

**A STUDY OF THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUPERINTENDENTS OF HOW
POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL BOARDS AFFECT
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN HIGH- AND LOW-ACHIEVING DISTRICTS**

by

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The intent of this study was to identify and examine the policies and practices of Pennsylvania School Boards, and identify what relationship these might have to patterns of district-level student performance. This study utilized a sequential mixed-methods approach in collecting data. First, quantitative data were secured using surveys sent to a large group of superintendents from similar-sized school districts across Pennsylvania. Then, for the qualitative aspect, a select few superintendents were interviewed in order to more closely analyze the policies and practices of school boards that were identified from the survey. The two research questions developed to guide the study were 1) What policies and practices does a school board engage in that influences student achievement? 2) How do those policies and practices of school boards compare in lower- and higher-achieving school districts?

Even though school boards do not directly instruct students, their actions can have a profound effect on the quality of education they receive. Indicative of the study, school boards want their students to be academically successful; however, not all of the policies and practices they partake are beneficial in reaching that goal. The survey and interview data from the study indicates there are both similarities and significant differences between boards from lower- and higher-achieving districts in regards to the policies and practices they participate in, which ultimately influences student achievement.

The findings from this study can help both school boards and superintendents utilize the most successful policies and practices to enhance board governance as well as provide the best opportunity to allow their students to be academically successful.

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PREFACE

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1.0 CHAPTER I

1.1 THE ISSUE

Each school board's role differs among districts across the nation. In the United States' early history, the inception of the first boards began as a way for the community to gather and discuss all its issues, including educating the children. These boards made all of the major decisions concerning public education (Poulos, 2005). Today, some school boards continue to be rooted in this history. They are involved in all of the major decisions within their district. However, as the educational goals of the schools changed during the history of the country, so too has the philosophy changed as to what role the school board should play. And even though there are many current publications that provide school boards with guidelines concerning their responsibilities and conduct, our current form of school governance is still far from being uniform.

Seen throughout the research, there is a disparity among different school boards because they utilize different governance approaches. However, it is unclear if the board's policies or practices have any effect at all on the educational success of students. Some school boards want to be a part of all the decision-making in the school district just as their predecessors. In this system of governance, school boards are directly involved in the daily activities such as academic issues, hiring of staff, student discipline, and textbook selection. They even act as a sounding board for public complaints. Consequently, in this form of school governance, the

superintendent does not act as the sole leader of the district where he has the freedom to make educational decisions on his own.

Conversely, other school boards govern by becoming policy-making boards (Danzberger & Usdan, 1994). In this system of governance, school boards create policies for the school administration to follow and achieve. These policies are formed to allow school boards to have a “hands-off” approach in the daily decision-making of the school district. The superintendent would then implement any programmatic, budgetary, and personnel directives in order to reach the goals the board has set forth. In turn, the superintendent acts as the chief executive officer (C.E.O.) of the district and is held responsible and evaluated based on the established policies and goals.

With many Americans feeling as if we are far behind other countries in educating our youth, there is a big push to increase achievement. Student proficiency has clearly been identified as a major concern across the country. In fact, Bracey and Resnick (1998) believe that “raising student achievement is the most important challenge facing local school boards today” (p. 7). Federal and state mandates such as No Child Left Behind and individual state assessment tests hold school boards and districts accountable for positive results. In turn, more pressure is being placed on school boards to lead the way for higher student achievement. But, as identified in the literature, school boards can play an important role in student achievement.

When school districts fail to demonstrate significant academic gains, the role and effectiveness of the local board comes into question. So much, in fact, that some states declare school boards as being obsolete and an ineffective form of educational governance. As a result, some school boards from lower-achieving schools are being dismantled in favor of mayoral or state board of education takeovers (Danzberger, 1992).

Yet, many educational experts believe that the current form of educational governance should not be totally dissolved, it just should be restructured. “Within the past two decades, several school board experts have called for states to pass legislation to refocus the roles and responsibilities of school boards on policymaking and oversight, and limit school boards’ management responsibilities” (Land, 2002, p. 7). Although there is a call in some states for school boards to serve more as policymakers and to limit management responsibilities, it still is unclear if student achievement would increase. The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB, 2000) feel that the verdict is still out regarding the restructuring of school boards because “in the arena of educational research, the effect of school boards on student achievement is largely uncharted territory” (p. 2).

In studies conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB, 2000) and Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman (Goodman et al, 1997), the researchers identified several key roles and characteristics that school boards from both low- and high-achieving school districts share. However, it is unclear by the broad nature of the studies to fully conclude if the board’s roles and/or characteristics had either a positive or negative impact on student achievement. To help reveal the effect school boards have on student achievement, Land (2002) suggests that additional studies linking school board characteristics to student achievement are needed. This study will attempt to find relationships between the policies and practices of the school board behaviors and link them to student achievement.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Effective school board management is a prominent issue in the realm of education. School board experts and associations, including the National School Boards Association, provide guidelines that may help school boards function as a quality governance entity and effectively raise student achievement. However, student achievement, as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, displays varying degrees of success across the state. As a result, a clear question emerges as to whether the policies and practices of school board members positively or negatively influence student achievement. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine if student achievement, throughout similarly-sized school districts in Pennsylvania, is affected by the policies and practices of the school board.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will attempt to find answers to the following questions from the perspective of the superintendent:

1. What policies and practices does a school board engage in that influences student achievement?
2. How do these policies and practices of school boards compare in lower-and higher-achieving school districts?

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Boone (1991) suggests that the school board is the sole determining factor in the quality of education provided within the school district. While that statement may or may not be true, it has been found that the role of the school board and the relationship with the superintendent can have both a positive and negative impact on student achievement (IASB, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997; Land, 2002). In both the IASB (2000) and Goodman et al. (1997) studies, researchers attempted to find a correlation in student achievement results and connect them to how the school board governs. As a result, common characteristics were found that school boards of higher-achieving schools share with each other, while also identifying common characteristics that lower-achieving schools share.

However, one major study helps to guide this particular study. Goodman et al. (1997) focused their research on quality governance, specifically the school board/superintendent relationship and then linked these results to student achievement. Governance issues within this relationship such as goal setting, mutual respect, micromanagement, and chain of command were all addressed. The Goodman et al. study found that in school districts where the superintendent and the school board worked effectively together, student achievement was noticeably higher compared to districts with a less effective superintendent/school board relationship.

Similar to Goodman et al. (1997), this study will examine school board governance, but it will focus specifically on the policies and practices of the school board, and then search for a causal relationship to student achievement. Goodman et al. defines student achievement through attributes such as state and national test results, profiles of graduating classes, and student dropout rates, and then ranked school districts from low to high based on these student achievement results. For this study, student achievement will be determined through two

consecutive years of scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) on both the mathematics and reading exams for grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11.

Another difference from the Goodman et al. (1997) study will be the selection of individuals chosen to participate in the study. Goodman et al. interviewed board members, administrators, educators, parents, community leaders, and citizens (1997). This study will focus on the policies and practices of the school board from the superintendent's perspective as identified in the literature. They include policy making, budget oversight, evaluation of the superintendent, board member training, use of data, hiring practices, micromanagement, community relations, goal/vision setting, focus on student achievement, school board/superintendent relationship, student advocates, and professional board meetings.

2.0 CHAPTER II

2.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1.1 Introduction

In each school district across the country, there are many factors that contribute to the academic success of students. Within each educational community, one factor is the local school board that plays an important role as a policymaker, liaison, visionary, and financial gatekeeper. Clearly, the school board's role as a governing body is important to the educational community as a whole, including the quest for each student's high academic achievement. Although there are many publications that provide guidelines school boards should consider in order to function as a harmonious entity, the actual impact school boards themselves have on the educational process, specifically student achievement, is less clearly defined. The purpose of this literature review is, first, to frame the policies and practices of the school board and then to examine what is known about the role they play in the pursuit of high academic achievement.

As a starting point for this literature review, several questions were created in order to narrow the search through the multitude of academic writing that appears on the topic of school boards. The first question focused on: Why were school boards originally created and how did they evolve into our present form?

Next, because school boards undertake many responsibilities that are linked to the success or failure of a school district, the second question focused the literature on: Which of the current management styles of school boards are prominent? Areas identified in the literature that may have an impact on student achievement include training school board members, making data-driven decisions, creating policy, prioritizing budget needs, hiring a superintendent, forming a school board/superintendent relationship, and micromanaging school boards.

Also, there has been a call in recent years to revamp the way school boards operate. Therefore, an additional question explored through the literature was to determine: What models of school board governance are currently being proposed? As a result, the literature identified the different concepts of a local education policy board, a policy governance model, site-based management, and the elimination of school boards.

The fourth and final question explored in the literature: What significant studies were previously conducted to connect the function of the school board with high and low levels of student achievement? Two major studies were identified: one by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB, 2000) and the other by Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman (Goodman et al., 1997).

2.1.2 Why were school boards originally created and how did they evolve into our present form?

The concept of a school board has been in existence in some form since the eighteenth century (Flinchbaugh, 1993). In its infant stages, townspeople would gather together in order to discuss all pertinent issues of the community, which included the education of their children. As towns grew larger, not everyone could take part in the discussions, so town selectmen or a committee of

selectmen were elected to represent the citizens (Flinchbaugh, 1993). As a result of laws passed in 1826 and 1827, the first official town school committee was established in Massachusetts (Flinchbaugh, 1993). During this early stage, school board members served as a link to the citizens of their own local level (Caruso, 2005; Flinchbaugh, 1993). In this model of local governance, it was the laypeople of the town who oversaw all aspects of public education (Poulos, 2005).

As laypeople or selectmen started to operate the public schools with local tax dollars (Poulos, 2005), state governments began to create government entities designed specifically for oversight of public education. In 1837, Massachusetts established the first state board of education and the office of state superintendent (Danzberger, 1994). In addition, local school board members were now considered agents of the state, and they had the responsibility to ensure that state regulations for education were being met (Flinchbaugh, 1993; Hill, 2003). Eventually, as the idea that the public as a whole could be represented by smaller groups of citizens, laws were passed in each state that formally gave school boards constitutional responsibility for education (Hill, 2003).

As schools grew larger in size, they separated into school districts; thus, the role of the school board changed as well. By 1920, school boards evolved as to mimic corporate boards (Poulos, 2005). School boards began to focus on oversight policies rather than daily management of the school district (Land, 2002). Each school district then had a central school board as well as a professional chief executive, the superintendent (Danzberger, 1994). The superintendent was in charge of instruction and then eventually the daily operations of the school district. The superintendent assumed the role as the educational leader in the district. Due to the creation of the superintendent position, school boards began to change from operating boards into policy-making boards (Danzberger & Usdan, 1994).

Beginning in the 1980's with the publication of A Nation at Risk (1983), the function, focus, and knowledge of schools and school boards came into question (Sewall, 1996). This publication described the United States school systems as only being mediocre. Therefore, governmental agencies began to closely monitor the role of the school board and the academic results that schools produced. As a result, the call for national academic standards and accountability measures emerged as the general public became dissatisfied with the current state of education (Sewall, 1996).

The governing system for public schools became even more complex, incorporating multiple players and decision makers, including federal and state courts, the U.S. Congress, state governors, and legislatures (Danzberger, 1994; IASB, 2000). As the government's role in education at the state and federal levels increased, the flexibility to manage and determine appropriate curriculum according to local needs began to evaporate for school boards. As an attempt to hold school districts accountable for student learning, statewide testing programs were created (IASB, 2000). School boards had to be cognizant of the standardized testing movement and make appropriate changes to curriculum, personnel, and policies to achieve academic growth.

Currently, governmental agencies also monitor and report the results of testing programs on a comparative basis (IASB, 2000). States and school districts alike must show they are achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) under the guidelines of No Child Left Behind. According to the U.S. Department of Education's website, "[A]YP is an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving to state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math" (NCLB, 2001). Understandably, school boards feel tremendous pressure for their districts to perform well academically. If not, state policymakers and local school boards threaten to replace staff or close schools if they do not

bring their students to acceptable standards of achievement (IASB, 2000). State policymakers do not make idle threats in regards to low achieving schools. Paul Hill (2003) comments,

Some states (New Jersey) have taken over districts and put them in the hands of state department of education staff, and others (e.g., Ohio, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Michigan) have disbanded elected school boards and assigned responsibility for public education to the mayor. State governments justified these actions in terms of their direct responsibility for children's education, saying that their chosen instrument, the elected local school board, had failed to perform. (p. 13)

Even though some states choose to disband their local school boards, a clear majority of states depend on local school boards to manage their educational systems.

Physically, the number of members in a school board across the nation vary in size, but they are still comparable. Samantha Sell (2006) reports that school boards are usually made up of five to seven members. Also, odd numbered boards are more common than even numbered boards (Hess, 2002).

At the present time, there are many similarities in how school boards are assembled, including how a person gets onto the board. Michael Resnick (1999) writes that "across the nation, there are about 15,000 local school boards and 95,000 local school board members, 96% of school board members are elected by their communities" (p. 7). Therefore, to serve on the school board, members must be either elected or appointed. Deborah Land (2002) suggests that "most often, school board members are elected at large (i.e., city-/district-wide), elected within the subdivisions of the city/district" (p. 7). So, when in a larger city where there are several school districts, each person/community will be represented through their own district and not just the city as a whole.

In Pennsylvania, a school board consists of nine voting members who are either elected at large, by region, or by a combination of both (PSBA, 2009). Each district is responsible to approve an election plan that best represents the community in which they live. According to PSBA, there are “three ways school districts may elect board members: at large, by region or by a combination of these” (p. 1). If board members are elected at large, they can live anywhere within the school district boundaries. For those districts that approve a regional election plan, school board members are “elected by and from each region” (p. 2). Therefore, if the school district divides its representation into regions, the elected board member must be a resident in that region. For those districts that approve a combination of an at large and region plan, “all regions have an equal number of school directors who reside in each region and who are elected by each region” (p. 2). In this election plan, all reaches of the school district boundaries will have equal representation on the school board. Board members in Pennsylvania are elected for a four-year term “with the election process calling for five members being eligible for re-election during one election cycle and four being eligible in the next cycle” (2009, p. 1). So, the election process for school boards in Pennsylvania is held every two years and is designed to ensure consistency and eliminate the possibility of electing nine new members during one election cycle.

School boards today are different than in earlier times because they more closely parallel the varying ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender make-up of our nation’s communities:

“Compared to the school boards of the early 20th century, which were dominated by white male professionals from Protestant backgrounds, today’s school boards are more diverse in professional background, education, ethnicity, religion, and political persuasion” (Hill, 2003, p. 6). As the country’s laws and conceptions change with the varying people who live here, the types of people on the school boards are beginning to keep up with the diversity of its own

constituencies. Even though school boards increasingly resemble the population they serve, minorities and underprivileged citizens are still underrepresented (Hill, 2003).

However, no matter where a member is from, after a school board member is elected, there is one group that he/she is first accountable to: the educational community. Davis Campbell and Diane Greene (1994) feel that understanding the power in which board members obtain when elected, and being responsible with that power, is the ultimate challenge for board members. Campbell and Greene go on to say that board members need to rise above political pressures and govern in a highly ethical and professional manner. It is evident that school board members have a difficult and diverse set of goals to accomplish while in office.

2.1.3 Which current management styles of school boards are prominent?

Undoubtedly, school boards play a critical role in the education of students, which means they have an enormous responsibility to those students enrolled in their district, the staff they employ, and the citizens of their community. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing school board members is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn (Hess, 2002). While undertaking this lofty task, board members are expected to make sound, well-informed decisions concerning educational issues without themselves having a higher degree in education, or in some cases, any formal preparation at all for the position they hold: “School board members are not professional educators but it would appear they have important responsibilities related to teaching and learning, curriculum and instruction, and the learning environment” (IASB, 2000, p. 59).

Since many may not hold a degree in education, Campbell and Greene (1994) believe that school boards need some help, and they suggest that “in order to be effective, board members require training, establish clear role definitions, and keep up with critical education

issues and new developments” (p. 6). Such an enormous responsibility takes a clear understanding of their role within the school community as well as using a thorough decision-making process. To assist board members in decision-making that may affect students’ academic achievement, several sources provide board members with suggestions to help face these challenges.

2.1.3.1 Use of Data

One such publication is by The National School Boards Foundation (NSBF, 2001), which produced a publication targeting school boards and challenging them to find and use data to make informed decisions regarding student achievement. For example, school boards can find important data from many different sources such as graduation rates, attendance rates, test scores (local, state and national), and achievement of students with special needs (2001). In addition, NSBF offers the following areas that school board members can use reliable data in an attempt to produce higher student achievement:

- Focus board policies on student achievement.
- Measure whether the district is meeting goals to improve student achievement – academic as well as character, citizenship and values.
- Deepen community understanding about shared responsibility for student achievement.
- Set student achievement goals with your community.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of policies and programs.
- Identify new issues or challenges.
- Diagnose problems and revisit solutions.

- Identify new solutions to problems.
- Anticipate future conditions.
- Hold the superintendent, staff, students – and board accountable for results.
- Create shared accountability with your community.
- Provide opportunities to celebrate success.
- Depersonalize decisions.
- Make smart, informed budget decisions. (p. 10)

NSBF (2001) suggests that school board members can do their job more effectively by making decisions based on evidence, not speculation or guesswork. To the NSBF, academic achievement is not only seen through standardized test scores, but it also includes learning job skills, citizenship, arts appreciation, and developing character and values (2001).

Additionally, NSBF (2001) believes school boards should utilize specific types of data before they make decisions on academic programming. For example, in the area of creating board policies, “board members might approve policies that don’t match the actual needs of students. A policy may be designed to serve all students, in reality, resources could be better allocated toward certain students - those the data identify as most underserved” (p. 17). For instance, the school board may want to adopt a policy that mandates the high school to offer International Baccalaureate courses for the top-achieving students. Although the challenging courses may bring prestige to the district, the school board may use data, garnered through test scores and achievement rates, to determine if the money would be better utilized by hiring a math coach that would benefit both teachers and a greater number of students.

2.1.3.2 Use of Policy

Another way school boards may be able to improve student achievement is through the effective use of policy, which are the guidelines they create for the district to follow (Danzberger, 1994). There is a belief that when school board members are elected, it is their duty to keep a watchful eye on policies, as well as be creators of policy at the district level (Sewall, 1996). They feel that these are so important because, through these guiding principles, the board members send a clear message to the community about the district's goals and values (Lashway, 2002). Numerous authors as well as organizations such as state and national school board associations believe that school boards should focus their board policies directly on student achievement (Land, 2002).

The policy service and executive staff of the California, Illinois, Maine, Pennsylvania, and Washington school board associations (California et al., 1998) produced a reference entitled Targeting Student Learning: The School Boards Role as Policymaker. The book identifies policies of school boards directed at improving student achievement. California et al. (1998) believe that “policy adoption is one of the primary roles of school boards in today’s system for governing public education” (p. 15). With policymaking in the forefront, California et al. urges school boards to reexamine and focus their policymaking efforts, specifically to improve student learning. The project identifies the following eight categories as the most likely to improve student learning:

- governance and planning
- academic standards and assessment
- education program
- curriculum
- instruction

- learning environment
- professional standards
- parent/community engagement. (p. 12)

These are the areas they believe need to be focused on in order to help students learn to their full potential. For each of the eight categories, California et al. suggests concepts or components related to student achievement that individual school boards should address in their policies. For example, in the curriculum section, a school board may create a policy that ensures that the district curriculum is reviewed on a continuous cycle in order to ensure its effectiveness in meeting the needs of all students (1998).

2.1.3.3 Belief Statements

In addition, under the governance and planning category, school boards would create policies that identify the board's educational philosophy as well as establish guidelines for strategic planning, future policy development, and budget planning (1998). To further assist boards in creating policies, California et al. offers suggestions of belief statements that school boards can use for each policy topic. Specifically, when establishing the board's educational philosophy, "the board's primary responsibility to each student and the community is to advocate for and provide adequate and equitable educational opportunities" (p. 15). Therefore, the belief is that all students would receive an appropriate education. Another belief statement may be that "the board acknowledges that ultimate accountability for student achievement in the district rests with the board as elected representatives; the board also expects accountability from each member of the education community" (p. 16). In this philosophy, a school board accepts the accountability

of student achievement, but also creates a structure for administrators and teachers to follow and holds them accountable.

Within the academic standards and assessment category, California et al. (1998) suggests school boards should create policies that “clarify what students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level and in each area of study” (p. 20). This specific policy will enable the board to provide a roadmap for each student, according to standards, that would determine yearly student promotion, retention, and ultimately graduation. California et al. strongly believe that school board policies should reflect more than legal compliance requirements, but create a vision and establish educational goals to improve student achievement (1998).

2.1.3.4 Federal Mandates

In addition to local recommendations, school boards must also be cognizant of federal mandates associated with student achievement. Under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA), the National School Boards Association developed policy guidelines for the local school boards to follow to help support the achievement of their own students (NSBA, 2002). The guidelines range from creating a district report summarizing the district’s and students’ yearly academic performance all the way to ensuring that all teachers that are employed are “highly qualified” (NSBA, 2002). So, the local boards have policies that they themselves have to follow because of these federal guidelines. Due to the arrival of federal mandates regarding student achievement, school boards, now more than ever, need to pay greater attention to those policy issues related to student learning (California et al., 1998).

Although using local board policy as a vehicle to improve student achievement provides structure for teachers and administrators to follow, the verdict is still out whether it will make a

difference. In a comprehensive study of school boards, Deborah Land (2002) acknowledges that there is an abundance of literature that offers guidelines and recommendations for school boards to follow when creating policy; but, there is very little research to show its effectiveness on student achievement. Regardless of research, Larry Lashway (2002) believes “to some extent, the fact that a board has policies on student learning (irrespective of their content) will have a positive impact by demonstrating to the local educational community that student learning is a priority” (p. 4). Therefore, when the whole educational community thinks that the board is supporting student learning above everything else, then good things will automatically be produced.

2.1.3.5 Allocation of Funds

Another function of a school board that may affect student achievement is the proper allocation of funding. Deborah Land (2002) believes that “one of the school board’s principle budget responsibilities is to secure adequate funding to support academic achievement” (p. 29).

Supporting academic achievement through allocating budgetary items may take the form of hiring highly qualified teachers; creating smaller class sizes; purchasing up-to-date textbooks, sufficient materials, and supplies; supplying professional development; and properly training administrators. Unfortunately, securing enough funding for academic improvement is not an easy task as governmental mandates continue to increase.

One form of current governmental legislation, both state and federal, is the era of high stakes testing and accountability. School boards are trying to bolster academic achievement in order to meet changing requirements. But, in some cases, school districts are not receiving any additional funding from the government, even though they are being required to adhere to more

formal accountability methods. Campbell and Green (1994) suggest, “School boards today govern a system that has higher and higher expectations for its students, that must address a tremendous diversity of student needs, and that by and large is inadequately funded” (p. 2). School boards face the daunting task of trying to figure out how to fund new legislative requirements. Odden and Archibald (2000) state that

most school-finance experts predict that school funds will increase by only 25% in real, per-pupil terms over the next 10 years, while education reformers seek to double or triple the level of student performance—to move from 30 percent of students at or above standards to 60 to 90 percent. (p. 1)

So, even though standards are increasing at dramatic rates, the money being subsidized to the schools is not keeping up with what is being asked of the schools to do.

