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ABSTRACT
      This paper discusses a study of two large school
districts in Florida to determine their commitment to using local
school advisory committees. The survey included the use of two
questionnaires sent to 77 elementary, junior high, and high schools.
Respondents were asked if they perceived themselves as really making
a difference in the decision-making process of several activities
listed. Conversely, principals were asked if they perceived advisory
personnel as making important decisions in school matters. Results
showed that the extent to which citizens participated in the
activities was modest, considering the district's emphasis on citizen
involvement. Thus, citizen response showed some ambivalence in
participating in decision-making roles. (Author/LD)

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The Role of Advisory Committees in
School Decision Making

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(A Synopsis)

Public education is based on the premise that the schools really belong to the people and as such, function as integral parts of the culture and the community. The schools should serve as the psychological as well as the sociological institution in the community through its interwoven activities and functions of educating youth and the community. The school as no other organic institution requires the cooperation of all others in the community in order to come close to the goals of developing meaningful educational programs. Indeed, the citizens of the community have an obligation to supplement the professional appraisals of education by helping to identify needs and then to help resolve issues and problems.

"The schools belong to the people" seems to be heard consistently across the land and few would argue with it. However, when put to the test at the point where it is really meaningful, it tends to fade as a viable operational concept.

Citizens created the school and the schools belong to them. Public education is still being paid for by the people. But the control of education has not remained with the people. In reality, the control of public education has generally shifted over to management. Now this management includes the legislature, and other state level political forces such as the state board of education and state departments of education, the local school board and the professional educational leaders at the district and school levels—not to mention the federal government and the state and federal court systems. All of these layers of "school management" get their licks in to educational decision making and problem solving before the parents and citizens can get involved. These givens must be considered and reckoned with before we can attempt to study the role of citizens participation in school decision.

A philosophical basis for undergoing an investigation is very often as important as the actual study itself. My interest in this area has been

aroused for some time now as public education is being called to heel in getting citizens back into the school and more especially, getting citizens to once again support education. One of the ironies of this situation is that citizens have primarily left the interest and support of the school because their input was not acknowledged, sought, or accepted during these last twenty-five to thirty-five years and mostly owing to the fact that the very important decisions in public schools are made by the higher echlons such as the courts, legislatures and others mentioned before. However, in a movement to correct this great American dilemma, the local school boards and individual schools are asked to handle the problem. As all of us know now the wide spread accountability legislation across the nation is a manifestation of this "getting the schools back into the hands of the people". The recent movement of citizens participation in the schools is in fact a major component of accountability emphasis.

So what is happening across the nation is a general movement in activities geared toward resurrecting a reasonable trust level between the school and citizens. Following the tremendous upheaval during the 60's at all levels of education as well as the pretentious questioning of significance and relevance of schooling in the 70's, we find for example, in 1972, legislation in California linking early childhood education to school advisory committees. Florida followed in 1973 with legislation mandating school advisory committees. In 1977 South Carolina assumed the same pattern and mandated citizens groups in school decision making. The Florida law made it optional at the local level for either a district wide citizen group or individual school advisory groups. The intent was rather pointed in the Florida law regarding the expected outcomes and most local school boards initiated both the district wide as well as the individual school committees.

The history of parent or citizen advisory committees has been a success story over the past half century in the areas of vocational education and is

making great strides in occupational and career education. There appears
to be little role conflict between and among school management personnel and
the consumer/participant in these areas of interest. I think we shall see
when looking at the research in other more mainstreaming general education
programs that the symbiotic relationship and the necessary confidence and
trust levels have not shared the same acceptance. It seems that role confusion
and conflict emerge when general education management encounters general
citizen.

Since the early 70's and the mandatory legislation requiring citizen
participation in the schools, there has been a fair amount of research and
writings regarding this aspect of education. A number of doctoral disserta-
tions have kept pace with initial activities. All these treatments have been
valuable in tracing the movement up to the present time. My interest in
the area has been focused on the extent of quality involvement of citizens
in participation and especially the sharing of decision making into the
core of significant and important aspects of the school's operation.

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Design

The design of this project was to obtain heavy response from two large school districts in Central Florida. These districts were known to have a commitment to utilizing local school advisory committees. One half of the schools in these districts were included in the study. This amounted to 77 schools which included half of all the elementary, junior high, and senior high schools in the districts. The principals from these schools were surveyed as well as the chairman of the LSAC from each of these schools. The chairmen received their surveys at their home address.

