present and future local job market and hence advise
on the initiation, termination or modification of programs.
They may also assist in interpreting the total vocational
program to the community and play a major role in
program evaluation. If school advisory councils are to be
maximally effective, communication must be a two-way
propagation. That is, ideas must be brought to the school
from business and industry and the philosophy and
workings of the school's total program must be in-
terpreted to the council for dissemination to the com-

Local educational agency (L.E.A. administrative unit)
advisory councils should be composed of representatives
of the major vocational areas in the geographic area which
that L.E.A. serves. If school advisory councils exist within
that L.E.A., each of these councils should be represented.
The functions of an L.E.A. advisory council are somewhat
broader than those of a school advisory council. The coun-
cil for an L.E.A. should advise the school board on
the development of both long-range and annual plans for
vocational education, and on matters of policy with regard
to the implementation of these plans. These councils also
should have the responsibility of determining community
needs and transmitting these to the school board as well
as interpreting board policy to the community. They
should also be spokesmen for the vocational education
programs and assist school officials in evaluating the ef-
effectiveness of the total program.

Educational district advisory councils are normally
composed of persons from each of the L.E.A. councils
within the district, membership from manpower groups and
representatives of the general public. Generally, these
groups advise educators within their region, analyze
vocational trends and send recommendations to those
persons responsible for statewide planning.

The federal law does not dictate what system of ad-
visory councils shall be operated, but leaves this decision
to each recipient. Neither does the law simply say "do this
the best way you can," but requires that the State Ad-
visory Council provide whatever technical assistance is
requested.

If the only reason for establishing these local coun-
cils is to satisfy the federal requirements, any perfun-
tory attempt would suffice. However, if the intent is to comply
with the spirit as well as the letter of the law, care must be
taken in the appointment of the council members and
operation of the councils in general. Citizen groups
should be asked for suggestions for possible appointees.
Some members appointed should have recent practical
experience in the vocational area, and all members
should receive their appointments through the superin-
tendent and school board.

Unless citizen groups are involved at the local level,
educators will continue making their decisions based
upon past experience, general manpower data and their
own generally good judgment. However, no opinions
regarding the job market, needed additions and revisions
to the curriculum, retraining needs, and other aspects of
vocational education are as valid and valuable as those of
recent graduates and workmen in the field. As clearly
recognized by the Congress, it would be a complete fail-
ure if this expertise were not utilized to the fullest. As
fundamental as this seems, it is difficult to understand why
citizen involvement in planning for vocational educational
programs has not been the rule rather than the exception.
However, had this been universally the case, the federal
requirement would not have been necessary.

In conclusion, it should be remembered that the one
overall purpose of any advisory council is to provide ad-
vice and assistance to the teachers and administrators in-
volved in vocational programs. Virtually any sup-
plementary activity which contributes to or increases the
overall effectiveness of vocational education programs and
which the members of the advisory council are willing
and able to undertake may be considered a perfectly valid
function of that council.

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