In a case study of American schools, Odden and Archibald (2000) have concluded that school boards need to appropriately reallocate resources in order to support academic achievement. As part of trying to keep up with the additional requirements of the government, they found that schools instituted educational strategies such as “smaller class sizes, more planning time for teachers, expanded professional development, one-on-one tutors for students who were struggling to achieve high standards—in an effort to provide a more rigorous and cohesive schoolwide curriculum” (2000, p. 1). Creating changes in the curriculum usually means additional costs to the district. In order to pay for these updates, a majority of schools used Title I, bilingual education, and special education funding to help supplement these improvement initiatives (2000). For example, one school in the study shifted from a pull-out special educational model to a full inclusion model. As a result, “six special education positions were eliminated and replaced by six regular education classroom teachers, enabling the school to

reduce class sizes” (2000, p. 4). This school kept the same number of teachers, keeping the cost to the district the same, but they received the benefit of decreased class size.

Ultimately, though, the school districts that were able to produce substantial reforms and improve student achievement were those that not only made conscious decisions to reallocate resources, but they also did this in conjunction with reducing or eliminating programs (Odden and Archibald, 2000). In turn, tough decisions had to be made to determine where or what programs had to be eliminated to pay for the latest proposed educational strategies. Some districts reassigned or eliminated instructional support aides and cut custodian hours to help pay for their academic improvement strategies (2000).

Deborah Land (2002) agrees that spending money alone does not guarantee academic success. While sufficiently funding academic-improvement initiatives, school board members must ensure they are spending money wisely, not just frivolously. In order for school boards to see academic growth, funding must be devoted to effective policies and programs (2002). School boards often face tough choices as they attempt to fund scholastic programs.

One tough choice Sell (2006) points out is that members of school boards are being scrutinized as they attempt to divide a limited amount of money between the needs of the community and fulfilling mandates. For example, extra-curricular activities such as athletics are often the pride of their communities all around the country; it may be tempting for school boards to heavily fund these programs. Board members may also receive pressure from the community to do so. Regardless of community pressure, the fact remains that a critical task for school boards is to provide financial resources to bolster academic achievement (Land, 2002).

2.1.3.6 Evaluation of Superintendent

As part of how to raise student achievement while also being mindful of the allocation of money, hiring a highly qualified superintendent to lead the district's vision should be a top priority. Land (2002) and Sell (2006) believe that one of the school board's chief responsibilities is the hiring and evaluation of the school district superintendent. There are many components that go into choosing a candidate. Therefore, Scariano and Glover (2000) believe that "the process of conducting a search for a new superintendent can be one of the most trying and time consuming activities a board of education may ever undergo" (p. 1).

After the board chooses their candidate to act as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the district, the distinct role of becoming the "evaluator" is significant as they determine if the superintendent is effectively leading the district's academic charge. To help school boards determine the quality of a superintendent's performance, Doug Eadie (2003) recommends three key steps to guarantee that the board's supervision is successful:

1. The school board can assign accountability for managing the board-superintendent relationship to a standing committee of the board.
2. This committee and the superintendent can reach agreement each year on the specific leadership challenges that deserve special attention from the superintendent, specific performance targets for the superintendent, and any special board support that might be needed to ensure the superintendent's success in meeting these targets.
3. And, at least annually, the school board can conduct an in-depth assessment of the superintendent's performance against these targets

and can reach agreement on corrective actions that need to be taken to bring performance up to standard in particular areas. (p. 1)

In the current era of school administration, one of the primary responsibilities of the superintendent is to be the educational leader in the district. However, Eadie's steps suggest that the school board and superintendent meet regularly in order to determine what these goals might be and how to achieve them. In addition, once the committee agrees to the areas that need to be worked on, it is the school board's role to help the superintendent reach these objectives. Proper evaluation and support from the school board can enable the superintendent to achieve the desired goals of the entire educational community.

It is critical to have a strong working school board/superintendent relationship in the effort to raise student achievement. Doug Eadie (2003) states, "The indispensable foundation for high-impact governing is a working partnership between the board and the superintendent that is close, positive, productive, and solid" (p. 26). So, even though Eadie believes that it is the school board's role to evaluate the progress of the district and superintendent, there still needs to be a symbiotic relationship between the two parties. It is very difficult for a superintendent or a school board to be effective when they are not working in unison. As Eadie suggests, "[A]t the heart of every truly high-impact school board is a solid board-superintendent working relationship" (p. 29).

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA, 2009) urges Pennsylvania school board members to view the superintendent as their partner as well the district's executive agent who helps formulate policies to lead the school district. In addition, PSBA states that the superintendent should serve as the district's "professional adviser to the board, the chief administrator of the schools, the leader of the staff and the focal point of responsibility in the

district” (p. 2). In essence, PSBA believes that a successful relationship between the school board and the superintendent is important for the entire educational community.

While a longstanding, positive working relationship between the school board and the superintendent is optimal for academic success, school boards often have to deal with a high turnover rate among superintendents. Wallace (1996) contends that “the life span of a superintendent in one community averages fewer than 6 years; in the large cities of the nation, the average span of a superintendent’s service is fewer than 3 years” (p. 93). According to these statistics, many districts, especially urban districts, cannot rely on stable leadership to improve student achievement. As a result, a consistent effort in implementing and evaluating educational initiatives may be difficult in this case since Wallace believes it takes five years of consistent, stable leadership in order to witness these substantial academic improvements within a district (1996).

2.1.3.7 Board Micromanagement

One of the major causes of superintendent turnover has been contributed to the micromanagement of the daily operations of a school district by the school board. Michael Jazzar (2005), a former school board member, principal, and superintendent, defines micromanagement as “interference, involvement, or conflict with a subordinate’s work, performance, or decision making that fosters employee apathy and disrespect” (p. 31). Literature written about the board/superintendent relationship identifies several reasons why school boards micromanage.

One of the reasons Danzberger (1994) believes that school board micromanagement occurs is because of the promises board members make while running for election. In addition, Danzberger argues that because state statutes and requirements are so rigid, they place the

majority of the responsibility on the school board: “Many board members genuinely fear that, if they are not directly involved in everything, they will leave themselves vulnerable to economic and legal sanctions for violating laws and regulations” (p. 1). They feel that it is easier to do it themselves since they will be the ones who are going to be reprimanded.

Michael Jazzar (2005) also identifies six common reasons why school boards tend to micromanage:

1. The board trustee’s role and responsibilities are unclear.
2. Board members have no policies delineating their appropriate role.
3. Management of day-to-day work is what board members know from real life.
4. Board members are invited onto the board to perform a task, not to lead.
5. Micromanagement is a response to a crisis.
6. Board members are afraid. (p. 32)

Jazzar concludes that unless school boards can focus on policymaking and curb micromanaging the daily operations of the district, their actions may obstruct growth and eventually cause the district and programming to fail.

Another reason school boards may micromanage is due to the amount of power the board has collectively. Hill (2003) declares that school boards micromanage because in the current state of school governance there are no limits on what they can or cannot do. Hill further states,

They own the district, hire the superintendent and all staff, decide how money will be spent, and in some cases even set schedules and buy textbooks. It is a surprise then that many school board members are ‘into everything,’ micromanaging, intervening in schools on behalf of constituents, joining with other board members to issue new policies, and

forming alliances with central office staff to obstruct initiatives they do not like. (p. 11)

He believes that because they are a part of so much already, it is natural for them to want to maintain that level of involvement. Furthermore, Hill suggests that the only way to curb board micromanagement is to restructure the boards' constitutional powers (2003). In essence, stripping the power away from school boards will deter them from micromanaging. Instead, they will focus on policymaking and ensuring that each child in the community will have the opportunity to attend a quality school.

2.1.4 What models of school board governance are currently being proposed?

A change to the way current school boards operate has been called for in the literature due to the ongoing saga within the boards. In fact, several experts believe that unless the role of the school board significantly changes, sufficient school reform, including higher academic achievement, will not occur (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). Research of the literature found proposals that ranged from completely changing the way a school board operates to merely creating clearer guidelines for a school board to follow.

One such proposal was created by The Twentieth Century Fund (1992), which commissioned a Task Force on School Governance in order to study school boards and provide possible reform options. The Task Force believes that current school boards are not providing the leadership necessary to improve the state of education in our country. Therefore, they proposed a structured framework for modern day school boards to follow instead of the antiquated structure currently being used. The Task Force acknowledges that states and communities would be more receptive to school board reform that enables basic improvements to the already "familiar

democratically chosen citizen boards” (p. 2). As a result, the Task Force identifies and supports the concept of a local education policy board instead of a traditional school board to lead American schools:

The Task Force believes that school boards must become policy boards instead of collective management committees. This will require granting them the policymaking latitude that would allow them to function as bodies responsible for governance; they will be responsible for setting broad policy guidelines, establishing oversight procedures, defining standards of accountability, and ensuring adequate planning for future needs. While professionals would oversee the myriad details of running public schools-as they theoretically do now-they would do so within the constraints and policy parameters established by those governing local education: the education policy board (p. 5).

As a result of their recommendations, the board’s role would only consist of policy creation and oversight. In turn, the school board would not interfere with or micromanage the day-to-day operations of the school district; this would be left up to the administration.

In order for the transformation to occur, state governments need to play a key role in the adoption of the local education policy board. The Task Force (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992) recommends “that states repeal all current laws and regulations specifying the duties, functions, selection, and role of school boards” (p. 9). So, first, the states would need to clear the slate of the law books when it comes to defining the boards in these terms. In addition, the Task Force believes that states should give the newly created policy boards the latitude within their own district to be effective (1992). The abolishment of regulations that many states have set forth would allow more freedom for school districts to operate. Although, the state will still need to

hold school boards and districts accountable: “States should set clear performance criteria that would enable them to hold local policy boards accountable for student progress and management effectiveness” (p. 10).

In the area of policy creation, many of the policies created by a policy board would focus on student achievement. The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) points out that “policy boards would be responsible for developing strategic plans with both long- and short-term goals, objectives performance indicators, and pupil assessment systems” (p. 8). Once these guidelines and curriculum structures are in place, a clear understanding of educational goals would be present. Perhaps a major shift from current school board interaction would be that “policy boards would not be involved in curriculum development, but would instead establish overall curriculum objectives and directions” (p. 8). They would, therefore, be involved with the creation of the overall and long-term plans for where the district should be, but yet they would keep out of the areas like curriculum where they may not have expertise.

Furthermore, in terms of budgeting, The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) suggests that school boards “continue to exercise overall responsibility for the budget, collective bargaining, and education initiatives” (p. 8). Through policies, the board would establish budgetary goals and hire auditors to ensure that the policies were followed as intended. Also, the board would “establish overall goals for labor agreements and approve the final contracts, but they would not be involved in the negotiating process” (p. 8). This is a change from the current trend where teacher’s unions negotiate with the school boards. The policy board would be responsible for setting parameters that the superintendent could negotiate within. Ultimately, the superintendent would resume all of the responsibilities for negotiations as well as authorizing the day-to-day spending in the district.

The hiring of staff members would also change with the creation of local education policy boards. The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) specifies, “Policy boards would not be involved in the hiring of employees beyond a few senior administrators. Boards would not interview or approve prospective principals. Instead, principals would be selected in accordance with the personnel policies set by the board” (p. 9). So, again the board would be responsible for creating the guidelines that the superintendent would then follow. Also in this model, the superintendent and/or building principal would conduct interviews for potential employees following the guidelines and then make recommendations to the board for hire.

In addition, The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) suggests that the creation of a true education policy board would clarify the role and accountability of the school superintendent: “This structure would actually create greater accountability for the professional leadership of the school districts, setting out a clear division of labor and including a role for general government” (p. 105). Each administrator would have a specific role to follow as drawn up by the board. Furthermore, the superintendent would be the sole individual held accountable to achieve the goals set forth by the board and to make decisions based on the policies created.

As an additional component, The Twentieth Century Fund (1992) recommends that election procedures for new board members be modified. The Task Force identifies that one major problem of local school board elections is that communities may not be truly represented due to the lack of voter participation. In order to combat the problem, The Twentieth Century Fund suggests, “[N]o school board election can be certified by the state if less than 20 percent of registered voters turn out” (p. 14). If such an event would happen, school districts would schedule a separate election to fill any vacancies (1992).

In the case of large cities across the nation, The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force (1992) believes there should not be any vote at all. Instead, they suggest that the mayor appoint

board members rather than being elected by citizens. The Task Force says that in doing so, it would “encourage greater collaboration between schools and city government, meeting our concern that children receive the necessary full range of social services” (p. 15). Furthermore, the collaboration with the mayor might enhance the climate for budget and financial support for schools within the city (1992).

Another proposal for board reform has been developed by John Carver (2000), the creator of the Policy Governance model. Carver believes that all governance boards, not just educational ones, are lacking standards and are not keeping up with their own management teams “in conceptual development and useful paradigms” (p. 1); i.e., in schools, the administration. His model “calls upon boards to be strategic and visionary leaders and imposes a set of carefully crafted principles to distinguish board decisions from managerial and professional ones” (p. 2). Carver outlines several components of the model that would directly affect school boards and especially superintendents:

- Governance is seen as a specialized form of ownership rather than a specialized form of management. That is, the board is more identified with the general public than with the staff and more akin to the phenomenon of owning than operating. Hence, a school board does not exist to run a school system, but on behalf of those who ‘own’ the system to govern those who do.
- The board as a body is vested with governing authority so that measures to preclude trustees from exercising individual authority are crucial to governance integrity. This means that instructions and advice of individual trustees do not have to be heeded by staff. The board, on the other hand,

exercises strong control, albeit control carefully couched in documents crafted especially for governance precision.

- The board, on behalf of the public, specifies the nature and cost of consumer results ('ends'). This constitutes a careful description of the educational product—what results with whom is the public purchasing at what cost. The board does not specify the methods and activities ('means') required in the system operation.
- The board outlines boundaries of acceptability, within which the superintendent and staff are permitted free choice of means. Hence, maximum creativity, innovation and decentralization are allowed without giving away the shop. The proscription of unacceptable means tells the superintendent how not to operate rather than by how to operate.
- The board monitors performance on end and unacceptable means in a systematic and rigorous way. Because the board treats the superintendent as a true chief executive officer, all accountability for ends and unacceptable means rests upon the superintendent alone. For example, the board would not hold the chief financial officer accountable for poor accounting, but the superintendent.
- Board meetings are spent largely in learning about, debating and resolving long-term ends issues rather than dealing with otherwise delegable matters. The consent agenda is used for those items that should be delegated to the superintendent, but upon which the law requires board action. Consequently, unless law directs otherwise, nothing goes on the board's agenda that does not require the working of board wisdom (p. 2).

Overall, the school board would not give up control of the district, nor does Carver argue that it should. He merely says that they stay in control by deciding “what to control and what not to control according to carefully derived principles” (p. 2). Therefore, the school board would be in control of creating the guiding principles. Carver touts that more authority would be given to the superintendent to run the district; in return, the board would hold the superintendent accountable for specific results based off of the guiding principles the board has set up.

To clarify the board and superintendent’s role in Policy Governance, Carver (2000) points out several key components they should follow, which are based on the above components. First, the board’s responsibility should be one of an “owner-representative, the superintendent works for the board, not for the public. . . . For the superintendent, this means that it is the board’s job, not the superintendent’s, to resolve the powerful, conflicting desires of the public” (p. 4). This allows the board to stay part of the community from where they were elected while the superintendent can focus on running the school.

Another point discussed by Carver is that the board should be creating the policies that staff should follow, but they should not be interacting or discussing individual staff matters. Carver (2000) further mentions that the creation of committees in order to help them in their own role is completely necessary, while doing so in order to delve into staff issues is unacceptable and it “interferes with appropriate superintendent prerogatives” (p. 5) by breaking its responsibility to speak as one body.

In an effort to control micromanagement, Carver (2000) clearly states that the board should not get involved with making decisions at the school level. Instead, they should be determining what results they want from the students, staff, and administration: “The board does not compete with administrators in running the schools. The board’s job is not to run schools at all, but to determine as the public’s purchasing agent what the public is buying for the next

generation” (p. 3). The board can do this by determining the results to be obtained for academics as well as “setting the boundaries of ethics and prudence within which the system must operate” (p. 3).

So, as long as the superintendent works within the given means, he/she has freedom to reach these means: “Choosing administrative and programmatic means to achieve the expected student performance is left to the superintendent, so long as the system operates within ethics and prudence boundaries set by the board” (p. 3). This gives the whole staff the ability to bring in their own personalities and strengths into their particular role.

Specific to school districts, Carver believes that the superintendent can operate a school district like a genuine chief executive officer (CEO). The accountability of the school, therefore, lies in the superintendent’s hands. Evaluation of the superintendent is a meticulous one as the board determines if the system is working. To clarify, “the board evaluates the system, then pins that evaluation on the superintendent. In short, ongoing monitoring of system performance against the board’s stated expectation is the superintendent’s evaluation” (p. 5). Therefore, the superintendent is evaluated on objectives decided on the board ahead of time.

In addition, school boards would resume the responsibility to run meetings and supply their own agenda. Currently, school boards look to the superintendent to create an agenda for discussion that covers managerial tasks. Carver (2000) discusses that by creating their own agendas, they will not be bothered by managerial tasks, and they can be of a “far higher order” (p. 3).

Carver’s Policy Governance model clearly distinguishes the role of the school board and the role of the superintendent. In this model, school districts would operate similar to corporate boards and provide the latitude for the CEO or superintendent to handle all of the day-to-day operations. The board’s primary focus would be to establish clear guidelines to follow and

measure profits or losses. In the educational sense, the board would measure fiscal spending and student achievement outcomes.

Site-Based Management (SBM), sometimes called school-based management, is a third proposed model of school board reform. With the concept of SBM, educational decision-making occurs at individual school sites rather than coming from school board or central office directives (Ziebarth, 1999); this is commonly known as decentralization, which limits school board facilitation.

In the SBM approach, each individual school within a district would be responsible to establish and uphold its own educational goals, curriculum, and budgets. Through their studies, Leithwood and Menzies (1998) found that school administrators and key school personnel should be directly responsible for the school they are in charge of. Furthermore, Leithwood and Menzies state, “[S]uch authority, in combination with the incentive to make the best use of resources, ought to get more of the resources of the school into the direct service of students” (p. 328). This form of educational governance would clearly change the responsibilities of the traditional school board. In turn, students’ needs would be met without seeking direct approval from the school board. Supporters of SBM suggest that this type of educational governance reform will improve student achievement.

To better understand SBM, Drury (1998) outlines three fundamental beliefs on the effectiveness of SBM when it is utilized as a form of governance in school systems:

- Those closest to the ‘technical core’ of education systems – because of their greater access to information concerning students’ diverse characteristics, needs, and learning styles – will make better decisions about educational programs than those farther removed from the teaching and learning process;

- Decisions concerning curricula, instructional technologies, and other programmatic features of education will be most effective and enduring when carried out by those who feel a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for those decisions; and
- Accountability will increase when key areas of decision-making authority are shifted to the local level. (p. 2)

Therefore, the individuals that Drury believes should make the decisions are the ones who are closest to the students and the school itself. The individuals responsible for the decision-making would work cohesively to determine the direction and academic goals for each building.

Although the benefits of SBM may be great, it may cause discord among individuals who do not have the same goals in mind.

In SBM, the school administration may not necessarily be the sole individuals making educational decisions. They have the option to do so, but they may also take in the opinions of others. Instead, building principals, teachers, and parents would be charged to make these important decisions collectively through what is known as a school-site council, also known as a school-based management council (Kubick, 1988; Ziebarth, 1999). In the SBM model, the school administrators would facilitate the process as they seek input from the rest of the council. The school board would, though, take an active role in conjunction with the administration in terms of how they set up SBM by determining who and how many will be on this council, as well as who gets the final say in the decision making.

Even though some of the decisions of running the school will be taken out of the hands of the local school boards, the board still has an extremely important role: “The board continues to set broad policies and establish a clear and unifying vision for the district and the schools” (Kubick, 1988, p. 2). Policies may include pay structures for teachers, overall educational goals,

and establishing accountability systems. This would be similar to the policy boards that are believed to be effective according to The Twentieth Century Fund (1992).

School boards that choose to utilize the SBM model often face constraints when establishing the amount of authority given to individual schools (Drury, 1998). Wallace (1996) explains, “The current legal structure in most states leaves the sole responsibility for schools to the elected school board. Boards are not free to assign their legal responsibilities to local governance structures without appropriate action by state legislators” (p. 83-84). Under the current system of educational governance, most states do not have guidelines in place that will help board members discern what educational responsibilities can be allocated to individual schools. Zeibarth (1999) cites that fewer than twelve states have mandatory SBM legislation for schools to follow. Therefore, a majority of states do not have legislation that will force or help boards decide what individual schools will be responsible within the constraints of the law.

Even though school administrators may be trained in many areas of school leadership, it cannot be expected that community members and teachers of the council will have the same fundamental knowledge base to assume a joint leadership role in the school system. In order to allow individual school stakeholders like the school-site councils to make decisions regarding educational issues, proper training must occur. Wallace (1996) states, “The key to successful site-based governance of schools is adequate training for school personnel, parents, and community members in conducting effective meetings, consensus decision making, conflict resolution, budget development, and so on” (p. 84). Therefore, all involved should acquire training when implementing SBM. Training may include topics such as conflict resolution, budget development, and curriculum implementation. The training would be based on the areas that were covered by the school-site councils.

Another obstacle regarding SBM is how school district money will be divided. The school board would still come up with the overall amount that the district has to spend. They will formulate the overall amount through what is brought in at both the state and local levels. Then, “the district office determines the total funds needed by the whole district, determines the district wide costs (such as the cost of central administration and transportation), and allocates the remaining funds to the individual schools” (Kubick, 1988, p. 3). The district office would also take into account how many students were in each school and what type of student they were (1988). Then, it would be up to each individual school and site council, if they were using one, to determine where the money would go within each school: “Surplus funds can be carried over to the next year or be shifted to a program that needs more funds; in this way, long-range planning and efficiency are encouraged” (Kubick, 1988, p. 3).

Supporters of SBM believe it makes sense to take the decision-making authority out of the hands of school board members and into the hands of individuals who are closest to the educational process. Advocates of SBM contend that such a model would “democratize governance, ensure greater efficiency in the utilization of resources, enhance accountability, professionalize and empower teachers, increase responsiveness to local values and preferences, and improve educational programs” (Drury, 1998, p. 1). By empowering individuals who have an understanding of the daily operations of a school, decision-making may be expedited without having to petition the school board or central office for approval. As an example, money and/or personnel may be shifted from one program to another to best serve the needs of students anytime during the school year. These actions would not have to then follow typical school board voting regulations like bringing up the topic at a meeting, tabling the issue, then voting on it, which can sometimes take up to a month or more to make a decision. As a result of the shift in

responsibility to individual schools and decision-makers, supporters believe that SBM will produce significant gains in student achievement (1999).