The Survey

The survey included two instruments. Both questionnaires were
identical so far as the activities to be evaluated were concerned. The
difference between the two were in how they were to be responded to. The
first questionnaire was seeking to determine the extent of involvement in
the activities on a three point scale and the second questionnaire was seeking
the effectiveness level of involvement as perceived by the respondent. The
second questionnaire had a six point choice scale from very effective to
very ineffective. So in essence, we were asking respondents, to what extent
were advisory committee members involved and just how effective were they
in the involvement. In other words, did they perceive themselves as really
making a difference in the decision making process of each activity and
conversely, did principals perceive advisory personnel as making important
decisions in school matters.

The Instruments

The eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation by Sherry Arnstein has been utilized to establish the hierarchial level of the fourteen activities used in the questionnaire activities. Activities at the top end and bottom end of the ladder were not included as it was felt the mid range and upper mid range would be the arena of interest here (T/P 1). The items were adjudged to be distributed over the range thusly (overly on T/P 1). The fourteen items are (T/P 2 and 3).

For each of the advisory committee functions listed below, indicate your evaluation of the extent to which your committee has been <u>effective</u> (e.g., actions of the committee that have been adopted or supported by the principal, superintendent, school board, or community). Use the scale below to choose the number for your rating, then circle the appropriate number to the right of each function listed. If your committee did not perform a function(s), place an <u>X</u> in the box to the extreme right of that function(s).

```
6---------5---------4---------3---------2---------1
Very                                          Very
Effective                                     Ineffective
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Function	Rating	Does Not Apply
a. Participated in the identification of educational needs (resource needs, surveys, etc.)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
b. Made recommendations regarding the planning, development or improvement of school educational programs (e.g., curriculum recommendations)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
c. Participated in the development of educational goals, objectives, and program priorities?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
d. Assisted the school in the evaluation of its academic effectiveness?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
e. Participated in the development of policies affecting the interests and welfare of pupils (e.g., discipline, homework, grading practices, dress code, etc.)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
f. Advised the school staff of community feelings on important issues (e.g., desegregation, zoning, bussing, etc.)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
g. Facilitated school communication with parents and citizens (e.g., school-community relations)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
h. Assisted in securing the support and services of parents, teachers, and students (e.g., mobilizing public support for the school)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
i. Participated in the development of the annual school progress report?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
j. Made recommendations concerning school needs (e.g., building, equipment, instructional materials, library books)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
k. Participated in faculty meetings, in-service meetings (e.g., staff development sessions)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
l. Participated in interviews for faculty and staff openings?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
m. Participated in preparing and reviewing the school budget?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
n. Participated in decisions on use of the building (e.g., in school activities or after school activities)?	6 5 4 3 2 1	