However, opponents of SBM believe that the switch to decentralized decision making brings uncertainty for school boards. Danzberger (1992) writes that districts that have made the move “to school-based management within the current governance structure are facing real barriers resulting from confusion over roles within the district and the reluctance of boards either to give up power or trust the schools to make decisions” (p. 106). It may be a difficult adjustment for school boards to allow individual schools to make decisions while the board is still legally responsible for the district’s performance. In addition, Wallace (1996) warns that some community members who serve on the decision making panel may make decisions based on their own interest and not of the entire school community. This is a common issue of any organizations to face whether they are in or out of the realm of education.

Site-based management has been an option for school boards for almost two decades. Over the years, research has been conducted to determine if SBM is a viable option for school boards to increase student achievement. Danzberger (1992) suggests that the verdict is still out whether or not SBM will improve academic achievement. More definitively, Drury (1998) reports that “a growing number of studies suggest that this reform has been largely ineffective in raising the bar for student achievement” (p. 6). Finally, Drury recommends that until SBM has shown to be successful in raising student achievement, school boards should use caution implementing this type of decentralizing decision-making model. Although, Bickel (2008) suggests that just like with other academic programs such as special education and charter schools, it is in how school boards organize and implement SBM that will be a direct reflection on its success.

Finally, the total elimination of school boards is another competing model school boards currently face. Those who advocate such a change argue that school boards are no longer effective in operating school districts (Danzberger, 1992). As school districts are being held accountable for increased levels of student achievement, concerns have risen as to whether or not school boards are the appropriate governing body to lead the charge. One model that would eliminate school boards as a governing body includes a mayoral takeover of city schools. Another proposal would eliminate the need for a school board due to a state-monitored system of public education.

A mayoral takeover of a school district would relinquish the power of school boards and give it directly to the mayor. The mayor, in turn, would then be responsible for decisions such as funding, contract negotiations, and curriculum. Danzberger (1992) writes, in this model “accountability for public education would lie squarely with the mayor, rather than be diffused among a board of governors” (p. 110). Supporters of this model of school governance believe by taking the decision making out of the hands of school boards and placing it within the power of city governance, positive outcomes may occur. As an example, educational and city services may be linked together and provide a more coherent educational system (Danzberger, 1992). Such services include Children and Youth, juvenile probation, health services, and physical plant maintenance.

Critics of the mayoral system believe that a mayor, without knowledge of educational best practices, may not be the answer for academic improvement. Resnick (1999) writes, “[T]he mayor’s time, focus or knowledge base is likely to be inadequate to lead a sustain student achievement and other attributes of good governance” (p. 28). Adequate time to focus solely on educational issues may not be possible for a mayor with other responsibilities. According to Danzberger (1992), critics believe that special attention to education would be lost in this type of

merger while also adding additional political pressures to an already politically-filled entity.

Danzberger goes on to write “critics envision political deals in which education needs are on the table along with potholes in the streets, the number of police on the beats, and garbage collection” (p. 110).

To offset some of the educational responsibilities of the mayor, he/she may appoint a board of managers to oversee public education (Resnick, 1999). This has already been done with one major city school district. Angela Sewall (1996) cites that the Chicago School District “replaced the school board with a business board” (p. 8). The business board was appointed by the mayor to oversee the work of the superintendent and maintain financial control of the district (1996). The business board, unlike an elected school board, does not have to represent constituencies of the community. Sewall goes on to describe “the business board, really a board of trustees, oversees the large financial interests of the district and addresses issues such as facilities maintenance, strategic planning relative to transportation, facilities, bonding and other general functions” (p. 8). In turn, the superintendent of schools would still focus on curriculum issues in the district. Danzberger (1992) expresses that even though governance changes may occur, such as Chicago, there is no guarantee of growth in academic achievement.

A state-monitored system of education, another form of board elimination, would force school districts to operate under the direct umbrella of each state’s department of education. In a state takeover, the school board’s responsibilities would be significantly reduced or even eliminated. Such takeovers are gaining more attention nationwide as states are feeling the pressure to comply with federal mandates. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), requires states to take corrective action against school districts that are not demonstrating sufficient academic gains (Hammer, 2005).

In accordance with NCLB, academic gains are monitored in each state by the issuance of standardized tests. If sufficient academic progress has not been made over a period of time, states may impose corrective action(s) to ensure acceptable student achievement gains. Steiner (2005) cites that under NCLB regulations, one option of corrective action for states to employ would be to turn school operations “over to the state educational agency, if permitted under State law and agreed by the State” (p. 3). If a takeover by the state occurs, the state has options such as contracting with an outside agency to run the school or reopen the school as a charter school (2005). In either case, the current school board structure would dissolve entirely or be severely eliminated. In addition to poor academic performance, other causes for a state takeover include financial mismanagement, corrupt governance, and run-down infrastructures (Ziebarth, 2002).

Regardless of the reason, states must pass laws to assume control of either individual schools or entire school districts. A majority of states already have legislation in place to take over struggling school districts. Hammer (2005) reports,

Since 1988, more than half of all states have passed laws that allow state authorities to take control of local school districts under certain circumstances. As of 2004, 54 cases of state takeovers had been reported nationwide - most of them in urban and rural districts (p. 1).

Hammer also notes that state takeovers can last until improvement has been shown. Once improvement has been demonstrated, states may relinquish its authority back over to the school district.

School boards across the country are feeling the pressure to improve all aspects of public education including academic achievement. The elimination of a school board is a viable option for some struggling school districts, and in some cases, the next logical step. Hammer (2005) states that “when school boards fail after years of warnings and less intrusive interventions by

the state, policymakers are faced with having to choose other institutions – at least – for a time – to operate districts” (p. 5).

2.1.5 What significant studies were previously conducted to connect the function of the school board with high and low levels of student achievement?

Deborah Land (2002) provides a review of literature that has been written over the past two decades on the role and effectiveness of school boards. In the report, Land identified two major studies that offer insight on a school board’s effect on student achievement. The first study was conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB, 2000). The second study was developed by Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman (Goodman et al., 1997).

The IASB (2000) developed a study to determine if some school boards can create higher student achievement than other boards. Furthermore, IASB attempted to identify links between school board behavior and academic achievement of students. In order to create the study, IASB looked at six school districts in Georgia that ranked very high or very low in academic achievement for three consecutive years: 1995-96, 1996-97, and 1997-98. To identify these districts, the IASB used a database from a previous study in Georgia that was established for the Council for School Performance. The database established academic indicators such as the percentage of students deemed proficient on the statewide curriculum-based assessments: “In addition to the state curriculum based assessments, the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) was administered to third, fifth, and eighth grade students and the Georgia High School Graduation Test was administered to the high school students” (p. 4). The six school districts studied ranged from 1,359 to 5,163 students with similar community demographics.

Once the districts were identified, the IASB (2000) research team conducted interviews of more than 159 individuals who represented school board members, administration, and teachers from all six districts. Prior to the interviews, the research team did not know which district was classified as a high- or low-performing district. Through a twenty-five question interview, researchers asked questions pertaining to conditions that existed in the district for school renewal or productive change. The established conditions were “derived from summaries of research on productive educational change” (p. 30). The seven conditions for school renewal include

1. Emphasis on Building a Human Organizational System
2. Ability to Create and Sustain Initiatives
3. Supportive Workplace for Staff
4. Staff Development
5. Support for School Sites through Data and Information
6. Community Involvement
7. Integrated Leadership. (p. 7)

Questions were organized for school board members and administrators to determine which of the seven conditions were currently happening in the district and whether or not the interviewees understood each of the seven conditions. Also, questions were reorganized for school employees to determine the degree in which the conditions were present.

Key findings of the study were broken down into similarities and differences within the six districts studied. Similarities include

Caring about children. While their specific behaviors and attitudes were remarkably different, in all cases the people appeared to care deeply about doing the right thing for children.

Peaceable relationships. In all cases, the board/superintendent teams had fairly amicable relationships. Typically, board members in all six districts said, ‘we disagree without making it personal.’

Board opinion of superintendent. All the boards were fairly well satisfied with their superintendents.

Tension about roles in a site-based system. All were feeling some tension in balancing the goal of building-level autonomy in site-based management with the need for equity and continuity across the school system.

Students in categorical programs (special education, Title I, bilingual programs). Neither high or low achieving districts had been successful at closing the learning gap for students with special needs and all were providing services in categorical programs.

Local backgrounds of board members and staff. Approximately 75-80 percent of the board members and professional staff in all districts grew up in the district, an adjacent county or a similar county within their region. (p. 5)

In this study, regardless of academic achievement, the district personnel interviewed claimed to have a “peaceable” relationship between school boards and their superintendents. Also, the composition of the school boards studied appeared to be very similar in nature, including backgrounds and demographics. As a result, IASB concluded that any differences between high- and low-performing schools “were not products of the gross demographic features of the communities and the people who operated the schools” (p. 40). But, similarities between the high- and low-achieving districts stopped there.

IASB (2000) found major differences both in beliefs and in actions by the school board/superintendent team. First, the high-performing districts believed that all students could be

successful, regardless of their home life or financial status: “Social or economic conditions of homes and the community were seen as challenges in the quest to help all students succeed” (IASB, p. 6). As part of this challenge, high-achieving districts believed that their job was to find ways to educate every student, regardless of obstacles: “Poverty, lack of parental involvement and other factors were described as challenges to be overcome, not as excuses” (IASB, p. 7).

Contrarily, IASB (2000) found that the low-achieving districts felt that students were being academically limited by such factors such as income or home situations. IASB writes, “Board members often focused on factors that they believed kept students from learning, such as poverty, lack of parental support, societal factors, or lack of motivation” (p. 8). Furthermore, IASB believes that the low-achieving districts not only acknowledged the limiting factors but accepted them as well. For example, several quotes from board members in the low-achieving districts interviewed include, “You always have some parents you just can’t reach” and “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink” (p. 6).

Next, the high-achieving districts were constantly looking for ways to improve the quality of education being provided. IASB (2000) found that “The board/superintendent team and school personnel viewed the school system critically and were constantly seeking opportunities to improve” (p. 6). The motivation to improve academically regardless of external pressures such as state mandates was inherent. The high-achieving districts did not need directives from the state or federal regulations such as NCLB to motivate them to educate students at a high level.

In the low-achieving districts, the school board/superintendent teams focused on “managing the school environment, rather than changing or improving it” (p. 6). Furthermore, the low-achieving districts were reactive toward state mandates rather than being proactive in order to ensure student growth: “Board members referred to external pressures as the reasons for

working to improve” (IASB, p. 8). In addition, one school board member of a low-achieving district cited “not wanting to have the lowest test scores” (p. 8) as a motivator to improve academically. Generally, school boards of low-achieving districts did not have an internal desire to make academic improvements like high-achieving counterparts unless an outside entity forced their hand.

Another significant difference between the low- and high-achieving districts was the understanding and implementation of the seven conditions for school renewal (IASB, 2000). In high-achieving districts, school board members were “knowledgeable about topics such as improvement goals, curriculum, instruction, assessment and staff development” (p. 6). In addition, IASB found that the board members in high-achieving districts understood current school initiatives, welcomed staff development, participated in goal setting, and understood clearly what their role was in supporting the process. They achieved a high level without micromanaging the process.

IASB (2000) found the opposite to be true for the low-achieving districts: “Board members were, as a whole, only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives” (p. 6). Moreover, very few board members were able to describe goals set for the district, identify their role in school improvement, or value staff development. In one interview of a low-performing district, IASB cited a board member declaring, “There is too damn much staff development” (p. 57).

One final difference noted by IASB (2000) was the connection between staff members in the district and the educational goals set by the school board and administration. In the high-achieving districts, “staff members could link building goals to board/district goals for student learning and describe how those goals were having an impact in their classroom and other classrooms in the building” (IASB, p. 6). To further identify the connection, IASB found that

staff members could verbalize how their staff development focused around district initiatives and how progress was monitored using data. Finally, the staff in the high-achieving districts felt respected and supported by the school board in their common goal of improved student achievement.

Contrarily, IASB (2000) found that in low-achieving districts, staff members believed that the school board did not focus on improving student achievement or school renewal of any kind: “Staff members couldn’t identify board goals for student learning or how they had impacted teaching and learning” (IASB, p. 13). In terms of staff development, staff members selected courses to meet individual needs instead of being focused around academic goals or initiatives. Therefore, IASB concluded that there was very little evidence that staff members in low-achieving districts focused on school improvement when it was not a priority at the school board level.

The initial question the IASB (2000) study had was to determine if some school boards could create higher student achievement than other school boards. While a definitive answer was not produced, clear differences in the way school boards operate were demonstrated:

The IASB study found that the understanding and beliefs of school boards in high-achieving districts and the presence of seven conditions for productive change were markedly different from those of boards in low-achieving districts. It’s important to note that, as a result of this study, we can’t say that the board caused high achievement or low achievement to happen. Instead, the board’s understanding and beliefs and their efforts to ensure the presence of specific conditions within the system appeared to be part of a district-wide culture focused on improvement in student learning. (p. 14)

Ultimately, the IASB study produced commonalities and beliefs of board members in high-achieving districts compared to those in low-achieving districts. The IASB concluded that even though school board members are not professional educators, they may have an impact on the quality of support and initiatives in the quest for academic improvements.

In a second study by Goodman et al. (1997), which was a national study, researchers set out to find links between the school board/superintendent collaboration as it relates to student achievement. In addition, the study focused on finding characteristics of quality school governance as well as poor governance. With the aid of the National Advisory Committee on Public School District Governance, a research design was created along with the selection of school districts to be used in the sample. The study sample included “ten diverse school districts in five states – Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, and Texas” (p. 3). School districts were selected from the following criteria:

- Size: Districts in rural areas, suburban areas, and small to medium-sized cities.
- Student Achievement: Districts with low to high student achievement, based on recent state and national test results, profiles of graduating classes, and dropout rates over the past three years.
- Governance: Districts with recent school board-superintendent conflict and districts with strong school-board-superintendent collaboration.
- Racial and economic Factors: Districts reflecting America’s diversity in these key areas (p. 9).

Overall, the research team interviewed over 130 educators, board members, parents, community leaders, and citizens.

As a result of the study, Goodman et al. (1997) confirmed that quality school board-superintendent governance has an effect on student achievement in a positive way. As school boards and superintendents work together, Goodman et al. states, “Research confirms that it can have a very positive impact on the factors that influence achievement” (p. 22). However, Goodman et al. also points out that there are other important factors that influence student achievement such as “socioeconomic factors, parent involvement, quality of teachers and other staff, curricula, facilities, and so on” (p. 22). Still, Goodman et al. report that school districts with a quality governance system in place tend to produce academically higher achievement results.

Through the school board-superintendent relationship of quality governance systems, Goodman et al. (1997) found and identified several common characteristics among high-achieving school districts in the study.

- Well-governed school boards usually had longer board service: “School board members in these quality districts tend to serve at least two terms (three to four years per term)” (p. 13).
- School boards ran effective board meetings and participated in board training. School board meetings in the top schools last approximately two hours and are held one time per month. New school board members participate in orientation training sessions held by the superintendent so that they understand “their legal and policy responsibilities” (p. 14).
- School boards were effective in leading a district without micromanaging. The board allows the superintendent to operate as the CEO and educational leader in the district. Simply, school board members create the structure and policies that allow the superintendent to effectively run the district.
- School boards worked as a “board as a whole” instead of standing committees.
- The board president or chair and the superintendent communicated effectively: “The board chairs and superintendents in these high-achieving districts meet or confer via telephone or email

at least once each week” (p. 15). In turn, the board chair communicates important information to other members of the board.

- The school board and superintendent create short- and long-term goals for the district that focuses on the improvement of student achievement.
- There is evidence of effective communication between the school board and community. The board keeps the “community informed of student progress and needs, and serving as ‘cheerleaders’ for the schools” (p. 15).
- After adopting a school budget, the board delegates the responsibility to oversee the budget to the superintendent.
- School boards had a systematic approach to evaluate the performance of the superintendent. The evaluation is based upon a predetermined, “mutually agreed-upon procedure” (p. 15).
- Self-assessment of the board-superintendent governance. School boards held “periodic retreats with the superintendent to evaluate their work as a policy board, to assess the effectiveness of the board-superintendent team in improving student achievement, and to plan for the continuing education of their governance team” (p. 15).
- Collaborative board-superintendent relationship. “Above all else, the school boards and their superintendent in these high-performing districts work collaboratively on behalf of children. There is a high degree of trust between each quality school board and its superintendent of schools” (p. 16).

Goodman et al. (1997) also identified school board characteristics that were shared by low-achieving school districts, thus labeling them as having a poor governance system and exhibited poor student achievement.

- School board micromanagement. “Instead of setting goals, policies, and strategies, the boards were mired in decisions about field trips, discipline, personnel, school fundraising, parent complaints, and petitions” (p. 17).
- Conflict between individual board members amongst themselves as well as with the superintendent. Conflict stemmed from board members serving their own personal interests as well as not agreeing on what their priorities should be. In some cases, the conflicts lead to the firing of the superintendent and board members not being re-elected.
- Board members did not follow the agenda process and the chain-of-command: “Individual board members would bring up matters at board meetings with no prior notification to either the superintendent or school board chairperson” (p. 17).
- Board members play to the news media. School board members “grandstand” during their televised board meeting. “In some instances, individual members who dislike the superintendent or other board members try to embarrass them through questions raised before the TV cameras” (p. 18).
- School boards were not committed to improving governance. School boards were not willing to self-analyze their effectiveness or improve the governance structure.

As a result of the study, Goodman et al. (1997) suggests that there is a direct correlation between student achievement and quality governance. However, Goodman et al. did cite one district that maintained a high student achievement level with a poor governance system. As a rationale for their findings, Goodman et al. credited the superintendent for effectively controlling the board and effectively producing high student achievement: “The researchers learned that the superintendent serves as a buffer between the board and the schools, so that the conflict in the board room does not disturb the work of students, teachers, principals, or other staff members” (p. 17). Even though the research team found one exception in their study, Goodman et al. (1997)

maintains that effective teamwork between the superintendent and school board can produce high levels of student achievement.

In both studies, IASB (2000) and Goodman et al. (1997) identified common characteristics of board behavior that may influence student achievement (Table 1. & 2.).

Additionally, both studies indicate that the role of the school board and quality of governance does have an affect on student achievement.

Table 1 IASB Summary of School Board Behaviors

School Board Behavior	High-Achieving Schools	Low-Achieving Schools
1. Cares about children	X	X
2. Peaceable relationship with superintendent	X	X
3. Belief that all students can be successful	X	
4. Belief that home or income affects learning		X
5. Primary mission is to educate every student	X	
6. Constantly seeks ways to improve education	X	
7. Reactive rather than proactive to improve education		X
8. Internal desire to improve academically	X	
9. Knowledgeable about educational initiatives	X	
10. Participated in goal setting	X	
11. Micromanaging the educational process		X
12. Supports professional development	X	
13. Staff perception that board members focused on education	X	
14. Fosters a district-wide culture to improve education	X	

Table 2 Goodman Summary of School Board Behaviors

School Board Behavior	High-Achieving Schools	Low-Achieving Schools
1. Longer tenure of board members	X	
2. Collaborative board/superintendent relationship	X	
3. Micromanaging the educational process		X
4. Systematic approach to evaluate superintendent	X	
5. Conflict between board members/superintendent		X
6. Professional board meetings	X	
7. Chain of command is observed	X	
8. Committed to improving governance	X	
9. Participate in board orientation	X	
10. Superintendent operates as C.E.O.	X	
11. Board operates as a whole not committees	X	
12. Effective Communication with superintendent and community	X	
13. Create short and long term educational goals	X	
14. Serves on board for personal agenda		X
15. Participates in goal setting “retreats”	X	

2.1.6 Conclusion

School boards can play a crucial role in the quest for improved student achievement. To target the function of the school board, this literature review explored how school boards were created and the policies they currently utilize in the school system. In addition, there was a focus on the literature to establish what key school board practices that may have both a positive and negative affect on student achievement.

In publications such as A Nation at Risk (1983) and federal mandates like No Child Left Behind, school boards are criticized for not being effective in leading educational improvement. As a result, several proposed models of school board governance were identified in the literature that could, or has, changed the function of the traditional school board. Finally, the literature was

explored to identify significant studies previously done that link the role of the school board to student achievement.

As a result of the review of literature, a need is evident for additional studies of school boards, specifically the investigation of board characteristics and its affect on student achievement. Deborah Land (2002) concurs: “[S]olid research linking these characteristics to more effective governance and, more specifically, positive academic outcomes is notably absent in the literature” (p. 33). Therefore, the basis of this study will attempt to link the policies of the school board and its practices to student academic achievement from the perspective of the superintendent.

3.0 CHAPTER III

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to identify the supporting factors within school boards that have an effect on student achievement taken from the perspective of the school superintendent. As identified in the literature, additional research on school boards is necessary to determine what kind of effect the school board has on student achievement (Land, 2002). This correlation study will attempt to help clarify the relationship between the policies and practices that school boards engage in and examine the effect they may have on student achievement. To help guide the study, the following research questions were developed:

1. What policies and practices does a school board engage in that influences student achievement?
2. How do these policies and practices of school boards compare in lower- and higher-achieving school districts?

This chapter will establish the design of the study as well as the population and sampling of districts that were used. In addition, the data collection methods and research instruments will be identified. Finally, the procedures used to analyze the data collected will be addressed.

3.1.2 Overview of the Study

This study was designed by using a form of mixed method research. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) define mixed method research as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study” (p. 17). Individually defined, quantitative research focuses on deduction, explanation, and prediction using data collection tools such as surveys (2004). While in qualitative research, the researcher is considered the “primary instrument of data collection;” as such, personal interviews allow the researcher to study a limited amount of cases in greater depth (2004).

More specifically, this study utilized a sequential mixed method approach in collecting data. Creswell (2009) defines sequential mixed methods as “when the data are collected in phases, either the qualitative or the quantitative data come first” (p. 206). For this study, quantitative data was secured first through using surveys sent to a large group of superintendents. Then, for the qualitative aspect, a select few superintendents were interviewed in order to more closely analyze the policies and practices of school boards. Creswell states that this type of approach will allow the researcher to first explore a topic from a larger number of people and then explore the topic with participants at selected sites in an interview format. (2009). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) believe this type of research approach is a valid way to learn about the issues then “discuss directly the issues under investigation and tap into participants’ perspectives and meanings” (p. 18-19).