o. Performed other functions? (please specify)	6 5 4 3 2 1	

For each of the possible advisory committee functions listed below, indicate the extent to which your committee has been involved.
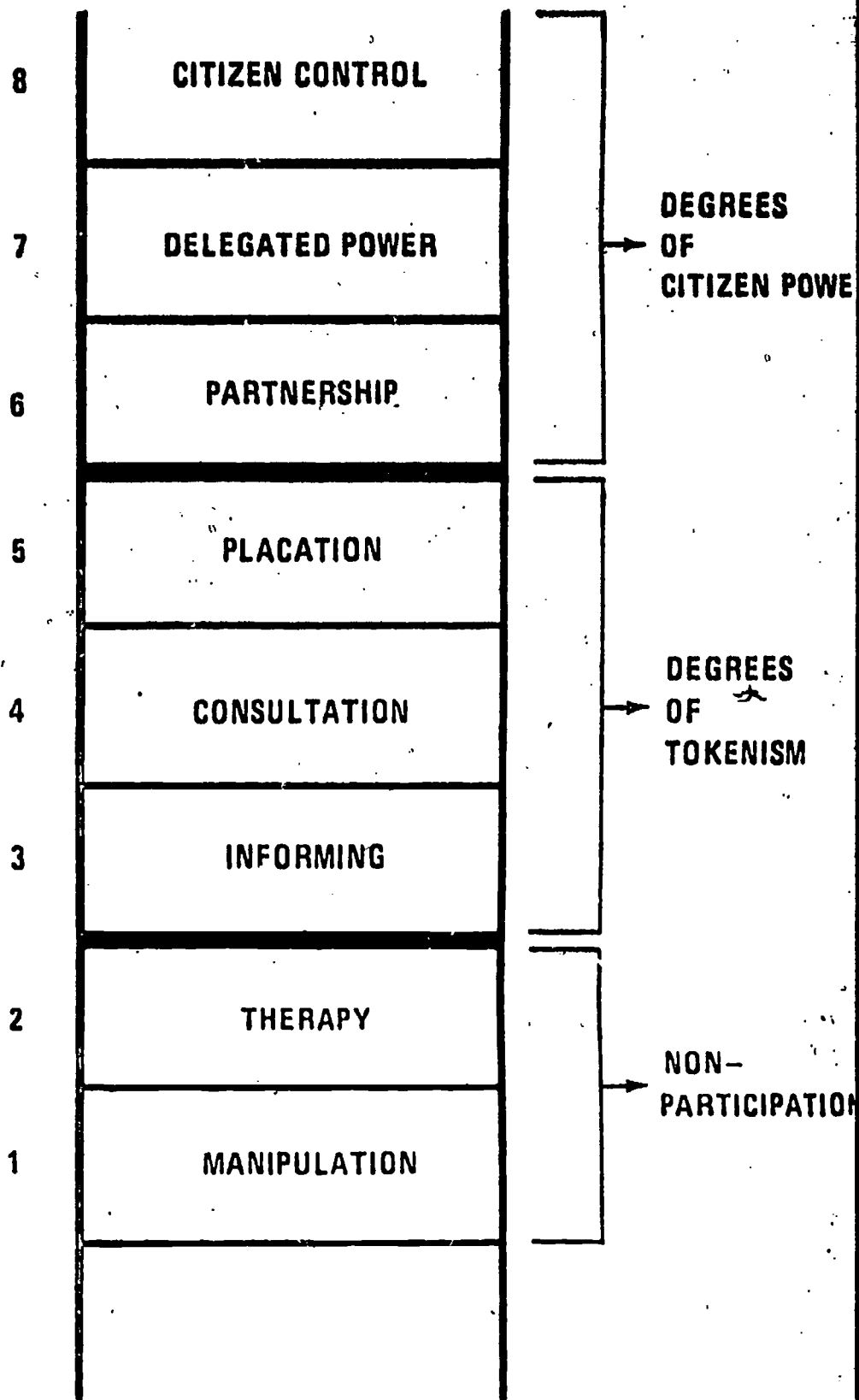
HAS YOUR ADVISORY COUNCIL:	Amount Discussed (Check one box for each of the fourteen items listed)			
	Very Much	Some	None	Don't Know
a. Participated in the identification of educational needs (resource needs, surveys, etc.)?				
b. Made recommendations regarding the planning, development or improvement of school educational programs (e.g., curriculum recommendations)?				
c. Participated in the development of educational goals, objectives, and program priorities?				
d. Assisted the school in the evaluation of its academic effectiveness?				
e. Participated in the development of policies affecting the interests and welfare of pupils (e.g., discipline, homework, grading practices, dress code, etc.)?				
f. Advised the school staff of community feelings on important issues (e.g., desegregation, zoning, bussing, etc.)?				
g. Facilitated school communication with parents and citizens (e.g., school-community relations)?				
h. Assisted in securing the support and services of parents, teachers, and students (e.g., mobilizing public support for the school)?				
i. Participated in the development of the annual school progress report?				
j. Made recommendations concerning school needs (e.g., building, equipment, instructional materials, library books)?				
k. Participated in faculty meetings, in-service meetings (e.g., staff development sessions)?				
l. Participated in interviews for faculty and staff openings?				
m. Participated in preparing and reviewing the school budget?				
n. Participated in decisions on use of the building (e.g., in school activities or after school activities)?				
o. Performed other functions? (please specify)				

Seventy-six percent of the overall surveys were returned with 68% from school principals and 79% from chairmen of local school advisory committees. The first data observed from the respondents is very interesting. There was a high correlation between the respondents in terms of what activities were participated in and just how effective advisory committees were in those activities. They were very consistent. The correlation was .68. So everyone seems to be in the same key.

The basic interest and concern for this study, however was to measure the involvement of LSAC's (Local School Advisory Committees) in high level and significant decision making and to observe the extent of the sharing of decision making. It seems that this is the intent of mandated legislation - The development of a high level of trust leading to high level interaction and participation.

All fourteen activities in the study are certainly important school functions. The intention for the inclusion of these items was to infer (hopefully justifiably) that reasonable parent involvement had already been achieved but that considerable in-depth participation at higher levels of decision making might be accomplished. Several activities in the study were selected that get right to the heart of administration and academic prerogatives. As a matter of fact, several activities included in the study have rarely been shared with staff or operational faculty. As a side issue in this or any other similar study, the implications are that we certainly should be sharing important decision making in the schools.

8	CITIZEN CONTROL	
7	DELEGATED POWER	DEGREES OF CITIZEN POWE
6	PARTNERSHIP	
5	PLACATION	
4	CONSULTATION	DEGREES OF TOKENISM
3	INFORMING	
2	THERAPY	NON-PARTICIPATIO
1	MANIPULATION	

EIGHT RUNGS ON THE LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATI
By Sherry R. Arnstein

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Analysis of Data

The fourteen activity items were clustered into the middle four categories of the Arnstein Ladder of Citizen Participation. The four are shown on the Arnstein ladder. Four items were placed in the Partnership category, two in Placation, four in Consultation, and four in Informing.