In addition, the mixed method approach was employed for this study to allow the researcher to triangulate the data gained from both the superintendent interviews and from the surveys (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). For example, the data gained from the survey, or the

most prominent policies and practices of school boards that affect student achievement, served as the basis for the interviews with the selected superintendents. The data gained from the interviews were used to support or contradict the findings from the survey. Ultimately, the methods triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data served as a comparative analysis for this study (Patton, 2001). It is the intent that the data collected from both the surveys and interviews will provide a clear picture of the policies and practices of the school boards that were studied.

The overall design of the study was divided into four sequential steps. The first step identified which school districts/superintendents were eligible to participate in the study. The second step categorized and ranked the selected school districts into lower-and higher-achieving school districts. The third step was to distribute surveys to the superintendents of the selected school districts. The final step was to conduct interviews with the selected superintendents.

3.1.3 Population and Sampling

For this study, superintendents of school districts were identified to participate in a survey and personal interview. In two previous studies of school boards, IASB (2000) and Goodman et al. (1997), researchers chose a wider population of individuals. They went to teachers, administrators, community members, or board members themselves to provide information for their study. This researcher chose only to utilize superintendents of Pennsylvania school districts to collect data. The rationale for selecting superintendents was based on the position that the superintendent is considered to be the chief educational leaders in their respective school systems (Carver, 2000; Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). As the school district's chief educational leader, the superintendent has a direct hand in school board operations and understands the implications

of policy on student achievement. Furthermore, since the superintendent is not an actual member of the board but still works with them on a daily basis, he or she is able to look at the board as a whole to see how they function and provide an important perspective of the policies and practices of the school board. For the study, the names of superintendents and the school districts in which they lead were obtained through the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

The sample size of superintendents for this study was selected from within the 500 school districts in Pennsylvania (PDE, 2007). In the previous studies of school boards, IASB (2000) and Goodman et al. (1997) both identified a small sampling of school districts to study. For example, IASB selected 6 school districts in Georgia with similar community demographics. Goodman et al. selected 10 schools throughout five different states and limited the study from small to medium-sized cities. For this study, school districts studied were selected by enrollment size and represent the majority of school districts in Pennsylvania.

The rationale for limiting the sample size is twofold. First, because this study is broken into two parts, both quantitative and qualitative, it was important to identify a workable sample size that best represented the majority of school districts in Pennsylvania. Second, although there are many factors that contribute to the policies and practices a school board may play within a district, it is reasonable to believe that the size of a school district would play an integral part. For example, the hiring practices of school boards in districts with a student population of over 100,000 students would face significantly different challenges than a school board who is responsible for educating only 500 students. Therefore, it is the researcher's belief that by focusing on school districts that represent the majority of school districts in Pennsylvania, as well as relatively similar student populations, a clear picture could be obtained on the policies and practices of school boards.

The following school district populations from across Pennsylvania, as seen in Table 3, were identified from the most recent public school enrollment listings as garnered from PDE (2007).

Table 3 Distribution of Public School Districts by Enrollment Size (PDE, 2006-2007)

Student Population	Number of Districts	% of Districts	% of Enrollments
Total	500	100.0	100.0
13,000 or more	7	1.4	16.7
12,000 to 12,999	3	0.6	2.2
11,000 to 11,999	6	1.2	4.0
10,000 to 10,999	1	0.2	0.6
9,000 to 9,999	4	0.8	2.1
8,000 to 8,999	8	1.6	3.8
7,000 to 7,999	10	2.0	4.2
6,000 to 6,999	12	2.4	4.5
5,000 to 5,999	27	5.4	8.6
4,000 to 4,999	40	8.0	10.1
3,000 to 3,999*	74	14.8	14.6
2,000 to 2,999*	97	19.4	13.4
1,000 to 1,999*	146	29.2	12.4
Under 1,000	65	13.0	2.8

** Denotes school districts that are eligible to be selected for study*

PDE (2007) illustrates that school districts across Pennsylvania vary in size; the smallest district consists of 246 students while the largest district educates over 177,000 students. It was determined that school districts with a student enrollment between 1,000 and 3,999 students represent 63.4% or a majority of all Pennsylvania public school districts. As a result, these 317 school districts were identified as possible participants in the study.

Within this sample group, school districts were ranked based on two consecutive years of the most recent reading and math scores on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (2008), the PSSA is a standardized test administered in all Pennsylvania public schools. The test was first implemented

in 1992 and became mandatory in 1998. The original standardized tests allowed the Pennsylvania Department of Education to inform their residents about the quality of schools and assist school districts in identifying strengths and weaknesses in academic programming. However, as a result of the federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the current form of the PSSA exams provide an additional function. Now, the PSSA exams track student proficiency as well as determine if school districts meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as established in No Child Left Behind. AYP sets proficiency benchmarks for school districts and requires that all students are “proficient” by the year 2014.

Performance results on the PSSA exams identify if students are advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic based on state approved standards. Currently, students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 are tested and scored in math and reading. However, not every grade level mentioned was tested and counted for AYP before the 2006-2007 school year. Therefore, this study will utilize PSSA results from the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years.

To begin the ranking process of the 317 school districts, PSSA results were obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the 2006-2007 school years. This researcher totaled the percentage of students in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 in each district who received a score of “proficient” or “advanced” in math and then added them to the percentage of students who received “proficient” or “advanced” in reading to get a combined score. Next, the same procedure was used for the 2007-2008 school years. The last step was to add the math/reading combined scores for both the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years to determine an overall proficiency score. Below are examples of how the overall proficiency of a school district was calculated.

Table 4 illustrates the Sto-Rox School District earned a combined math and reading proficiency score of an 86.4 in the 2006-2007 school year. In the 2007-2008 school year, Sto-

Rox recorded a combined math and reading proficiency score of a 91.9 (Table 5). After combining the two years of testing together, the Sto-Rox School District tallied an overall proficiency score of 178.3 (Table 6).

Table 4 2006-2007 PSSA Proficiency Results

District Name	Grade	% of Math Advanced	% of Math Proficient	% of Reading Advanced	% of Reading Proficient	<i>Math and Reading Combined</i>
Sto-Rox SD	District Total	15.8	29.4	10.9	30.0	86.4
Big Spring SD	District Total	36.5	34.6	25.6	36.9	133.6
Peters Twp SD	District Total	62.8	28.0	53.4	36.9	181.1

Table 5 2007-2008 PSSA Proficiency Results

District Name	Grade	% of Math Advanced	% of Math Proficient	% of Reading Advanced	% of Reading Proficient	<i>Math and Reading Combined</i>
Sto-Rox SD	District Total	20.5	29	12.2	30.2	91.9
Big Spring SD	District Total	38.8	32.1	27.5	38.3	136.7
Peters Twp SD	District Total	62.8	26.1	52.5	36.5	177.9

Table 6 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 Combined Proficiency Results

District Name	Grade	Math and Reading 2006-2007	Math and Reading 2007-2008	<i>Overall Proficiency Score</i>
Sto-Rox SD	District Total	86.4	91.9	178.3
Big Spring SD	District Total	133.6	136.7	270.3
Peters Twp SD	District Total	181.1	177.9	359.0

Next, the median score was calculated. The median proficiency score for the 317 school districts selected for the study was 290.70. The school districts that fell below the median were considered a lower-achieving school district and the school districts above the median were considered a higher-achieving school district. The final step in ranking the 317 school districts was to divide the districts into quartiles and label them ranging from lowest-, lower-, higher-, and highest-achieving school districts.

To further narrow the survey population, 158 districts and their superintendents or approximately 50% of the original 317 superintendents were selected to receive a survey to complete. Of the 158 superintendents identified, 79 or 25% were from the absolute lowest-achieving districts, and 79 or 25 % of the superintendents were from the absolute highest-achieving school districts as previously identified through PSSA scores. It was imperative to have both the absolute lowest- and highest-performing schools represented in order to help show the disparity between the districts and try to highlight what the actual differences are between boards.

One final benchmark was established for school districts to be considered as one of the 25% highest-achieving districts. Each school district must meet or exceed the 2008-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals set by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). As established by PDE (2008), the AYP goals for the years 2008-2010 in math are 56% of the students scoring proficient or higher and 63% of the students scoring proficient or higher in reading. Therefore, to be considered a highest- achieving school district for the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years, districts must reach or exceed the 2008-2010 AYP goals in both math and reading. The rationale to include this final step is to provide validation that if a school district is recognized as a highest-achieving district, the school district has met or exceeded acceptable proficiency rates in both math and reading as prescribed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Below (Table 7) is an example of how the AYP goals were used to help determine if a school district qualifies as a highest-achieving school district. Notice that in the year 2006-2007, the Big Spring School District did not reach the 63% proficiency goal established by PDE, and would not be considered a highest-achieving school district.

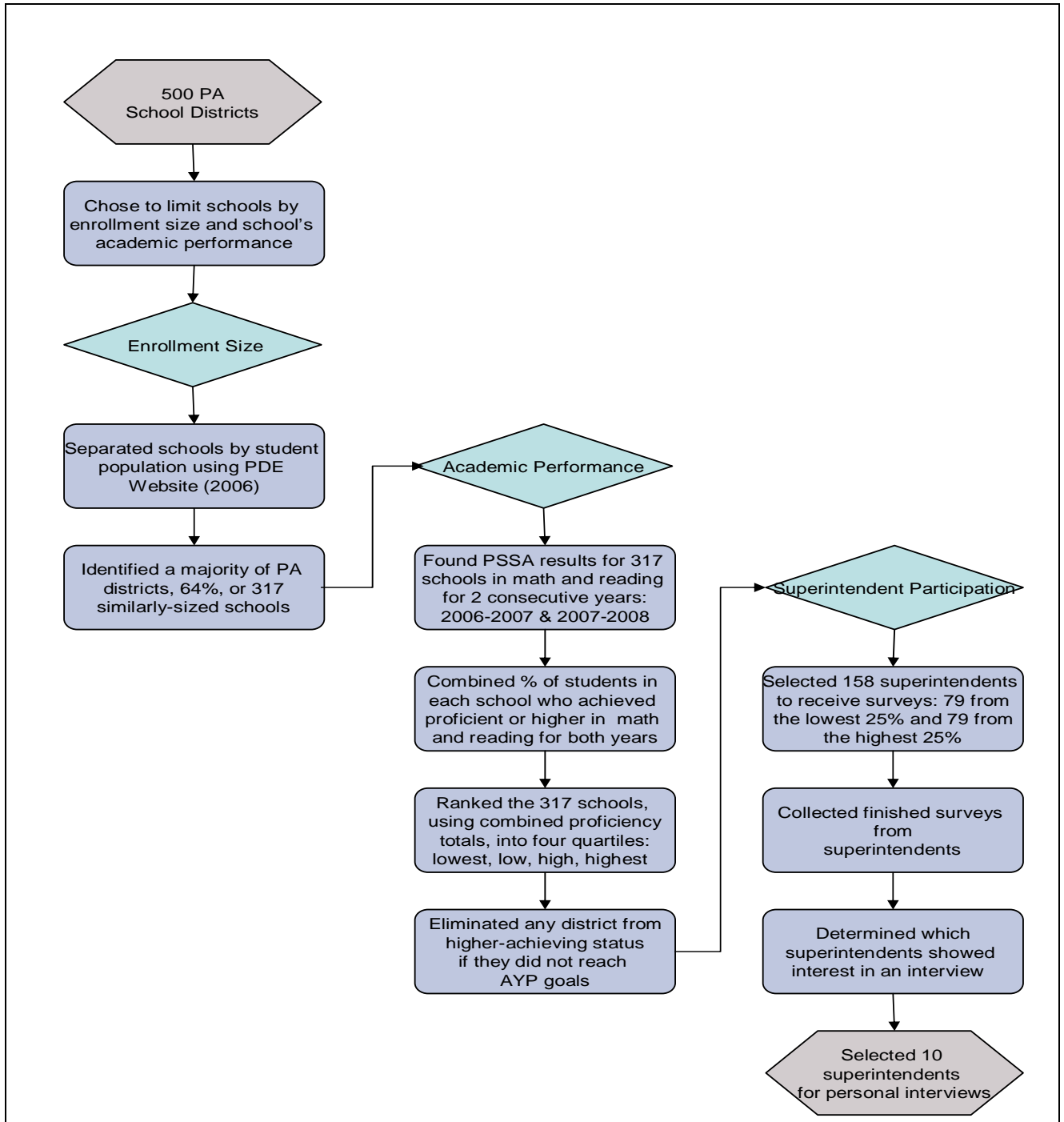
Table 7 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 AYP Goals

District Name	2006-07 Math. Pro.	AYP Goal	2006-07 Rdg. Pro.	AYP Goal	2007-08 Math. Pro.	AYP Goal	2007-08 Rdg. Pro.	AYP Goal	Qualifies Higher Achieving
Sto-Rox SD	45.2	No	41.2	No	49.5	No	42.4	No	No
Big Spring SD	71.1	Yes	62.5	No	70.9	Yes	65.8	Yes	No
Peters Twp SD	90.8	Yes	90.3	Yes	88.9	Yes	89.0	Yes	Yes

For the qualitative portion of the study, 10 superintendents who responded from the survey sample population were selected to participate in a personal interview. The purpose for the interviews was not to represent the survey population but an opportunity to discuss in greater depth qualities of school boards identified from the surveys that have affected student achievement. Superintendents were selected based on interest and the willingness to participate in the interview process as indicated on the survey questionnaire. As a result, half of the superintendents interviewed were from the lowest- achieving districts and the other half of the superintendents were from the highest-achieving districts. Therefore, the small sample of superintendents interviewed was considered a sample of convenience to allow the researcher to equally select superintendents from both the lowest- and highest-achieving school districts.

Below (Figure 1) is a visual representation of the procedures how school districts and superintendents were identified and selected to participate in the study.

Figure 1



School District and Superintendent Selection

3.1.4 Data Collection via Survey

The quantitative research portion of this study utilized a survey instrument to collect data from the identified superintendents. As cited in the literature review, studies on school board's and its affect of student achievement are limited (Land, 2002). In the two major studies of school boards cited previously, IASB (2000) and Goodman et al. (1997), researchers used a qualitative approach to their studies and utilized interviews to gather data. Therefore, to create the survey for this study, the researcher identified from the literature the most common policies and practices of school boards that may have an impact on student achievement. In addition, this researcher spoke to Richard Goodman, the primary researcher of the Goodman et al. study and obtained the interview questions that were used for their particular study in order to help as a guide to build this survey. In short, survey questions were developed from items identified in the literature, sample interview questions from the Goodman et al. study, and the researcher's past experiences. While creating the survey instrument, every effort was made so that each respondent will interpret the questions the same way and respond accurately (Dillman, 2000).

3.1.5 Description of Survey Instrument

The survey in the form of a questionnaire was designed to collect information from the superintendents' perspective of their school boards as they relate to student achievement. The survey utilizes Yes or No responses to questions as well as questions using a Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The survey focuses on policies and practices of school boards that may have an affect on student achievement as found in the literature. Specific content areas in the survey include the use of board policy (Sewall, 1996;

California et al., 1998; Land, 2002; NSBA 2002; Lashway, 2002; Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Carver 2000), utilizing data (NSBF, 2001), student achievement (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; IASB, 2000), budget (Campbell and Greene, 1994; Odden and Archibald, 2000; Land, 2002), evaluation of the superintendent (Eadie, 2003; Sell, 2006), student advocates (IASB, 2000), and goal/vision setting (IASB, 2000; Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Goodman et al., 1997).

In addition, questions regarding board management practices (Jazzar, 2005; Danzberger, 1994; Hill, 2003; Carver, 2000), school board/superintendent relationship (Eadie, 2003; IASB, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997), hiring practices (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992), school board training (Goodman et al., 1997; Campbell & Green, 1994), community relations (Goodman et al., 1997), and effective school board meetings (Carver, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997) were included in the survey. The last section asked respondents general questions concerning years spent in the district (Goodman et al., 1997) and also their willingness to participate in a personal interview. A timeline for the collection of surveys was in April 2009.

Below (Table 8) reflects the survey items and the sources of where the items were found.

Table 8 Survey Items and Sources

Questions Items	Source
Board Policies	Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Land, 2002 California et al, 1998 Danzberger, 1994
Use of Data	NSBF, 2001
Student Achievement	IASB, 2000
Budget	Odden & Archibald, 2000 Land, 2002 IASB, 2000
Superintendent Evaluation	Eadie, 2003 Goodman et al., 1997
Student Advocates	Goodman et al., 1997
Goal/Vision Setting	Goodman et al., 1997 Twentieth Century Fund, 1992
Board Management	Danzberger, 1994 Jazzar, 2005 Carver, 2000
School Board/Superintendent Relationship	IASB, 2000 Goodman et al., 1997
Hiring Practices	Twentieth Century Fund, 1992
School Board Training	Campbell & Greene, 1994 Goodman et al., 1997
Community Relations	Goodman et al., 1997
Effective School Board Meetings	Goodman et al., 1997
Superintendent Tenure	Goodman et al., 1997

3.1.6 Quantitative Data Analysis

After obtaining survey data from the identified superintendents, responses were coded and entered into the SPSS program. Each answer was given a value ranging from 1 to 5.

Response	No	Yes
Code	1	2

Response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Code	1	2	3	4	5

Utilizing the SPSS program, a Chi-Square Test was performed on the yes/no questions and an Independent Samples T Test was performed on the Likert-type questions to compare the means and averages for each category on the survey. Then, a statistical comparison was made to determine if school boards from lowest-achieving school districts have similar tendencies. This same process was utilized for school boards from highest-achieving districts. Finally, a comparative analysis was performed to identify any differences in the policies and practices of school boards between lowest-and highest-achieving school districts.

3.1.7 Data Collection via Interviews

The qualitative portion of this study was in the form of personal interviews with selected superintendents from both lowest- and highest-achieving school districts. The purpose of the interviews allowed the researcher to further discuss the key areas of the school board’s policies and practices first identified in the survey. Interview questions were developed from survey results as well as interview questions developed by Goodman et al. (1997).

Ten superintendents were selected for personal interviews from those who indicated an interest on the survey. Five of the interested superintendents interviewed came from the identified lowest-achieving districts and five superintendents were selected from the identified highest-achieving school districts. Face to face interviews with the superintendents was optimal, but a phone interview occurred if it was more convenient for the superintendent. In addition,

interviews were tape recorded as a means for further analysis and documentation if permission was granted from the superintendent. If permission was not granted to tape record the interview, detailed notes were taken. The timeline for personal interviews with the superintendents was June to August 2009.

3.1.8 Qualitative Data Analysis

Patton states, “[Q]ualitative analysis transforms data into findings” (2001, p. 432). To transform the data gathered from the superintendent interviews into a workable analysis, Creswell’s (2009) approach to analyze qualitative data was employed. The first step according to Creswell is to “organize and prepare the data for analysis” (p. 184). For this study, interviews were collected, typed, and categorized based on lowest- and highest-achieving school districts. Creswell states the second step is to “read through all the data” (p. 184). Typed interviews were read to obtain a general sense of the data and record any thoughts about the data. Step number three is to perform a “detailed analysis with a coding process” (p. 185). While reading through the text, important topics were identified and given an abbreviation in an effort to code responses from the interviews. The codes for this study were identified through “emerging information collected from participants” (p. 186). Finally, the fourth step used the coding process to generate categories or themes for analysis (2009). The most predominant categories or themes identified from the coding helped serve as major findings from the interviews. Since the interview questions were designed to provide greater depth and understanding of the survey data, the qualitative data was used to help conclude what tendencies, if any, occurred in the lowest-achieving schools as well as highest-achieving schools.

3.1.9 Pilot Study

In an effort to test the clarity and validity of the survey questionnaire, a four stage process was employed by pretesting the survey as found in Dillman's Tailored Design Method (2000). First, the survey was reviewed by two knowledgeable colleagues in the school district in which I work. They checked for question clarity, possible elimination or addition of questions, and general appearance (2000). During this first step, I eliminated a few questions that were similar to other questions and added additional questions that may provide important data to the study. The second stage was to evaluate cognitive and motivational qualities (2000). For this stage, I utilized the expertise of Dr. Rubenstein from the Office of Measurement and Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Pittsburgh. As a result, each question was examined for interpretation, understanding, and to determine if the data collected for each question would be useful to my study. The third stage of the pretesting was to conduct a small pilot study (2000). With the aid of two local superintendents, they were asked to complete the survey and provide feedback. From their suggestions, several questions were rewritten to help provide clarity. Finally, the fourth stage of the pretest was to perform a final check (2000). In this stage, I asked two teachers in my English Department to proofread for clarity and missed mistakes.

3.1.10 Survey Distribution and Non-Response

Superintendents selected to participate in the study received a cover letter explaining the study as well as a request to participate. If they chose to participate, they signed the consent form as well as completed and returned the enclosed questionnaire. After a two-week window, a second mailing was sent to any non-response superintendents requesting them to participate.

The superintendents that agreed to participate in the interview portion of the study, and were selected, were contacted by email to arrange a meeting time for the interview.

3.1.11 Study Limitations

An aspect that needs to be heeded during this study is candor. It is imperative that the superintendent's be truthful when it comes to the policies and practices of the school boards in order to create a viable study. It is acknowledged that there is a potential risk for superintendents when discussing negative board behaviors and certainly the superintendent or the researcher does not want any negative repercussions to come forth from what might be said. Therefore, during the study and at all times, each superintendent and school district selected for will remain anonymous.

In addition, it must be noted that the data collected from the study represents only one point of view in the educational organization. Even though the superintendent may intend to answer questions truthfully, he or she may not be objective due to his or her intertwined relationship with the school board.

4.0 CHAPTER IV - RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The intent of this study is to look from the school superintendent's perspective in order to identify the relationship between policies and practices that school boards engage in, and then examine the effect they may have on student achievement. For the study, a sequential mixed method approach was utilized in collecting data. First, quantitative data was secured by sending surveys to a large group of superintendents from similar-sized school districts in Pennsylvania. Questions for the survey focused on policies and practices of school boards that may have an effect on student achievement as found in the literature.

Next, qualitative data was obtained by interviewing ten superintendents in an effort to closer analyze the policies and practices of school boards. Questions for the superintendent interviews were created after finding responses from the survey questions that demonstrated the most significant differences between the highest-and lowest-achieving school districts. As a result, fourteen topics were identified regarding school board policies and practices: participating in goal-setting retreats, improving student achievement from an internal desire, competing with administration in terms of who is running the schools, making decisions based on personal agendas, funding professional development, utilizing data for academic decisions, evaluating the superintendent formally, evaluating the superintendent based on mutual goals, being knowledgeable about district educational initiatives, promoting academic successes of students,

promoting the district in the community, considering the superintendent the CEO, involving themselves in the interview process for teachers, and preferring to hire local teaching candidates.

As pointed out in chapter 3, the research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What policies and practices does a school board engage in that influences student achievement?
2. How do these policies and practices of school boards compare in lower- and higher-achieving school districts?

Chapter 4 identifies the profile of the participants in the survey/superintendent interviews, the methods used to sort and answer the research questions, and the results of the data.

4.2 PROFILE OF THE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

To review, the school district sample used for the study was selected by a combination of school district size and student achievement scores on the two most recent years of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams in both reading and math. First, school districts in Pennsylvania with enrollment between 1,000 to 3,999 students were considered similar-sized districts and identified as possible participants. Next, those 317 similar-sized school districts identified, which represented 63.4% or a majority of all Pennsylvania public school districts, were then categorized into four quartiles ranging from lowest-, lower-, higher-, and highest-achieving school districts based on the combined PSSA results. There were 158 superintendents chosen for participation and were mailed a survey to complete. Of the 158 superintendents identified, 79 or 25% were from the absolute lowest-achieving districts, and 79 or 25% of the superintendents were from the absolute highest-achieving school districts.

The first mailing of surveys was sent on April 6, 2009. As a result of this mailing, 80 out of 158 superintendents responded, a 51% response rate. A second mailing was issued to the non-responsive superintendents on April 27, 2009 where an additional 16 superintendents completed the survey. In total, 96 out of the 158 superintendents completed the survey, which equaled a 61% response rate. With 96 completed surveys, 52 of the respondents were from the highest-achieving school districts and 44 of the respondents were from the lowest-achieving districts.

Table 9 illustrates the represented counties in Pennsylvania of those who completed surveys. In total, 43 of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania were represented. This researcher believes having 64% of the counties participate, as well as a 61% response rate, provides a fair assessment of how boards from similar-sized districts operate in terms of the policies and practices that may affect student achievement.

Table 9 Profile of Participating Superintendents in Survey

County	Highest Achieving	Lowest Achieving
Adams		1
Allegheny	6	3
Armstrong	1	1
Beaver	4	1
Berks	2	1
Blair	2	
Bradford		2
Bucks	2	
Cambria	2	
Carbon		2
Clearfield		1
Cumberland	1	1
Dauphin	1	
Delaware	5	
Elk	1	
Erie	3	2
Fayette		2
Franklin		1
Greene		1
Huntingdon		1
Juniata		1
Lackawanna	2	
Lancaster	3	2
Lawrence	2	1
Lebanon		1
Lehigh	1	1
Luzerne	1	1
Lycoming	2	
Mercer	2	3
Montgomery	2	
Northampton	1	
Northumberland		2
Perry		1
Schuylkill	1	2
Snyder	1	
Somerset	1	
Susquehanna		1
Tioga		1
Union	1	
Venango		1
Washington		4
Westmoreland	1	1
York	1	1
Total	52	44

96 Total Districts

Another aspect of the survey profile is the tenure of participating superintendents in both their current district and cumulative total years as a superintendent. The tenure ranged from zero to ten-plus years. Data was obtained from survey questions number 39 and 40. Of the respondents, 45.7% indicated that they have been the superintendent in their current district between three to five years. Likewise, 40.4% indicated that the total years as a superintendent was between three to five years. On each question regarding superintendent tenure, two survey participants chose not to answer the questions. Tables 10 and 11 illustrate the years, frequency, and percent of the superintendent tenure from those who completed the survey.

Table 10 Years as Superintendent in Current District

	Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 0-2	22	22.9	23.4
	2 3-5	43	44.8	45.7
	3 6-8	16	16.7	17.0
	4 9-10	1	1.0	1.1
	5 10+	12	12.5	12.8
	Total	94	97.9	100.0
Missing System		2	2.1	
Total		96	100.0	

Table 11 Total Years as Superintendent

	Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1 0-2	15	15.6	16.0
	2 3-5	38	39.6	40.4
	3 6-8	14	14.6	14.9
	4 9-10	7	7.3	7.4
	5 10+	20	20.8	21.3
	Total	94	97.9	100.0
Missing System		2	2.1	
Total		96	100.0	

4.3 PROFILE OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Superintendents were identified as possible participants in a brief interview because they answered “yes” on a question in the survey requesting participation. Of the 96 survey respondents, 70 superintendents said they were willing to participate in the interview. Of these 70 superintendents, 38 superintendents came from the highest-achieving districts and 32 superintendents came from the lowest-achieving districts.

As described in Chapter 3, ten superintendents were selected for the interview; five from the lowest-achieving districts and five from the highest-achieving districts. When selecting superintendents to participate in the interview, an attempt was made to select districts that covered various counties throughout Pennsylvania. In total, 18 superintendents were contacted by email to participate in the interview. Eight of the 18 superintendents did not respond to the email request. As a result, nine counties were represented from various regions throughout the state. The timeline for the interviews began in June 2009 and ended in August 2009.

Table 12 illustrates the counties that were represented from the superintendent interviews.

Table 12 Profile of Participating Superintendents in Interview

County	Highest Achieving	Lowest Achieving
Armstrong		1
Cumberland	1	
Lehigh	1	
Mercer	1	1
Northumberland		1
Schuylkill	1	
Tioga		1
Washington		1
York	1	
Total	5	5

10 Total Districts

4.4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY AND INTERVIEW DATA

The rest of Chapter IV identifies the responses from the survey and interviews. The data is organized and presented by themes categorized from the survey questions. Within each of the categorized themes, the two research questions will be answered: one, what are the patterns of policies and practices that school boards participate in that influence student achievement, and two, how do they compare between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts.

The survey was specifically designed to answer research question one. Each of the questions is an actual policy and/or practice the school boards were utilizing across Pennsylvania that were previously identified in the literature. By answering each question, superintendents had to indicate how often, even if not at all, their board was utilizing each policy or practice. Therefore, the combined responses of all respondents collected from the survey questions were used to determine at what rate the boards were utilizing the policies and practices. The results of the findings for the first research question are reported by either a mean score or the percentage of the “Yes” or “No” responses from all of the respondents for each question on the survey.

Research question two will be answered by separating the collective responses between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. Ultimately, the responses from the two groups were compared to determine if there was a difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts in the policies and practices they utilize. The findings are reported by either the mean score for each question or the percentage of the “Yes” responses from each group. In addition, a probability value (p-value) was calculated to determine if there was a trend or a significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts.

Table 13 demonstrates the broad reporting theme, the response rate of the participants (research question one), the comparison between the two groups (research question two), and the probability value for each question.

Table 13 Sample Data Table

	Theme		
	Survey Topic Question 1	Survey Topic Question 2	Survey Topic Question 3
Research Question One Response Rate of Participants	X	X	X
Research Question Two Results of Highest- Achieving Districts	X	X	X
Research Question Two Results of Lowest- Achieving Districts	X	X	X
P-value	X	X	X

The themes reported in this chapter include board policy, utilizing data, board involvement, student achievement, budget, school board/superintendent relationship, hiring, superintendent evaluation, goal setting, board training, community relations, student advocates, and school board meetings.

The survey included 38 questions to specifically address the policies and practices of school boards. The survey used both “Yes” and “No” responses, as well as Likert-type questions ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Utilizing the SPSS program, a frequency test was performed in order to give a count and percentage of how the superintendents responded from both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. In addition, an Independent T-test was

performed to calculate the difference between both groups based on the coded responses from the Likert-type questions.

As previously identified, districts were separated into the lowest- and highest-achieving school districts. A Chi-Square Test was performed for each question to determine the probability (p-value) that the difference in results between the lowest- and highest-achieving districts could come about just due to chance. For this study, the p-value smaller than $p=.05$ indicates that there is a significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts, and any p-value smaller than $p=.1$ would indicate a trend. So, if the p-value is larger than $p=.1$, there is not a basis to say there is a significant difference or trend between the lowest- and highest-achieving districts.

Finally, 14 topics from the survey either identified a trend or displayed a significant difference between the lowest- and highest-achieving districts. Superintendent interviews were then performed to more closely analyze these differences.

4.4.1 Board Policy

The first three questions on the survey asked the superintendent whether or not their school board created or updated policies within the past two years to increase student achievement, clarify academic achievement standards, and/or ensure productive learning environments such as class sizes, hiring qualified teachers, etc. Research question one asked about specific policies that influence student achievement. As illustrated on Table 14, 63.8% or 60 out of the 94 respondents indicated they updated or created policies so as to increase student achievement in the last two years. And, 62.1% or 59 out of the 95 responding superintendents indicated that their school board created or updated policies for the purpose of ensuring productive learning environments.

Finally, only 56.4%, which is 53 of 94 of the superintendents indicated that their board created or updated policies to clarify academic achievement standards.

Table 14 Board Policies

	Board Policy		
	Increase Student Achievement	Productive Learning Environments	Clarify Achievement Standards
Percent of Yes response	63.8%	62.1%	56.4%
Percent of No response	36.2%	37.9%	43.6%
Percent of Highest-Achieving Yes responses	62.7%	61.6%	54.9%
Percent of Lowest-Achieving Yes responses	65.1%	62.8%	58.1%
P-value	.833	.535	.836

To examine research question two, the number of “Yes” and “No” responses were tallied and the responses were separated to compare the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. Based on the percentage of “yes” responses on each question, the lowest-achieving districts have created board policies to increase student achievement more so in the past two years than the highest-achieving districts.

For example, Table 14 shows that 62.7% (32 of 51) of the superintendents that responded to this question from the highest-achieving districts felt that their board created policies to increase student achievement within the past two years. In comparison, 65.1% (28 of 43) of the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts indicated that their board created policies to increase student achievement within the past two years.

The next two questions produced similar results in that boards from the lowest-achieving districts created policies within the past two years to ensure productive learning environments and clarify academic standards more so than the highest-achieving districts. However, the difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving groups for each question proved to be insignificant as the probability value (p-value) for each question was $p=.833$, $p=.836$, and $p=.535$ respectively. Because there was not a trend or significant difference regarding board policies, this topic was not addressed during the superintendent interviews.

In summary, slightly more than half of the boards from both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts created or updated board policies for each of the three questions on the survey. The single question in this theme that garnered the lowest percentage of “Yes” responses (56.4%) from all of the respondents was in the area of utilizing board policies to clarify academic achievement standards. In an overall comparison, it appears that the lowest-achieving districts have utilized board policies within the past two years for each of the three areas in the theme of board policies more so than the highest-achieving districts.

4.4.2 Utilize Data

The next three questions focused on school boards utilizing data for the purpose of making informed decisions to improve student achievement, determining if the district is reaching its academic goals, and helping make informed budgetary decisions. Looking at research question one, Table 15 shows 90.6% or 87 out of the 96 respondents in both the lowest- and highest-achieving districts feel their board utilizes data to make informed decisions to improve student achievement. Also, 92.7% or 89 out of the 96 responding superintendents felt that their boards utilize data to determine if the district is reaching its academic goals. Finally, utilizing data to

make informed budgetary decisions received the most “Yes” responses in this theme as 91 out of the 96 superintendents (94.8%) felt their board utilizes data for budgetary decisions.

Table 15 Utilize Data

	Utilize Data		
	Improve Student Achievement	Reach Academic Goals	Informed Budgetary Decisions
Percent of Yes response	90.6%	92.7%	94.8%
Percent of No response	9.4%	7.3%	5.2%
Percent of Highest-Achieving Yes responses	96.2%	92.3%	94.2%
Percent of Lowest-Achieving Yes responses	84.1%	93.2%	95.5%
P-value	.075	1.00	1.00

In comparing the two groups, one question stood out as a notable difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. When asked if the school board utilizes data to make informed decisions to improve student achievement, 96.2% (50 of 52) of the superintendents coming from the highest-achieving districts marked “Yes” while only 84.1% (37 of 44) of the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts agreed with the question. The p-value for this question is .075 and was considered a trend between the two groups.

Because utilizing data to improve student achievement was considered a trend, this question was addressed during the superintendent interviews. In the interviews, every superintendent except one said their board utilized data to make informed academic decisions.

Examples of the way their board utilized data include looking at PSSA results, program attendance, staffing issues, and programmatic changes. One superintendent from a highest-achieving district felt that her school board looks to the administration to provide the necessary data in order to make informed decisions:

“I think that they rely on us to report the data and to be accurate with the reporting that we make. For instance, when we get back to the rationale for the extra staffing, they want us to show them the data and it is always a part of what we present and they are used to that. So, I’ve seen more support on the decisions. Even as far as when we made a change in the elementary math curriculum about four years ago. We have noticed declining scores and have also noticed that students’ basic math facts were not where they should be. That was pretty much across the board, so when we researched the different math programs, that was probably \$150,000 investment. They wanted to see the data but then trust that we’ve done our homework and agreed to the new math program.”

From her response, it appears that the board expects data from the superintendent to help them make informed decisions to improve student achievement and justify budgetary items.

The one superintendent that said his board did not utilize data to make informed decisions came from a lowest-achieving district. He stated,

“I would say that is done on the administrative level. We share data with them, explain it to them, and often times we use the data when we are talking about making changes, rationale for changes. I know currently one of our big items is the 11th grade PSSA testing and their scores are really bad in that area. So we are making pretty wholesale changes in that area.

Of course our rationale is based on test scores and student success in that area. And so we use data with the board in terms of making arguments to support programmatically what we want to do. I'm not going to say they are ignorant to the data. We give them the data, they look at it and a lot of times they will say that they have read that thing that you gave us and it is really interesting. They do look at the data, they do understand it, but I think they lean on us to interpret it and turn it into programmatic changes.”

From this response, it appears that the superintendent is presenting data to the board, but the board does not request specific data to institute change in the district.

In summary, the superintendents in both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts signified their boards were utilizing data to make informed budgetary decisions and to determine if they were reaching academic goals. One trend between the two groups is the highest-achieving districts are utilizing data to make changes within the district to improve student achievement more so than the lowest-achieving districts.

4.4.3 Board Involvement

Two questions on the survey focused on the board’s involvement in running the schools in the district. Each question utilized a Likert-scale response with values ranging from 1, which means “strongly disagree,” to 5, which means “strongly agree.” Both of these questions look at research question one in terms of what practices the school board participates in. The first question asked the superintendents if their board members want to be involved in the day-to-day decision-making. Table 16 shows that the mean score from all of the respondents was $m=2.27$.

The mean score for this question would indicate that the average response of the superintendents signifies that they “disagree” with the question.

To answer research question two, Table 16 illustrates the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts (m=2.60) is higher than the mean score from the highest-achieving districts (m=2.00). Therefore, the boards from the lowest-achieving districts are more inclined to want to be involved in the day-to-day decision making then the boards from the highest-achieving districts. The p-value (p=.015) signifies a significant difference between both groups. As a result of being a significant difference, this topic was addressed in the superintendent interviews.

Table 16 Board Involvement

	Board Involvement	
	Involved in daily decision-making	Competes with administration in running schools
Mean Score of All Responses	2.27	1.93
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	2.00	1.75
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	2.60	2.14
P-value	.015	.115

Another question in this section addressed competition with the board. To answer research question one, when asked if the board competes with the administration in running the schools, the mean score from all of the respondents was m=1.93. Therefore, the score on the Likert-scale would signal that the average response of the superintendents was “strongly disagree.”

In comparison, the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts ($m=2.14$) was higher than the mean score ($m=1.75$) from the highest-achieving districts. Although the mean value for this question is higher for the lowest-achieving districts, the p-value ($p=.115$) did not indicate a trend or significant difference between the two groups.

In the ten superintendent interviews, the topic of the board being involved in the daily decision-making was addressed. Each superintendent was asked if there are matters brought before the board they believe could be handled by the administration. All five of the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts responded that the board members want to be involved in the daily decision-making. Two of the five superintendents from the highest-achieving districts feel their boards do not get involved in the daily decision-making. There were several areas identified where board members get involved in the daily decision-making. They are personnel issues, building principal decisions, and extra-curricular situations.

A superintendent from a lowest-achieving school stated, “The only thing that they will occasionally get us into a little trouble is that they will get involved in personnel issues. Someone saying something about a teacher or especially in the coaching area.” Similarly, a superintendent from a highest-achieving district felt the board was “trying to micromanage building issues with building principals.” She noted,

“We have a lot of new, younger principals that are now getting a bit more seasoned. The building issues that they would hear in the community with regard to student teachers or whatever, and then they would go to the principal rather than go through appropriate channels.”

In each of these examples, the superintendent’s felt their board members would get involved with personnel issues.

Another superintendent from a highest-achieving district responded that the board did not compete with the administration in running the schools and stated,

“Since I bring all matters to the board, the answer is no. I certainly wouldn’t bring them something I felt I should handle myself in the first place. Several times I sat in executive sessions with the board and I put things on the table and they would start a discussion and eventually one or two board members would say, ‘Enough discussion, let the administration handle it, it’s their job, let’s move on.’”

In this example, it is clear that the board looks to the superintendent to handle all management issues in the district.

To summarize, by the relatively low mean score for both questions from the survey, it appears the superintendents did not feel that their board had significant involvement with running the schools. However, after examining the data from the superintendent interviews along with the p-value ($p=.015$) from this question, it appears the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts had a greater concern with the boards involvement in the day-to-day operations of the schools than the boards from the highest-achieving districts. It is this researcher’s belief that the candidness of the superintendents during the interviews helped to shed light on the boards’ involvement in running the schools. Their input would help explain the discrepancy between the low mean score on the survey compared to the interview data.

4.4.4 Student Achievement

In this next theme, four questions focused around the boards’ beliefs and understanding of student achievement in the district. Each question on this topic utilized a Likert-type response.

The first question asked the superintendents if they felt the board believes that one of their primary responsibilities is to increase student achievement. In response to research question one, Table 17 shows the mean score from all of the respondents for the first question was $m=4.25$. Therefore, the score on the Likert-scale would indicate that the average response of the superintendents was “agree.”

In comparison, the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts ($m=4.19$) is lower than the boards from the highest-achieving districts ($m=4.31$). The data indicates that the boards from the highest-achieving districts felt that one of their primary responsibilities is to increase student achievement more so than the boards from the lowest-achieving districts. However, the p-value ($p=.470$) does not indicate a trend or significant difference between the two groups and, therefore, was not discussed in the interviews.

The second question regarding student achievement asked the superintendents if they felt the board believes that all students can be academically successful. In an effort to answer research question one, Table 17 shows the mean score from all of the respondents was $m=4.15$. As a result, the average score for this question symbolizes that the majority of superintendents “Agree” with the question.

To focus on the second research question, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=4.23$) is higher than the mean score ($m=4.05$) for the lowest-achieving districts. Consequently, the data signifies that more boards from the highest-achieving districts believe that all students can be academically successful compared to the boards from the lowest-achieving districts. Once again, the p-value ($p=.240$) does not indicate a trend or significant difference between the two groups and not discussed further.

Table 17 Student Achievement

	Student Achievement			
	Primary resp. to increase student achvmnt	All students can be acad. successful	Knowledgeable of educational initiatives	Internal desire to improve student achvmnt
Mean Score of All Responses	4.25	4.15	4.41	4.38
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	4.31	4.23	4.56	4.50
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	4.19	4.05	4.23	4.23
P-value	.470	.240	.019	.082

In the survey, the third question of this theme asked the superintendents if they felt their board was knowledgeable about the district’s educational initiatives. To answer the first research question, Table 17 shows the mean score from all of the respondents was $m=4.41$. The fairly high Likert score would indicate that the majority of superintendents felt their board was knowledgeable about the educational initiatives.

However, the mean score from the highest-achieving district is $m=4.56$ and the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts is $m=4.23$. The data indicates that the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts believe their boards are knowledgeable about the district’s educational initiatives more so than the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts. The p-value for this question is $p=.019$, which indicated a significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, this topic was explored during the superintendent interviews.

When asked during the superintendent interviews, all ten of the superintendents felt that their boards as a whole were at least somewhat knowledgeable about their district’s educational initiatives. However, two superintendents, one from the lowest-achieving districts and one from

the highest-achieving districts, felt that the knowledge level varied for each board member. As an example, a superintendent from a lowest-achieving district responded by saying,

“I think that varies from board member to board member. There’s some that are very savvy and have been here long enough that they can do that. There are others that would shy away from that due to their own comfortableness. So I think it would vary from board member to board member.”

In this case, one factor that may enable board members to be more comfortable in understanding the educational initiatives occurring in the district is the longevity of service from each board member.

Furthermore, five of the ten superintendents interviewed felt that it was their responsibility to keep the board informed of the educational initiatives. When asked this question, a superintendent from a highest-achieving district said, “They better be.” He went on to say,

“It’s a lot of time and effort we put in to making sure that they all have what they need. They joke now when we do presentations at the board meetings about how we have to hear this again. Yes, you have to hear it again. We've got more data for you to look at and understand. But, I think they feel proud they know what's going on in the district and that they are a very informed board.”

From this example, it appears the superintendent ensures that his board is fully aware of the educational initiatives occurring in the district as he updates them on a regular basis.

The last question on the survey regarding student achievement asked the superintendents if their board had an internal desire to improve student achievement. In response to research

question one, the mean score for this question was $m=4.38$ and would indicate that the majority of superintendents “Agreed” with the question (Table 17).

However, while comparing the two groups, the mean score was $m=4.50$ for the highest-achieving districts and $m=4.23$ for the lowest-achieving districts (Table 17). In turn, the p-value for this question was $p=.082$ and represented a trend between both groups, thus, explored further during the superintendent interviews.

In an effort to identify concrete examples of the boards internal desire to improve student achievement, during the interviews, the superintendents were asked to describe action(s) the board has taken that should result in higher student achievement. Several examples superintendents from both the highest- and lowest-achieving schools gave included allowing more money for professional development, hiring additional staff, structuring class size guidelines, approving new curriculum initiatives, and revising the school calendar in order to allow more time for data analysis.

One superintendent from a lowest-achieving district suggested that the best thing the board has done was “to give the administration the freedom to pursue the avenues that we think are going to improve student achievement.” From this statement, it appears that the board takes a “hands-off” approach in terms of actions that could result in higher student achievement. Conversely, a superintendent from a highest-achieving district stated that the board encourages the administration to increase the rigor of the curriculum and has a desire to provide additional opportunities for students:

“We have a lot of options at the high school for students to take AP courses, which were all approved by the school board as we were going through. They can get credit through a local college for about 18 college credits. They can leave our schools during the school day to take classes at

a local college. All of these things were done with the approval of the school board and their encouragement to continue to challenge upper level students while at the same time providing lots of opportunities for kids who are not yet proficient.”

In both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts, the overall sense of the superintendent responses is that their school boards honor the requests of the administration in support of academic achievement, albeit, with different levels of involvement.

In summary, based on the survey and interview data, the majority of superintendents felt that their boards want their students to be academically successful. In turn, the boards support student achievement by following recommendations initiated by the administration. However, the boards from the highest-achieving districts did appear to have a better understanding of the educational initiatives occurring in the district compared to the boards from the lowest-achieving districts. It is important to note, as uncovered in the superintendent interviews, the majority of superintendents felt it was their responsibility to promote academic achievement in the district. In turn, the results from the data collected from the survey and interviews may reflect the superintendents' view of their own effectiveness compared to the boards desire to improve student achievement.

4.4.5 Budget

The next two questions on the survey focused on the budget, more specifically, the allocation of money over the past two years for the purpose of supporting professional development for teachers as well as monetary support of academic improvement initiatives. These two questions utilized a “Yes” or “No” response on the survey. In reference to research question one, Table 18

shows that overall, 96.9% (93 of 96) of the superintendents indicated that their board has allocated money to support professional development for teachers over the past two years.