The most consistent, though negative, among responses were at the highest level or Partnership on the ladder: The agreement among respondents reached a correlation of .89 indicating little has been shared here. This is really only significant in that most respondents seem to agree that these activities were just beyond sharing at this point in time. These activities included:

k. Participation in faculty meetings and in-service.

l. Participation in interviews for faculty and staff openings.

m. Participation in preparing and reviewing the school budget.

and n. Participation in decisions on use of building - in school and
after school activities.

Items regarding involvement with interpreting and dispersing information regarding school activities were perceived by principals as being more effective citizen participation activities. Parents generally agreed that they were well involved in these functions, however, they didn't feel that these were their most effective opportunities. It appears that traditionally perceived roles came into play here. The activities which are customary for citizens to participate in are bleeding through here as the proper activities for parents to perform.

Basic activities at the Informing level, or the lowest level of items in the study again shared common perceptions between citizens and principals. These activities include:

b. Making recommendations for planning, development or improvement of educational programs.

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g. Facilitating school-community relations.

h. Assisting in securing support of parents, teachers and students
   (for the school).

j. Making recommendations concerning school needs.

The extent that citizens participated in the sum of the activities is
rather modest, considering the emphasis placed upon citizen involvement. Of
the ten activities identified as those of reasonable participation by
citizens, 44% responded in the mid range of a Likert scale indicating some
ambivalence in participating in decision making roles.

Can we project a participating role for citizens in significant
school decision making? I think we can and must. The research in the
field points out that some headway and progress has been made thus far.
But until very recently, citizens have not been involved to any degree in
school management other than special areas such as vocational and technical
programs. Their involvement in these special programs has been necessary
for adequate functioning of the programs. After many years of non-citizen
participation in regular education, it appears that for the welfare of
these programs we must make room for citizens in educational decision making.
The resistance thus far seems to frustrate and antigonize those citizens
attempting to lend a hand and support schools.

There is little question that the recent surge of citizen involvement
has been very disconcerting to principals and other school administrators.
In most cases there have been very limited operational guidelines from
district level administrators and school boards. Often there have been
local school board and state board policies which hamper the efforts at
the local school level. If there is to be honest effort in returning the
schools to the citizens then these policies and practices must be changed.

The role of the administrator is changing. It seems to be coming a
cooperative activity in the community and from observations at this point,

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it appears to show promise of improvement in school operations. I have seen and felt the tenseness and distance between citizens and administrators when decision making was not shared, yet there has been a blossoming of relationships in those observed situations where the trust level was high and the interaction was open.

Today the public is pressing for involvement in all our American institutions and our schools are at the top of the list. A lessening of confidence over the past thirty plus years has brought us face to face with dwindling support in terms of dollars, deeds, and support. However, of all the important American institutions, the schools are probably the best suited for heavy citizen involvement.

The time is ripe, and the movement has momentum. Let's welcome our citizens into their schools and become partners in all decision making. It will greatly improve our image and I think we will like the new dynamics of education.