Furthermore, research question two shows that every superintendent from the highest-achieving districts responded “Yes” while three superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts answered “No” to this question. Even though the differences between the two groups appear minimal, the p-value ($p=.093$) indicated that there is a trend between the two groups from the sample collected; and as a result, this topic was broached during the superintendent interviews.

Table 18 Budget

	Budget	
	Support professional development	Support academic initiatives
Percent of Yes response	96.9%	99.0%
Percent of No response	3.1%	1.0%
Percent of Highest-Achieving Yes responses	100%	100%
Percent of Lowest-Achieving Yes responses	93.2%	97.7%
P-value	.093	.458

Similar to the survey responses, every superintendent from the interviews strongly agreed that their board provides the necessary funding to support professional development in their district. However, the general feel of the responses is that the administration actually just

earmarks a portion of the budget specifically for professional development. For example, one superintendent from a highest-achieving school district said,

“That is part of the budgeting process and the answer to that is yes. But the recommendations don’t start with them; the recommendations come from me and the principals. We are the ones who put the initial money in the budget and that has never been cut. But, on the other hand, we only put in what we need.”

In this case, the administration recommends to the board, through the budgeting process, how much money should be allocated for professional development.

Another superintendent from a highest-achieving school provided a reason why their school board allocates money for professional development: “They feel that it comes back to serve the students if our teachers are better prepared. We also have a real high longevity with teachers, and the board feels that the teachers will get the opportunity to grow.” In this district, the board supports ongoing professional development for teachers as a way to better serve the students.

An additional aspect of funding of professional development that was uncovered during the interviews is the increased federal and state money available for districts, especially for low-performing districts. A superintendent from a lowest-achieving district said,

“Part of that is tied into the fact that we are in School Improvement II, so we get extraordinary amounts of funding. I don’t think the board pays much money out of their own pockets for anything we do. I think we are able to fund things because we have tremendous access, based on our poverty. I don’t know if we can spend all the money we have.”

In this case, the board supports professional development for teachers but it is paid for from increased federal and state monies and not through the budget process.

The second question on the topic concerning budget inquired if the superintendents felt their boards over the past two years allocated funding to specifically support academic improvement initiatives. To answer research question one, Table 18 shows that 99% (95 of 96) of the superintendents indicated “Yes” on the survey. Consequently, this question yielded the highest percentage score on the survey.

In comparison, only one superintendent from a lowest-achieving district answered “No” to this question. As a result, the p-value ($p=.458$) did not signify a trend or significant difference between both groups.

To summarize, the overwhelming majority of superintendents on the survey and interviews felt their boards allocated money in the budget to support professional development for teachers as well as academic improvement initiatives. However, as uncovered in the interviews, districts that are identified as needing improvement or reach a certain poverty level may receive additional state and federal monies to offset the burden placed on the district for educational initiatives and professional development.

4.4.6 Board/Superintendent Relationship

Three questions on the survey focused on the board/superintendent relationship. Each question on this theme utilized a Likert-type response. The first question asked the superintendents if they feel they have a positive working relationship with the board. In terms of research question one, Table 19 shows the mean score for all of the respondents was $m=4.52$. In further analysis, the majority of superintendents responded “strongly agree” to the question.

In comparison, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts (m=4.58) was slightly higher than the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts (m=4.44). The p-value for this question (p=.450) did not indicate a trend on significant difference between the two groups.

The second question regarding the board/superintendent relationship asked if there was often conflict between the superintendent and school board members. In response to research question one, the overall mean score from the respondents was m=1.85, which would indicate the majority of superintendents “disagreed” with the survey question.

To compare both groups, the mean score for the highest- and lowest-achieving districts was m=1.82 and m=1.88 respectively (Table 19). The higher mean score for the lowest-achieving districts would signify that they are slightly more inclined to have conflict between the board and the superintendent than the highest-achieving districts would. However, the p-value (p=.767) did not signify a trend or significant difference between both groups.

Table 19 Board/Superintendent Relationship

	<u>Board/Superintendent Relationship</u>		
	Positive working relationship	Conflict between superintendent and board members	Superintendent as CEO of district
Mean Score of All Responses	4.52	1.85	4.46
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	4.58	1.82	4.60
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	4.44	1.88	4.29
P-value	.450	.767	.074

The third question inquired if the school board considers the superintendent as the chief executive officer (CEO) of the district. In regards to research question one, allowing the superintendent to function as the CEO would be a specific practice of each school board. Table 19 illustrates the mean score for all of the respondents was $m=4.46$ as the majority of the superintendents “strongly agreed” with the question.

However, while comparing the two groups, the mean score ($m=4.60$) for the highest-achieving districts is higher than the mean score ($m=4.29$) for the lowest-achieving districts. The p-value ($p=.074$) indicated a trend between the two groups and was addressed in the superintendent interviews.

During the superintendent interviews, each superintendent was asked if their school board considered the superintendent to be the CEO of the school district, as well as how being the CEO impacted the overall academic success of the students. Eight of the ten superintendents felt strongly that their board considers them as the CEO of the district. Two superintendents, one from a highest-achieving district and one from the lowest-achieving district, felt that new board members sometimes do not understand the role of the superintendent. A superintendent from a highest-achieving district said,

“It was new for our newer board members, that concept. I think they had a preconceived notion what a superintendent is. Even one member made a comment that the teachers work for us, meaning the board members. There again, the board kind of polices themselves and they said no, the teacher’s work for the superintendent. The superintendent is the CEO and works with us. The superintendent is the boss of the teachers. That was a different concept for them. Even the way they evaluate me, there is a

whole column with several criteria and functions as the CEO of the district.”

Another superintendent from a lowest-achieving district shared a similar experience:

“Like I said, when those three new board members came on initially, that have been supported by the teachers, they didn’t see it in that capacity at that point in time. But I think over a period of time, and seeing how things operate, they’ve come a long way. I don’t want to say they’ve come from the dark side, but they have a better understanding of what’s going on.”

In these two examples, the superintendents felt that board members, specifically new ones, did not initially see them as the CEO of the district. However, it appears that over time, the board members were able to “police” themselves or better understand the role of the superintendent.

When asked how it impacts the overall academic success of students, a superintendent from a highest-achieving district said,

“I really think that it’s a key component. I pay attention to what the school board says; that’s what you have to do as a superintendent. And likewise, principals pay attention to what I say. If I have a priority, they know that’s what the superintendent wants. The same thing goes down to the teachers and even to the students. The teachers only pay attention to what the principal values. I do not affect the teachers directly. I affect the principals who affect the teachers. Same thing, I don’t affect the student directly. My impact on student achievement is through the principal, through the teacher, to the student. As long as I am making academic attainment an important issue, topic, priority, which is my number one priority, that’s it. I mean academic achievement, that’s it. Then the principal, then that’s their

number one priority. Then the discussions with the teachers change. It changes from whatever they used to talk about, whatever the principal style was, to now they're talking about instructional things. Well, that's going to then have the teacher talking about instructional things to their kids. So it's very important for the superintendent to be the lead educational leader in the school district. Our school board is well aware of that.”

The superintendent from this example believes the function of the superintendent as the CEO and educational leader of the district has an enormous impact on the academic success of students because the entire educational community understands who sets the educational direction of the district.

To summarize, the survey and interview data suggests that superintendents from the highest- and lowest-achieving districts have a positive working relationship with their boards. In addition, conflicts between the superintendent and boards appear to be minimal regardless of achievement status. However, the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts indicated they were considered the CEO of the district more often than the lowest-achieving districts.

4.4.7 Hiring Practices

Four questions on the survey focused on the hiring practices of school boards. All four questions utilized a Likert-type response. The first question asked if the school board accepted the administration’s recommendation when hiring new teachers. To answer research question one, Table 20 shows that the mean score for all of the respondents was $m=4.53$. In turn, 65.3% of the superintendents indicated “strongly agree” to this question on the survey.

In comparison, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=4.63$) is higher than the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts ($m=4.40$). But, the p-value ($p=.139$) did not indicate a trend or significant difference between both groups.

The next question in this theme asked the board if they based their decision on quality rather than cost when hiring new teachers. To answer the first research question, the overall mean score for this question was $m=3.92$. Since the mean score for this question falls near the “agree” category on the Likert scale, school boards in general appear to be aware of the financial implications when hiring new teachers.

In comparison, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=3.98$) was higher than the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts ($m=3.84$). Nevertheless, the p-value ($p=.478$) did not indicate a trend or significant difference between both groups.

Table 20 Hiring Practices

	Board Hiring Practices			
	Accepts administration recommendation	Hires based on quality than cost	Prefers to hire local candidates	Board involved during interview process
Mean Score of All Responses	4.53	3.92	1.97	1.88
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	4.63	3.98	1.66	1.65
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	4.40	3.84	2.30	2.16
P-value	.139	.478	.005	.039

However, the next two questions showed a significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. In the survey, superintendents were asked if their school board

prefers to hire local teaching candidates even when a more qualified candidate is available. In terms of the first research question, the overall mean score was $m=1.97$ which represents “disagree” on the Likert scale.

When comparing both groups, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts was $m=1.66$ and the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts was $m=2.30$. The data indicates that the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts feel their board prefers to hire local teaching candidates more so than the boards from the highest-achieving districts. Consequently, the result of the question in terms of the probability value (p-value) was the lowest in the study at $p=.005$, meaning it was the most significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts on the whole survey. Since this topic was considered a significant difference between both groups, it was addressed during the superintendent interviews.

During the interviews, each superintendent was asked if their school board prefers to hire local teaching candidates even when an equal or more qualified candidate is available. Eight of the ten superintendents felt that hiring the best-qualified teacher is what their boards want. However, one superintendent from a highest-achieving district said that her board “likes a mix.” She went on to say, “For instance, I am not from around here originally, so I know if they felt they got too out of whack, that there were too many people out of the area, they wouldn’t like that. They like a balance. Very much they like a balance.” It appears from this example that the board likes to hire the best available candidate, but they also like to hire locally as well.

A superintendent from a lowest-achieving district felt that his board prefers to hire local teaching candidates: “For the most part, if they are a former graduate or from our area, yes they prefer it, if everything is equal. But if and when somebody is from here and I say that there is no way because they are weak, they listen.” Another superintendent from a lowest-achieving district believes his board prefers to hire the local candidate regardless of ability level:

“Local is very, very powerful. Working for the school is very powerful. A lot of times we have people who aren't from this school district but they work here now in some other capacity. It really comes down to once you are either from here or you work here, you are part of this family. It really has a family flavor to it. You are one of us, you are a part of our group. Very influential.”

In this district, it appears the board makes it a priority to hire local candidates regardless of ability level. In a further discussion with this particular superintendent, he stated that on several occasions the board passed over more qualified candidates in an effort to hire the local candidate.

The last question on the survey regarding hiring practices asked if the school board is actively involved during the interview process of hiring new teachers. To answer research question one, the mean score on the Likert-scale for all of the respondents was $m=1.88$, which indicates that the majority of the superintendents “strongly disagreed” with the statement.

However, in comparing the two groups, Table 20 indicates the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts was $m=2.16$ and the mean score from the highest-achieving districts was $m=1.65$. This question also produced a very low p-value ($p=.039$), which is considered a significant difference. As a result, this question was addressed during the superintendent interviews.

During the interviews, nine of the ten superintendents said that the board is not at all actively involved during the interview process. In each case, the board accepts the recommendation of the administration and hires the teaching candidates at their school board meeting. A superintendent of a highest-achieving district explained their hiring process:

“Typically what happens is the principal interviews probably ten candidates or so. Then the principal will send to my level three finalists. I

tell them be careful of who you send because I can pick any one of the three. So don't send somebody up here that you are not happy with. Some people would send one good one, and two bad ones. Well, you never know what can happen so you better be careful. My assistant and I interview them and take the recommendations to the school board for hiring. We've never had a case where the school board didn't hire the recommendation. It could happen, and if it did, I would go to recommendation number two. Because theoretically they may know something about a person that I don't know. An interview will only tell you so much; even checking references only tell you so much. There may be something out there that I'm not aware of. That has not happened. Now, let's switch gears, if it is a school psychologist or a principal, the board members do the final interview. I asked the questions, they are the ones who decide.”

In this district, the school board is not involved in the interview process but accepts the recommendation of the administration of which teaching candidate is hired.

The one superintendent who said that his board is actively involved in the interview process came from a lowest-achieving district. He explained their process:

“We run kind of a phase program where the initial interviews are done by the administration and the final interviews are done with the board committee. The board committee takes strong control of the final hiring process. Administratively, we're stuck with making sure whoever we take there we can live with because we never know what we're getting. Their decision-making is not always of what I would call the highest educational rationale because it gets influenced by politics sometimes.”

The school board in this district wants to be involved in the hiring practices of new teachers. Interestingly, this particular lowest-achieving district is the same district that prefers to hire local teaching candidates as previously cited.

To summarize, it appears that the majority of boards from the highest-achieving districts are not involved in the hiring process of teachers. These school boards accept the recommendations from the administration on which teacher should be hired. Contrarily, a greater amount of boards from the lowest-achieving districts appear to be involved in the interview process of hiring new teachers and can influence, positively or negatively, which teachers are hired. Although the practice of hiring quality teachers rather than focusing on cost does not appear to be a significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts, hiring the local teaching candidate proved to be the most significant difference between the two groups in the study.

4.4.8 Superintendent Evaluation

Three questions on the survey focused on the evaluation of the superintendent. All three questions utilized a “Yes” or “No” response. The first question asked if the school board conducted a formal assessment of the superintendent’s performance in the past two years. To look at this question in the scope of research question one, Table 21 shows that 77.1% or 74 out of the 96 responding superintendents from both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts indicated they were evaluated in a formal manner.

Research question two indicates that out of the 52 superintendents from the highest-achieving districts, 44 indicated they were evaluated formally, while 30 of the 44 superintendents

from the lowest-achieving districts signified a formal evaluation. The p-value ($p=.087$) signified a trend between the two groups and was thus explored further in the superintendent interviews.

When asked during the interviews about an assessment, nine out of the ten superintendents indicated they receive a formal, annual evaluation. All nine of the superintendents suggested that the board uses an evaluation instrument that was either created by the board, PSBA, or a national model. Three of the superintendents indicated that their yearly raises were even connected with the annual evaluation. A superintendent from a highest-achieving district said,

“It has been very successful and has been very helpful. Especially I think it may be even more helpful to the board to be able to sit down and say okay, this is what the national organizations feel we should be supervising our superintendent on. They have clear data in front of them and a clear concept so they feel now if this is what the national organization is saying they should be using and they are using it, they are happy with that. They are doing the right kind of supervision and evaluation. And I am satisfied with it because I am a strong supporter of the national associations. And it works.”

In this highest-achieving district, the school board utilizes a national evaluation tool to assess the superintendent’s job performance on a yearly basis.

Contrarily, a superintendent from a lowest-achieving district indicated that their board does not utilize a formal evaluation. He said that the board evaluates the superintendent “by the seat-of-their-pants.” He went on to say, “they have not been big on formal assessments but more in that they’re happy with you or they’re not happy with you. They’re just not interested.” It

appears in this district, the board does not evaluate the superintendent formally, and instead, they rely on an informal process that may or may not occur on a yearly basis.

Table 21 Superintendent Evaluation

	Superintendent Evaluation		
	Formal Assessment of Superintendent	Evaluated on mutual Goals	Input from others for evaluation
Percent of Yes response	77.1%	77.1%	20.4%
Percent of No response	22.9%	22.9%	79.6%
Percent of Highest-Achieving Yes responses	86.6%	86.5%	22.0%
Percent of Lowest-Achieving Yes responses	68.2%	65.9%	18.6%
P-value	.087	.027	.798

The second question on the survey in regards to the superintendent evaluation asked if the superintendent was evaluated based on mutually-agreed-upon goals. To answer research question one, the percent of “Yes” responses was $Y=77.1\%$ (74 of 96), which was identical to the previous question.

However, Table 21 shows that 86.5% or 45 out of the 52 superintendents from the highest-achieving districts indicated they were evaluated based on mutual goals and 65.9% (29 of 44) of the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts agreed with the question. As a result, the p-value was $p=.027$ and indicated a significant difference between both groups. In turn, this topic was addressed during the superintendent interviews.

During the interviews, nine of the ten superintendents stated their evaluation is at least partially based on mutual goals. In these evaluations, other areas such as the board's personal goals, the superintendent's individual goals, and goals based on the strategic plan are included.

Three of the superintendents, all from the highest-achieving districts, reported that the mutual goals were set during their yearly retreat. One superintendent stated, "When we went to the retreat as a team of ten, it was part of what I asked the facilitator to work with is that they need to set goals and then my goals should be based on what we decided as a team." Another superintendent simply stated, "The goals are set during the retreat and the evaluation is based on the goals." The one superintendent from the lowest-achieving district who was not evaluated formally did not respond to this question.

The final question regarding the superintendent evaluation asked if the school board accepted input from parents, teachers, and other school employees during the superintendent evaluation. Only 20.4% of the overall respondents indicated their board accepts input from others for the evaluation (Table 21). Of the 20.4%, eleven "Yes" responses came from the highest-achieving districts while eight "Yes" responses came from the lowest-achieving districts. The p-value ($p=.798$) did not reflect a trend or significant difference between both groups and was, therefore, not further discussed.

In summary, the data indicates that the highest-achieving districts utilize a formal superintendent evaluation process more so than the lowest-achieving districts. In addition, when a formal evaluation process is utilized, regardless of achievement level, part of the evaluation process is based on mutually-agreed upon goals. As extracted from the interviews, goals are sometimes agree upon during a yearly goal setting retreat in which the superintendent and board members participate.

4.4.9 Goal Setting

Two questions on the survey asked the superintendents whether or not their board in the past two years set short- and long-term goals for improved student achievement and/or if they participated in a goal setting retreat. Both questions utilized a “Yes” or “No” response. To answer the first question, Table 22 shows that 64.7% or 64 out of the 95 respondents said their board has set short- and long-term goals to improve student achievement.

In comparison, of the 44 superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts, 32 or 72.7% signified “Yes” to this question, while 32 out the 52 or 62.7% of the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts agreed. The p-value ($p=.381$) did not indicate a trend or significant difference between the two groups. As a result, this topic was not addresses during the superintendent interviews.

Table 22 Goal Setting

	Goal Setting	
	Set short- and Long-term goals	Participated in goal-setting retreat
Percent of Yes response	64.7%	41.7%
Percent of No response	32.6%	58.3%
Percent of Highest-Achieving Yes responses	62.7%	51.9%
Percent of Lowest-Achieving Yes responses	72.7%	29.5%
P-value	.381	.038

The second question in this theme asked if their board has participated in a goal-setting retreat within the past two years. To address research question one, only 41.7% (40 of 96) of the respondents signified that they had (Table 22).

In comparing both groups, out of the 52 superintendents from the highest-achieving districts, 27 indicated “Yes” while only 13 of the 44 superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts agreed. The p-value for this question was $p=.038$ and proved to be a significant difference between both groups. As a result, this topic was explored during the superintendent interviews.

During the interviews, superintendents were asked if their board recently has participated in development activities such as board retreats or training sessions. Of the ten superintendents interviewed, seven confirmed that their school boards either attended retreats or training sessions. Only one of the superintendents from highest-achieving districts said their board does not; the other two came from the lowest-achieving districts.

Board development activities ranged from workshops hosted by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA) to yearly retreats off campus. Items typically discussed in the development activities included district goals, fiscal issues, superintendent evaluation, legal issues, student achievement results, and a new board member orientation. All seven superintendents who said they have participated in board development activities felt their work was productive. A superintendent from a highest-achieving district thought the work they do at the yearly retreat is very productive:

“Especially in terms of having a clear understanding of what I was doing as the superintendent and what we were doing with the district in terms of student achievement. Student achievement has been our only major focus

since I've been here, and I wanted the board to clearly understand what that looked like.”

It appears the superintendent from this highest-achieving district utilizes the yearly retreat to keep the board informed on student achievement initiatives.

On the opposing end, when asked if their board participates in board development activities, a superintendent from a lowest-achieving district felt the board would not be agreeable to board development activities such as a retreat:

“They all like that sense of independence. I vote my way and I have my own thoughts and we agree to disagree. They are not into this team thing at all. They don't fight with each other, but I think that some of them don't like the idea that they are getting together agreeing to do things together. I have my opinion and you have to respect my opinion and I will respect your opinion.”

In this district, it appears that the board members do not work in a cohesive fashion to establish district goals and not willing to participate in board development activities.

To summarize, it appears that more boards from both groups set short- and long-term goals to improve student achievement more than they attend goal-setting retreats. To distinguish between both groups, a higher percentage (72.7%) of the lowest-achieving districts is setting short- and long-term goals compared to the highest-achieving districts (62.7%). However, more boards from the highest-achieving districts (51.9%) are participating in goal setting retreats than the lowest-achieving districts (29.5%). As identified from the superintendent interviews, topics such as academic goals, budget, short- and long-term goals, board self-analysis, school development, and team building were areas of focus at the retreats.

4.4.10 Board Training

Three questions on the survey addressed school board training in regards to attending workshops to improve governance, providing an orientation for new board members, and keeping current in educational trends. The first two questions utilized a “Yes” or “No” response and the third question used a Likert-type response.

The first question asked the superintendents if board members attended workshops/training to improve governance within the past two years. To address research question one, Table 23 shows that 74.0% or 71 out of the 96 superintendents from both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts answered “Yes” to this question.

In comparison, of the 52 respondents from the highest-achieving districts, 40 indicated their boards attended training to improve governance, while 31 of the 44 superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts also indicated “Yes” to this question. The p-value for this question ($p = .493$) did not indicate a trend or significant difference between the two groups and not taken into the discussions with individual superintendents.

Table 23 Board Training

	Board Training		
	Attended workshops and/or training	Orientation for new members	Current in educational trends
Percent of Yes response	74.0%	75.0%	--
Percent of No response	26.0%	25.0%	--
Percent of Highest-Achieving Yes responses	76.9%	80.8%	--
Percent of Lowest-Achieving Yes responses	70.5%	68.2%	--
Mean Score of All Responses	--	--	3.17
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	--	--	3.29
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	--	--	3.02
P-value	.493	.119	.209

The second question asked the superintendents if in the past two years their board provided an orientation for new board members. Similar to the first question, 75% (72 of 96) of the respondents indicated their new board members are provided an orientation.

While comparing both groups, 42 or 80.8% of the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts marked “Yes” while 30 or 68.2% of the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts agreed with the question. The p-value is $p=.119$ and was not considered a trend or significant difference between both groups.

The third question in this theme inquired if board members remained current in educational trends through reading educational publications. The overall mean score for all of the

respondents on this Likert-type question was $m= 3.17$. The majority of the superintendents indicated “undecided” on the survey.

In response to research question two, the mean score for the highest- and lowest-achieving districts was $m=3.29$ and $m=3.02$ respectively. The p-value was $p= .209$ and did not represent a trend or significant difference.

In summary, approximately 75% of the superintendents felt their boards attended workshops and/or provided an orientation for new board members. In addition, the majority of superintendents were “undecided” if their board remained current in educational trends by reading educational publications. In comparison, the boards from the highest-achieving districts attend workshops or receive training to improve governance more so than the lowest-achieving districts. Furthermore, the highest-achieving districts provide an orientation for new board members more often than the lowest-achieving districts are. In terms of remaining current in educational trends, the data shows that the boards from the highest-achieving districts scored slightly higher than the lowest-achieving districts. Ultimately, the difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving groups proved to be insignificant as the probability value (p-value) for each question was $p=.493$, $p=.119$, and $p=.209$ respectively (Table 23). Because there was not a trend or significant difference regarding board training, these topics were not addressed during the superintendent interviews.

4.4.11 Community Relations

In the area of community relations, three questions on the survey inquired about different aspects including the board providing academic achievement results to the community, keeping the community informed of educational needs, and promoting the district in the community. Each

question utilized a Likert-type response. For the first question in this topic, superintendents were asked if their school board provides academic achievement results to the community. To answer research question one, Table 24 shows that the mean score for all of the respondents is $m=4.11$. The majority of superintendents indicated “agree” with the question on the survey.

In comparison, Table 24 illustrates that the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=4.25$) is higher than the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts ($m=3.93$). Although the p-value for this question ($p=.131$) is low, it does not signify a trend or significant difference between the two groups.

Table 24 Community Relations

	Community Relations		
	Provides achievement results	Keeps community informed	Actively promotes district
Mean Score of All Responses	4.11	3.95	4.20
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	4.25	4.10	4.35
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	3.93	3.77	4.02
P-value	.131	.116	.059

The second question in this theme asked the superintendents if their board keeps the community informed of educational needs. To answer research question one, the mean score of all the respondents was $m=3.95$. Nearly 48% of the superintendents indicated “agree” on the survey for this question.

In comparison, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=4.10$) is higher than the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts ($m=3.77$). The p-value ($p=.116$) did not indicate a trend or a significant difference between both groups.

However, the third question in this theme did produce a trend between the highest-and lowest-achieving districts with a p-value of $p=.059$. The question asked the superintendents if the board actively promotes the school district in the community. The overall mean score for this question was $m=4.20$. Once again, the majority of the superintendents indicated “agree” for this question on the survey.

In comparing the two groups, the mean score for the highest-achieving districts is $m=4.35$, and the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts is $m=4.02$. Since this topic was considered a trend between both groups, it was addressed during the superintendent interviews.

As a result of the interviews, all ten superintendents felt their school board makes an attempt to promote the school district in the community. A few examples they gave included hiring an employee to update the district website, hosting banquets for successful alumni, participating in other organizations in the community, attending school functions, and promoting simply by word of mouth. A superintendent from a highest-achieving district said that his board promotes the school district through voluntary organizations and an attempt to be accessible to community members. He said,

“Our school board members, probably half of them, are heavily involved in the community in some kind of voluntary capacity on other boards or those kinds of things. They are all really well known. People talk to them on the street all the time. Sometimes some of them get phone calls, but that’s not typical. So they have a good pulse of the community and I rely on that a lot to hear what the undertone of the community is.”

Another superintendent from a highest-achieving district felt his board tries to promote the district and has made it a priority: “That was one of their goals this year was to have more interaction with the community at large. So we tried several different things and we are going to try some more things and I know it’s something they’re going to carry over.” In both of the highest-achieving districts cited, board members make an attempt to promote their district in their particular community. In the second example, the board as a whole expressed a desire to improve in this area of community relations and made it a part of their yearly goals.

Similarly, a superintendent from a lowest-achieving district believes the board promotes the district in the community but utilizes the superintendent to help promote them:

“A lot of them are active in various social organizations like Lions, churches, whatever. What they will do since they have that connectivity, they will invite me into speak, so it is like a conduit to get me in there to tout the district and to go over what is going on. Every year I get invited to all the different groups to do what I call the state of the district and kind of give them an update of what we're dealing with here and what are the new bells and whistles and what are the roadblocks as well.”

In this lowest-achieving district, the board utilizes the superintendent as a spokesperson on behalf of the district.

To summarize, both the survey and superintendent interviews signify that the highest- and lowest-achieving districts make a solid attempt in the area of community relations. However, the survey data suggests that boards from highest-achieving districts edged out the boards from the lowest-achieving districts on all three questions in this theme. The one area of significance was the trend between the two groups in regards to the board actively promoting the district in the community.

4.4.12 Student Advocates

Three questions on the survey asked the superintendents if they regard their board as student advocates. All three questions utilized a Likert-type response. The first question asked the superintendents if their school board promotes the academic success of the students in the district. To answer research question one, Table 25 shows the mean score for all of the respondents was $m=4.37$. For this question, the majority of the superintendents indicated “strongly agree” on the survey.

In comparison, the mean score from the lowest-achieving districts is $m= 4.23$ and the mean score for the highest-achieving districts is $m= 4.49$. The results symbolize that the boards from the highest-achieving districts promote the academic success more so than the boards from the lowest-achieving districts. In addition, the p-value for this question is $p=.090$ and signifies a trend between both groups. As a result, this question was addressed in the superintendent interviews.

During the interviews, all ten of the superintendents felt their boards make an attempt to promote academic success of their students. Although, the responses varied as some boards expected the administration to promote the educational accomplishments of students through district newsletters, newspaper articles, or students being brought to board meetings in order to be recognized. A superintendent from a highest-achieving district said,

“Every business meeting I attempt to bring in students who have achieved or have done certain accomplishments so the board can recognize them publicly. But again, the administration does most of the prep work on this. We bring them to the board and the board reads the proclamations or

certificates. We bring kids to at least one board meeting a month for some kind of recognition.”

A superintendent from a lowest-achieving school also acknowledges that the administration leads the charge in promoting academic success. He stated,

“We have digital signs that I brought in the district this year at the high school and the central office. We flash every award that a child has whether it's an Eagle Scout or anything. I give them certificates at every public board meeting. Any academic competition, athletic competition, I give certificates out. We promote all things, athletic success, academic success. The board likes that and I love it because it then sets the tone that we are doing something good. Then, let them fight on stupid stuff in the meeting.”

In both cases, the superintendent takes the lead on promoting student achievement in the districts. However, in each of the cited examples, board members recognize student achievement at a board meeting each month. In addition, two superintendents, both from the highest-achieving districts, stated that board members attend academic recognition assemblies or academic award nights.

The second question in this theme asked the superintendents if their board members make decisions based on students' best interests, both general and academic. Research question one indicates that the superintendents generally “agreed” with the question as the mean score was $m=4.41$. Overall, the majority of superintendents (51.6%) indicated “strongly agree” to this question on the survey.

However, when comparing both groups, Table 25 shows the mean score for the highest-achieving districts is $m=4.54$ and the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts is $m=4.26$.

Although the p-value ($p=.052$) signifies a trend between the two groups, this question was inadvertently missed and was not addressed during the superintendent interviews.

Table 25 Student Advocates

	Student Advocates		
	Promotes academic Achievement	Decisions based on student interest	Decisions based on personal interest
Mean Score of All Responses	4.37	4.41	2.46
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	4.49	4.54	2.17
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	4.23	4.26	2.81
P-value	.090	.052	.010

The third question in the area of the board being student advocates asked the superintendents if board members make decisions based on their own personal agenda. To address research question one, the mean score for all of the respondents is $m=2.46$ (Table 25). Also, 47.9% of the superintendents indicated “disagree” for this question.

To respond to research question two and comparing the two groups, the mean score for highest-achieving districts is $m=2.17$ and the mean score for the lowest-achieving district is $m=2.81$. The mean score between both groups signifies that the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts feel their boards make decisions based on their own personal agenda more than the boards from the highest-achieving districts. The p-value for this question is $p=.010$ and is considered a significant difference between both groups. As a result, this topic was explored during the superintendent interviews.

During the interviews, superintendents were asked if there are board members with special interests that make the board less functional. Every superintendent felt to some degree that board members have special interests. Areas identified include keeping taxes low, focusing on extra-curricular activities, funding issues, changing facilities, and supporting the region in which they were elected.

However, three superintendents from the highest-achieving districts and one from the lowest-achieving district believe the special interests that board members have do not make the board less functional because they ultimately operate as a board as a whole. A superintendent from a lowest-achieving district said, "I think they all have special interests but they keep it in check." Similarly, a superintendent from a highest-achieving district stated,

"Sometimes they have special interests but they always act as a board. So, someone might bring up something with a personal interest but they know that the board can only act if they have five votes. So they may discuss those kinds of things, but unless they can talk other people into it, it has not been a problem. For the most part, in fact always, our board has decided to sometimes agree to disagree. And sometimes someone will bring up an issue and if they don't get any support, they typically respond, 'Well, okay, I can see I'm the only person with interests in that,' and we move onto something else."

In these two examples, the board polices themselves to ensure that one or two board members with special interests do not allow the board to be less functional.

However, another superintendent from a lowest-achieving district felt that board members with special interests was a major issue in his district because of their ties with family members working in the school system:

“We have virtually every board member that has a relative who works for the school district. Many of them have children in the school district. They have friends and neighbors who want jobs here, so there is some political side of it that shows its face at times. Usually with the caveat of here is the problem, I know my wife works at that building, but it’s not about her. It’s that prelude to I’m disemboweling that relationship, but the truth of the matter is most of the time, issues wouldn’t be coming up if their own spouse, son, daughter, relative wasn’t working for the district.”

It appears the board members in this lowest-achieving district develop special interests based on information they are receiving from family members who work in the district.

In summary, the board acting as student advocates was the only category on the survey where the results for every question was considered a trend or a significant difference between both groups. It appears from the data that the highest-achieving districts promotes student achievement and makes decisions based on students’ best interest more than the lowest-achieving district. The p-value for the question regarding board members who make decisions based on their own personal agenda ($p=.010$) signified the second most significant difference in the study. As discovered in the interviews, the boards from the highest-achieving districts may do a better job at “policing” themselves than the lowest-achieving districts, and ultimately making decisions that is in the best interest of all the students.

4.4.13 Board Meetings

Three questions on the survey explored the board’s role and practices at board meetings. Each question utilized a Likert-type response. The first question asked the superintendent if the board

maintains a high level of professionalism at board meetings. In direct response to research question one, Table 26 illustrates the mean score for all of the respondents is $m=3.99$. In addition, 45.3% of the superintendents marked “agree” to this question on the survey.

In comparison, the mean score for the highest-achieving district ($m=4.10$) is higher than the mean score for the lowest-achieving district ($m=3.86$). The data would indicate that the highest-achieving districts maintain a high level of professionalism more than the lowest-achieving districts. But, the p-value ($p=.282$) does not signify a trend or significant difference between the two groups.

The second question in this theme asked the superintendents if school board members argue between themselves and/or the superintendent during board meetings. To answer research question one, the overall mean score for all the respondents is $m=1.95$, which signifies the second lowest mean score on the survey. In addition, 42.1% of the superintendents indicated “strongly disagree” the survey.

For research question two, the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts ($m=2.05$) is higher than the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=1.87$) and signifies that the arguing occurs more during board meetings in the lowest-achieving districts. However, the p-value ($p=.417$) does not indicate a trend or significant difference between both groups.

Table 26 Board Meetings

	Board Meetings		
	High level of Professionalism	Argue among themselves	Operates as a “board as a whole”
Mean Score of All Responses	3.99	1.95	3.40
Mean Score of Highest-Achieving	4.10	1.87	3.38
Mean Score of Lowest-Achieving	3.86	2.05	3.42
P-value	.282	.417	.906

The last question on the survey regarding board meetings asked the superintendents if their board worked as a “board as a whole” instead of working as standing committees. For research question one, the overall mean score from both groups was $m=3.40$. For this question, the responses were spread out as 24.2% of the superintendents marked “strongly disagree,” 30.5% marked “agree,” and 27.4% indicated “strongly agree” on the survey.

To answer research question two, the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts ($m=3.42$) is slightly higher than the mean score for the highest-achieving districts ($m=3.38$). The p-value for this question is $p=.906$ and was not considered a trend or significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts.

In summary, both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts in the topic of board meetings are very similar. As the data shows, both groups maintain a relatively high level of professionalism at board meetings and equally work as a “board as a whole.” While slightly higher, the data also signifies that the boards from the lowest-achieving districts argue among themselves more than the boards from the highest-achieving districts. These results are

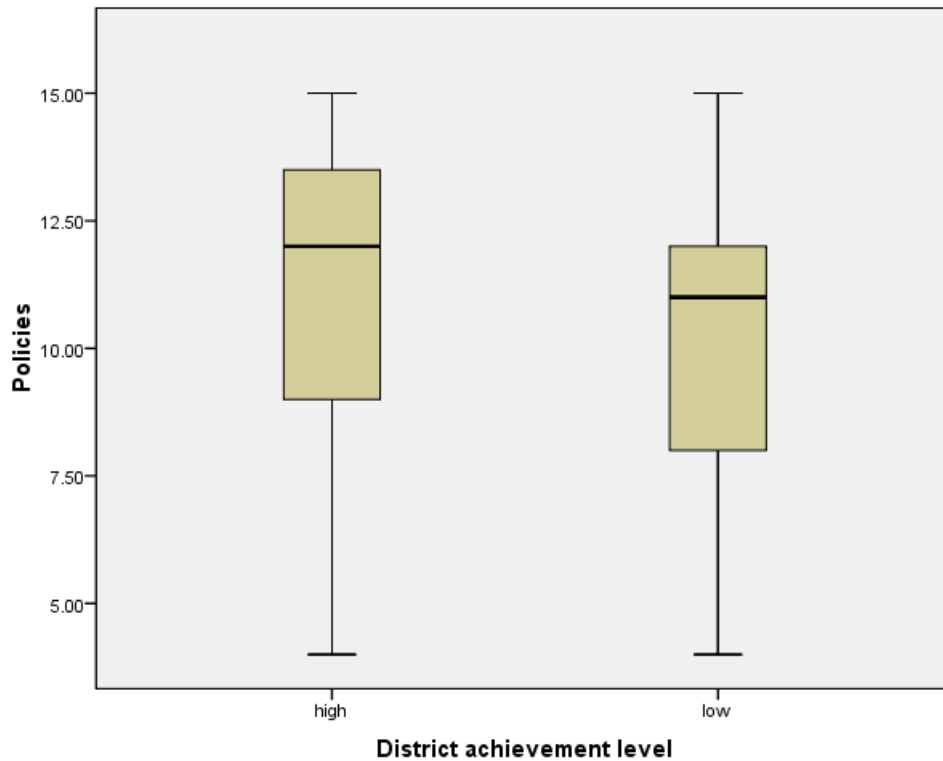
consistent with the superintendents' response to the question regarding the board maintaining a high level of professionalism at board meetings.

4.5 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data in the survey identified policies and practices school boards were using and highlighted the differences between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. In an effort to validate the survey data, an additional statistical analysis was performed to determine if there were any outlier districts, any district that scored either well above or below the mean score and then may have influenced the overall data results in either a positive or negative way. To test the data, an analysis was performed for questions one through fifteen, which were the yes/no questions on the survey. Also, an analysis was performed for questions sixteen through thirty-eight, the Likert-type questions on the survey. The results were categorized by the highest- and lowest-achieving districts.

For questions one through fifteen, each district received one point for every "yes" response and zero points for every "no" response, with the highest score being fifteen. The mean score for the highest-achieving districts was $m=11.23$ and the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts was $m=10.38$. As a result of the analysis, there were not any districts in either the highest-achieving group or lowest-achieving group that scored above or below the scoring band (Table 27).

Table 27 Analysis of survey questions one through fifteen



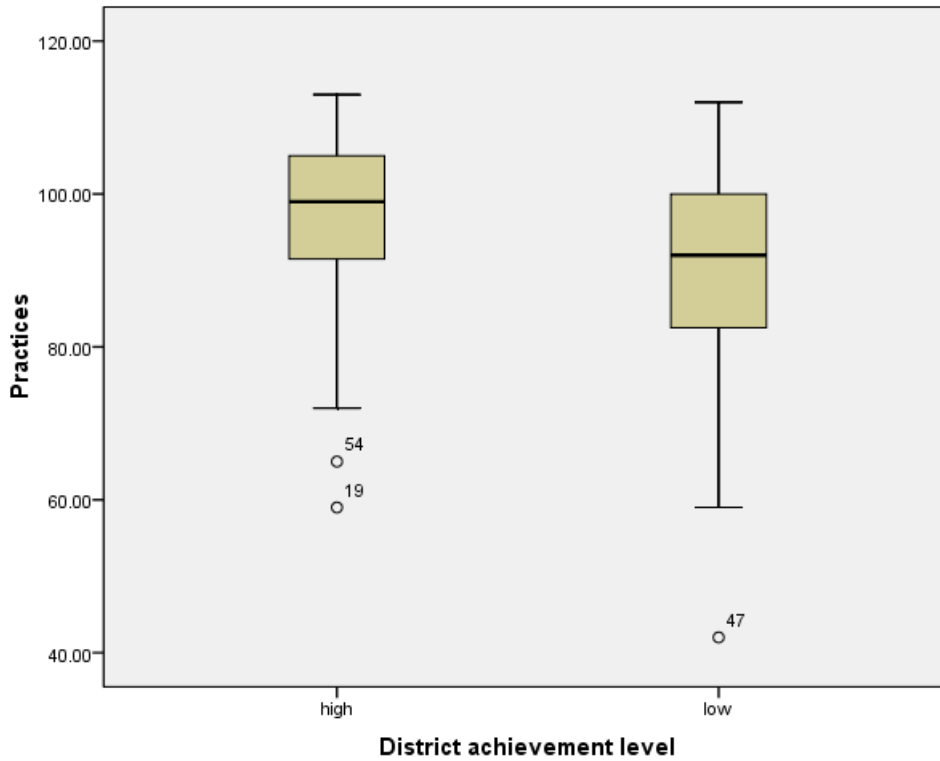
To perform the analysis of questions sixteen through thirty-eight, each district received points based on the response for each Likert-type question. For example, if a superintendent responded “strongly disagree,” one point was assigned and if a superintendent responded “strongly agree,” five points were assigned. The highest possible score for questions sixteen through thirty-eight was 115.

Response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Code	1	2	3	4	5

The mean score for the highest-achieving districts was $m=96.75$ and the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts was $m=89.88$. As illustrated on Table 28, two districts from the highest-achieving group, district #54 and district #19, fell below the scoring band and was

considered outlier districts. Furthermore, district #47 fell below the scoring band from the lowest-achieving districts and was also considered an outlier district.

Table 28 Analysis for questions sixteen through thirty-eight



Overall, the statistical analysis suggests the data collected from the surveys would not significantly change if the outlier districts were removed from the study.

4.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Chapter IV presented the results of the study of the policies and practices of school boards and how they affect student achievement. The remainder of the chapter will highlight the major findings of the data, categorized by each research question.

Research question one asked what policies and practices does a school board engage in that influences student achievement. In an effort to identify the most common policies and practices the boards were using, each question was analyzed according to the responses for each policy or practice. For example, in the Yes/No portion of the survey, any question where the superintendents' response totaled 90% or higher, for either a "Yes" or "No" response, that specific policy or practice was considered commonly used by the school boards. For the Likert-type questions, any response at a 60% or higher in either the "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" categories was considered a policy or practice commonly used by school boards.

Table 29 highlights the most commonly used policies and practices identified in the study.

Table 29 Research Question One - Most commonly used policies and practices

Policy/Practice	Response Rate
Funding to support academic improvement initiatives	Y = 99.0%
Funding for professional development for teachers	Y = 96.9%
Utilize data to make informed budgetary decisions	Y = 94.8%
Utilize data to determine if reaching academic goals	Y = 92.7%
Utilize data to improve student achievement	Y = 90.9%
Superintendent has positive working relationship with board	SA = 66.3%
Board accepts administration's recommendation on hiring new teachers	SA = 65.3%
Board considers superintendent as CEO of district	SA = 60.6%

Research question two asked how the policies and practices of school boards compare between the highest- and lowest-achieving school districts. To identify the most significant

differences between the two groups, where either the highest- or lowest-achieving district was doing something more than its counterpart, any policy or practice on the survey with a probability value (p-value) of $p \leq .05$ or lower was considered a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 30 highlights the most significant differences in policies and practices between the boards from the highest- and lowest-achieving districts found in the survey.

Table 30 Research Question Two - Significant differences between highest- and lowest-achieving districts

Policy/Practice	P-value	Prominent Achieving Districts
Board prefers to hire local teaching candidates even when a more qualified candidate is available	P = .005	Lowest
Board members make decisions based on personal agenda	P = .010	Lowest
Board wants to be involved in daily decision making	P = .015	Lowest
Board knowledgeable about district educational initiatives	P = .019	Highest
Board evaluates superintendent based on mutual goals	P = .027	Highest
Board has participated in goal-setting retreat	P = .038	Highest
Board actively involved in interview process for teachers	P = .039	Lowest

The final chapter will include study conclusions, limitations of the study, and implications for future research.

5.0 CHAPTER V– INTERPRETATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

Chapter V consists of the following sections: (a) introduction, (b) study conclusions, (c) limitations of the study, and (d) implications for future research.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the policies and practices of Pennsylvania school boards, through the eyes of school superintendents, and determine if those policies and practices affect student achievement. The two research questions that guided this study are

1. What policies and practices does a school board engage in that influences student achievement?
2. How do these policies and practices of school boards compare in lower- and higher-achieving school districts?

Similar-sized school districts across Pennsylvania were identified and ultimately categorized within a subgroup as highest- through lowest-achieving districts based on test scores from two consecutive years on the PSSA exams. Superintendents who participated in the study answered a forty-two question survey and then ten superintendents were selected to participate in a brief interview. The topics and questions used to create the survey were found in the literature regarding the policies and practices of school boards. Next, the topics and interview questions

were created from the trends and significant differences found between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts as identified in the survey. The data that was collected from both the surveys and interviews as well as examining the literature previously presented all indicate the need for school boards in Pennsylvania to look closer at their policies and practices in an effort to improve student achievement.

5.2 STUDY CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the survey and interviews presented in Chapter IV, the data indicates there are policies and practices that school boards participate in across Pennsylvania that can influence student achievement. Even though school boards do not directly instruct students, their actions can have a profound effect on the quality of education they receive. Indicative of the study, it is this researcher's belief that school boards in Pennsylvania want their students to be academically successful. However, not all of the policies and practices they partake in prove to be beneficial to reach that goal. The remainder of the chapter will highlight the most common policies and practices identified in the study from both groups as well as the most significant differences between the boards from the highest- and lowest achieving districts and correlate the results with the literature.

5.2.1 Research Question One

5.2.1.1 Funding

In the area of providing funding, two policies and/or practices came to light as being the most commonly used by the school boards in the study. First, funding to support academic

improvement initiatives was identified as being the most used policy and/or practice in the study. In fact, 99% or 95 out of the 96 superintendents felt their board has allocated funding within the past two years so as to support academic improvement initiatives. In reference to the literature, Deborah Land (2002) believes that “one of the school board’s principle budget responsibilities is to secure adequate funding to support academic achievement” (p. 29). In this case, every superintendent except one felt their boards were not only securing adequate funding but also allocated the necessary monies to improve academic achievement.

Next, the second policy and/or practice in the area of funding identified as being one of the most commonly used was providing funding for professional development for teachers. In the survey, 96.6% or 93 out of 96 superintendents agreed that their board has allocated funding within the past two years to support professional development for teachers. In a case study of American schools, Odden and Archibald (2000) concluded that school boards may need to reallocate resources in order to support academic achievement in areas such as expanded professional development opportunities. As discovered in the superintendent interviews for this topic, some school districts, either being a high poverty or low-achieving district, may receive additional state and federal monies to help offset the districts costs for professional development activities. In turn, the board is not directly paying for professional development opportunities.

5.2.1.2 Utilizing Data

In the theme of utilizing data, three separate policies and/or practices were identified in the study as being frontrunners of the most commonly used by school boards. As found in the literature, the National School Boards Foundation (NSBF, 2001) encourages school boards to utilize data as a means to make decisions based on evidence, not speculation or guesswork. On the survey, it

appears that a large majority, or 94.8% of the superintendents, indicated their boards have utilized data within the past two years to help make informed budget decisions.

Similarly, 92.7% or 89 out of the 96 superintendents felt their boards' utilized data to determine if the district is reaching its academic goals. The results from the survey has a strong correlation with the literature as NSBF suggests that school boards can produce higher student achievement by utilizing data to “measure whether the district is meeting goals to improve student achievement-academic as well as character, citizenship and values” (p. 10). It appears from the data that both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts are utilizing data equally for both of the survey questions.

The third question in the theme of utilizing data was to determine if boards practiced utilizing data to improve student achievement. Once again, a large majority of superintendents, 90.6% or 87 out of the 96 respondents indicated their boards' utilized data within the past two years to make informed decisions to improve student achievement. As uncovered in the superintendent interviews, every superintendent felt their board was exposed to the data regarding student achievement but differed in the understanding of the data and the willingness to utilize the data to help make academic improvement decisions.

5.2.1.3 Board/Superintendent Relationship

The next area identified as being a common practice with school boards was regarding the school board/superintendent relationship. The results of this Likert-type question found that 66.3% of the superintendents indicated “strongly agree” when asked if they have a positive working relationship with their school board. Furthermore, an additional 29.8% of the remaining superintendents indicated “agree” to the same question. In total, 96.1% of all of the responding

superintendents felt they have a positive working relationship with their board. Doug Eadie (2003) suggests that it is imperative for the board and superintendent to have a productive relationship. Eadie states, “The indispensable foundation for high-impact governing is a working partnership between the board and the superintendent that is close, positive, productive, and solid” (p. 26). It appears from the survey data that superintendents from both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts have a positive working relationship with their respective board.

Another aspect of the board/superintendent relationship considered a common practice of school boards in Pennsylvania was the boards’ view of the superintendent as CEO of the district. As cited in the literature, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA, 2009) recommends that board members view the superintendent as their partner as well the district’s executive agent. The data from the survey signifies that more than a majority of superintendents (60.6%) signaled “strongly agree” that their board considers them to be the CEO of the district. It is also important to note that an additional 29.8% of the remaining superintendents from the survey indicated “agree” to the question. In total, 90.4% of the superintendents from the survey felt they were considered the CEO of the district. As a result of the superintendent interviews, eight of the ten superintendents believed the board considered them to be the CEO of the district.

5.2.1.4 Hiring Practices

The last commonly used policies/practices identified from the survey evolved around the boards’ hiring practices of teachers. When asked if the board accepts the administration’s recommendation when hiring new teachers, 65.3% of the superintendents indicated “strongly agree” to this Likert-type question. In addition, 27.4% of the remaining superintendents marked

“agree” on the survey. As indicative of the study, superintendents feel their recommendations are accepted when given the opportunity to recommend new teachers to be hired.

5.2.2 Research Question Two

Within the policies and practices of school boards identified throughout the study, there were significant differences between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. This section will highlight the findings of the second research question and correlate the results with the literature.

5.2.2.1 Hiring Practices

Researchers suggest that school boards should not be involved in the hiring process beyond a few senior administrators (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992). By following this recommendation, school boards would not be involved in the interview process of new teachers. Instead, boards would govern as policy boards and create guidelines or hiring policies for the administration to follow and then accept the recommendations of the administration as to which candidates should be hired (1992). The data from the surveys indicated a significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving school districts in the area of the board being actively involved during the interview process of new teachers. The data indicated boards from the highest-achieving districts are not involved in the interview process as much as boards from the lowest-achieving districts are. More specifically, 50 of the 95 total respondents on this question indicated “strongly disagree” when asked if their board was involved with the interview process. However, 32 of the same 50 respondents (64.0%) were from the highest-achieving districts compared to 18 out of 50 (36.0%) coming from the lowest-achieving districts. In turn, the p-value for this question was $p = .039$. Unfortunately, there is not an overwhelming amount of

literature that researched the effect on student achievement in regards to the hiring practices of school boards. However, the data from this study indicates the boards from the highest-achieving districts are not as frequently involved in the interview process of new teachers.

Another significant finding from the study regarding hiring practices concludes that the lowest-achieving boards tend to hire local teaching candidates more often, even when a more qualified candidate is available. In fact, this question produced the most significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts in the study with a p-value of $p=.005$. Furthermore, 28 or 75.6% of the respondents who answered “strongly disagree” to this question came from the highest-achieving districts, while only 9 or 24.3% of the respondents came from the lowest-achieving districts. In a related topic, the literature indicates that in an average district in Pennsylvania, 40% of the teachers attended the district where they teach (Strauss, 1999). Strauss also states as the percentages of hiring local teaching candidates increase, student achievement falls (1999). Questions regarding a school board’s motive for hiring local candidates would benefit from additional research.

5.2.2.2 Short- and Long-Term Goals

Next, the literature suggests that the boards, in conjunction with the superintendent, should create short- and long-term academic achievement goals (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Goodman et al., 1997). One avenue to help boards set desired goals would be to participate in a goal setting retreat. In this study, the data shows there was a significant difference between the boards from the highest- and lowest-achieving districts that participated in a goal setting retreat. The survey showed that 40 of the 96 total respondents indicated that their boards held a goal-setting retreat within the past two years. Of the forty respondents 27, or 51.9%, came from the highest-

achieving districts and 13, or 29.5%, came from the lowest-achieving districts. As identified in the interviews, superintendents reported that academic goals are usually discussed and finalized during goal setting retreats. The finding of this study correlates strongly with the literature. Goodman et al. (1997) found similar results in their study of the school board/superintendent collaboration as school boards from higher achieving school districts held periodic retreats in an effort to improve student achievement.

5.2.2.3 Evaluation of Superintendent

The next significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts was in the area of the superintendent evaluation. A substantial amount of literature recommends that the evaluation of the superintendent be based upon mutual goals and/or policies established (Eadie, 2003; Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Carver, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997). This study found that 86.5% of the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts stated that they were evaluated based on mutual goals that were created with their respective boards. In contrast, only 65.9% of the superintendents from the lowest-achieving districts reported they received an evaluation based upon mutual goals. The data from the survey suggests that the boards and the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts are establishing clear measurable goals more so than the boards from the lowest-achieving districts. Similarly in their study of school boards, Goodman et al. (1997) found the boards from the higher-achieving districts used a mutually-agreed upon approach to evaluate the performance of the superintendent.

5.2.2.4 Educational Initiatives

Another significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts found in the study was the boards understanding of educational initiatives occurring in the district. In a previous study of school boards, researchers found that boards from low-achieving districts were only vaguely aware of school improvement initiatives (IASB, 2000). Similar to the IASB study, this study found that boards from the lowest-achieving districts were not as familiar with the educational initiatives in the district as the highest-achieving districts. The data showed that the mean score for the highest-achieving districts was $m=4.56$ on a 5 point scale. In contrast, the mean score for the lowest-achieving districts was $m=4.23$. In turn, the p-value for this question on the survey yielded a very low p-value ($p= .019$). The overall perception of the superintendent interviews was that the boards from the highest-achieving districts took pride in being familiar with the educational initiatives in the district. The same sense of pride was not evident in the lowest-achieving districts. The data and literature suggests that the boards from the highest-achieving districts are more in-tuned with the educational happenings in the district. Factors such as superintendent communication with the board regarding educational initiatives and the willingness of the board to put student achievement in the forefront may also contribute to this significant difference.

5.2.2.5 Personal Agendas

The second largest significant difference between the boards from the highest- and lowest-achieving districts was in regards to board members making decisions based on their own personal agendas. The mean score for the lowest-achieving districts was $m=2.81$ and the mean

score for the highest-achieving districts was $m=2.17$. As a result, the p-value for this question was $p=.010$. Similarly, the data from this study correlates with a previous study of school boards that found board members from lower-achieving districts were often in conflict with each other due to members “serving their own personal interests” (Goodman et al., 1997). Contrarily, Goodman suggests that the higher-achieving districts work collaboratively for the common goal of educating students.

As identified in the superintendent interviews, all of the superintendents thought that, in some form, board members made decisions based on their own agenda. Superintendents stated examples such as keeping taxes low, focusing on the area or community they represent, funding for activities in which their children participate, and teacher contract negotiations as key personal agenda items. The significant difference between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts is that the boards from the highest-achieving districts do a better job at “policing” themselves and ultimately making decisions that is in the best interests of all the students. Overall, the interview data from this study would suggest that the more effective school boards tend to put personal agendas aside and make decisions that are in the best interests of students, more specifically, student achievement.

5.2.2.6 Involved in Daily Decision-Making

Finally, the data from this study indicated a significant difference between the boards from the lowest- and highest achieving districts in regards to boards’ involvement in the daily decision-making of the district. The mean score for the lowest-achieving district was $m=2.60$ while the mean score for the highest-achieving districts was $m=2.00$. In turn, the p-value for this question was $p=.015$ and represented the third lowest p-value on the survey. The data shows a negative

relationship to student achievement when the boards are involved with the daily decision-making.

Superintendents from the interviews viewed this topic as the board “micromanaging” in areas such as personnel issues, building level decisions, athletics, and community complaints. Superintendents from both the highest- and lowest-achieving districts cited examples of board interference. However, two of the superintendents from the highest-achieving districts stated that their board did not get involved with the daily decision making because they were a policymaking board and wanted the administration to handle all day-to-day issues.

The findings of this study also correlate with the two previous studies of school boards where boards from the lower-achieving districts tend to “micromanage” the daily decision-making (IASB, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997). In addition, the literature suggests that school boards should relieve themselves of the daily decision-making process and focus on creating policies for the administration to follow (IASB, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997; Kubick, 1988; Ziebarth, 1999; Carver, 2000; Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Hill, 2003; Jazzar, 2005; Danzberger, 1994).

5.3 STUDY LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations that need to be addressed when analyzing the data from this study. Limitations include sample size, response rate, and data collected from the superintendent’s point of view.

Because school districts in Pennsylvania vary greatly in size, the policies and practices that boards engage in may be inherently different based on student enrollment. One example

would be the hiring practices of school boards. Due to time constraints, boards from a district that educate over 177,000 students may have a substantial amount of teacher openings every year, so it is not feasible to participate in the interview process. In contrast, a district that educates less than 1,000 students may have fewer openings and there may be an option for boards to be involved during the interview process. The intent of the study was to examine similar-sized school districts while also representing a majority of school districts in Pennsylvania. It is important to note that the sample size selected does not reflect every school board in Pennsylvania.

The next limitation to the study was the survey response rate of the selected superintendents. Of the 158 surveys mailed, 96 superintendents responded, which equaled a 61% response rate. One contributing factor to the limited response rate may be the time of the year the survey was distributed. The first and second mailings of the survey were distributed in April. Traditionally, the spring is a very busy time of the year for superintendents as they are dealing with staffing issues, state testing, graduation, etc. Perhaps a better time to distribute the survey would be in the fall when the superintendents may be more available to participate. Another possible factor to the limited response rate may be the superintendents' concern for anonymity. Even though the superintendents were informed that all names and districts would be kept confidential, the survey asked questions that may jeopardize their relationship with their current school board if their responses were known.

Another limitation of the study is collecting data about school boards from the perspective of the superintendent. Because the relationship between the superintendent and school boards are closely tied together, filtering out the policies and practices of the school board may be a difficult task for the superintendent. For example, when answering survey questions, superintendents may have felt some of the responses would be a reflection on their own

effectiveness as a superintendent instead of solely analyzing the boards' effectiveness. This was even more apparent during the superintendent interviews as the superintendents would often discuss the role they play in each topic rather than the practices or effectiveness of the school board. For example, when superintendents were asked if the school board members were able to speak about educational initiatives in the district, half of the superintendents were quick to point out that it was their job to keep the board informed of the educational initiatives in the district. Based on this premise, it is acknowledged that the data may be skewed due to the school board/superintendent relationship. Finally, even though superintendents agreed to participate in the study, response accuracy may have been softened due to the concern of anonymity as mentioned earlier.

5.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the data presented in this study, there are significant differences and trends between boards from the highest- and lowest-achieving districts. However, the data collected from this study only begins to shed light on the board's roles and practices and how it affects student achievement. Future research is needed to help identify "best practices" for school boards in the pursuit of academic excellence. Several areas to consider for future research are identified in the rest of this chapter.

The first suggestion for future research focuses on the hiring practices of teachers. In this study, two of the total seven significant differences between the highest- and lowest-achieving districts revolved around the hiring practices of school boards. The connection between boards wanting to be involved in the interview process of new teachers and the boards desire to hire

local teaching candidates even when a more qualified candidate is available is intriguing. Additional research on this topic may help uncover why boards want to be involved in the hiring process of teachers and not simply accept the recommendations of the educational professionals, i.e., school administration.

Another area of future research is to determine the impact on student achievement when the board makes the conscious decision to function as an educational policy making board. The literature cites experts and organizations in the field of education, including the Pennsylvania School Board Association, who recommend that school boards function as policy boards. The educational policy boards would create guidelines and policies for the superintendent to follow and would not be involved in the day-to-day operations of the district. According to the literature, benefits of a policy making board may increase student achievement due to less board micromanagement and the superintendent functioning as the C.E.O. of the district (Twentieth Century Fund, 1992; Carver, 2000). Additional research on this topic may help determine if the concept of an educational policy board has a positive impact on student achievement.

The final suggestion for future research would be to replicate this study but examine the policies and practices from the school board's perspective. As mentioned in the study limitations, superintendents may have a difficult time separating the effectiveness of the board with their own job performance. An additional study of school boards, taken from the board's perspective, may help filter this limitation and allow the researcher to focus on the policies and practices of school boards without superintendent bias. Other important factors to include in this study may be the demographic information regarding school board members' level of education and occupation as well as the socio-economic status of the highest- and lowest-achievement communities. Such information may provide a unique insight to the school board's management style and effectiveness.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY DATA

		Highest Achieving		Lowest Achieving		p-value
		N=Yes	%	N=Yes	%	
1	Created/updated policies to increase student achievement.	32	62.7	28	65.1	.833
2	Created/updated policies to clarify achievement Standards	28	54.9	25	58.1	.836
3	Created/updated policies to ensure productive Learning environment	32	61.8	27	62.8	.535
4	Allocated funding for professional development for teachers	52	100	41	93.2	.093
5	Allocated funding to support academic improvement initiatives	52	100	43	97.7	.458
6	Utilized data to make informed decisions to improve student achievement	50	96.2	37	84.1	.075
7	Utilized data to determine if district is reaching academic goals	48	92.3	41	93.2	1.000
8	Utilized data to help make informed budgetary decisions	49	94.2	42	95.5	1.000
9	Conducted formal assessment of superintendent's performance	44	84.6	30	68.2	0.87
10	Evaluated superintendent based on mutual goals	45	86.5	29	65.9	.027
11	Asked for input on evaluation of superintendent from parents, teachers, other employees	11	22	8	18.6	.798
12	Set short-and long-term goals for improved achievement	32	62.7	32	72.7	.381
13	Participated in goal-setting retreat	27	51.9	13	29.5	.038
14	Board members attended workshops/training to improve governance	40	76.9	31	70.5	.493
15	Orientation provided for new board members	42	80.8	30	31.8	.119

	District achievement level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	P-Value
q16 Board believes it has primary responsibility to increase achievement	1 high	52	4.31	.897	.470
	2 low	43	4.19	.699	
q17 Board believes all students can succeed academically	1 high	52	4.23	.757	.240
	2 low	43	4.05	.754	
q18 Board knowledgeable about District educational initiatives	1 high	52	4.56	.539	.019
	2 low	43	4.23	.782	
q19 Board has internal desire to improve student achievement	1 high	52	4.50	.642	.082
	2 low	43	4.23	.841	
q20 Board promotes academic success of students in District	1 high	51	4.49	.612	.090
	2 low	43	4.23	.841	
q21 Board makes decisions based on students' best interests	1 high	52	4.54	.699	.052
	2 low	43	4.26	.693	
q22 Board members make decisions based on personal agenda	1 high	52	2.17	1.098	.010
	2 low	42	2.81	1.254	
q23 Board wants to be involved in daily decision making	1 high	52	2.00	1.029	.015
	2 low	43	2.60	1.348	
q24 Board competes w administration in running schools	1 high	52	1.75	1.135	.115
	2 low	43	2.14	1.246	
q25 Board considers superintendent as CEO of District	1 high	52	4.60	.693	.074
	2 low	42	4.29	.970	
q26 Superintendent has positive working relationship w Board	1 high	52	4.58	.871	.450
	2 low	43	4.44	.854	

q27 Conflict occurs between superintendent and Board members	1 high	51	1.82	.974	.767
	2 low	43	1.88	.981	
q28 Board remains current in edu trends by reading publications	1 high	52	3.29	.997	.209
	2 low	42	3.02	1.024	
q29 Board accepts administration's recom on hiring new teachers	1 high	52	4.63	.742	.139
	2 low	43	4.40	.821	
q30 Board prefers hiring local teaching candidates even when more qual candidate available	1 high	52	1.69	.961	.005
	2 low	43	2.30	1.081	
q31 Board actively involved in interview process for teachers	1 high	52	1.65	1.064	.039
	2 low	43	2.16	1.308	
q32 Board bases hiring decisions on quality rather than cost	1 high	52	3.98	1.019	.478
	2 low	43	3.84	.924	
q33 Board provides academic achievement results to community	1 high	52	4.25	1.100	.131
	2 low	43	3.93	.910	
q34 Board informs community of educational needs	1 high	52	4.10	1.053	.116
	2 low	43	3.77	.947	
q35 Board actively promotes school district in community	1 high	52	4.35	.764	.059
	2 low	42	4.02	.869	
q36 Board maintains high level of professionalism at meetings	1 high	52	4.10	1.015	.282
	2 low	43	3.86	1.104	
q37 Board members argue among themselves or w superintendent	1 high	52	1.87	1.085	.417
	2 low	43	2.05	1.068	
q38 Board works as a whole rather than as committees	1 high	52	3.38	1.471	.906
	2 low	43	3.42	1.295	

APPENDIX B

SURVEY PARTICIPATION REQUEST

Dear Superintendent,

I am a doctoral candidate in School Leadership at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Education. I am studying the policies and practices of school boards in Pennsylvania and how they may relate to student achievement from the perspective of the superintendent. My dissertation study is being conducted under the guidance of Dr. William Bickel.

I am respectfully requesting your participation in a research study by asking you to complete a short survey concerning policies and practices of your particular school board. The survey will take approximately 6 minutes to complete. You are one of 158 superintendents in the state of Pennsylvania contacted to participate in this research study.

Please rest assured that the highest level of confidentiality will be kept throughout the study. While the name of your school district is needed to code responses in the study, the content will be analyzed and reported confidentially. No names of superintendents or school districts will be reported or released. The potential benefits of the study may help clarify the best governing practices of school boards in Pennsylvania and could result in improved student achievement.

I am asking that you sign the last page of the consent form and complete the enclosed survey and return both in the self-addressed envelope. Participation in this study is voluntary. When completing the survey, please think of your school board as a whole or what the majority position would be.

Please complete the survey by April 24, 2009. In addition, I am asking you to consider participating in a brief interview that will occur at a later date. The personal interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience.

If you would like any additional information before completing the survey, please feel free to contact me at (724) 333-2642 or email me at m_schreck@shenango.k12.pa.us. Also, if you would like a summary of the results, please indicate on the last page of the survey.

Thank you in advance for participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Michael Schreck

APPENDIX C

SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW REQUEST

Dear

At the end of April, you received a request to complete a survey regarding the various policies and practices of your school board. Your participation in the survey was truly appreciated and now I am attempting to complete the second part of my dissertation study - superintendent interviews.

You indicated on the survey that you would be willing to participate in a brief interview (approximately 30 minutes) to discuss a few survey topics in greater detail. You are one of ten superintendents throughout the state that I am contacting for the superintendent interview.

Interviews can be conducted either in person or by telephone. In either case, I would be happy to schedule a time that best fits your schedule. However, if you would prefer a personal interview, I will be traveling to your area on Monday, June 29 and Tuesday, June 30, 2009. Before the interview, I will email you a copy of the topics and questions that will be discussed.

Please rest assure that the highest level of confidentiality would be kept throughout the interview process and study. No names of superintendents or school districts will be reported or released and the content of the interview will be analyzed and reported confidentially.

If you would like any additional information concerning the interview, please feel free to contact me at (724) 333-2642 or email me at m_schreck@shenango.k12.pa.us. Once again, thank you for your earlier participation in my study and I am looking forward to speaking with you in person or by telephone.

Sincerely,
Michael Schreck
Doctoral Student
University of Pittsburgh

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVAL



University of Pittsburgh *Institutional Review Board*

3500 Fifth Avenue
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(412) 383-1508 (fax)
<http://www.irb.pitt.edu/>

Memorandum

To: Michael Schreck
From: Sue Beers, PhD, Vice Chair
Date: 2/25/2009
IRB#: PRO08110138
Subject: The Roles and Practices of Pennsylvania School Boards and how they affect student achievement.

The University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the above referenced study by the expedited review procedure authorized under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Your research study was approved under:

45 CFR 46.110.(7) characteristics/behaviors

Approval Date: 2/25/2009

Expiration Date: 2/24/2010

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to report to the IRB any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others [see 45 CFR 46.103(b)(5) and 21 CFR 56.108(b)]. The IRB Reference Manual (Chapter 3, Section 3.3) describes the reporting requirements for unanticipated problems which include, but are not limited to, adverse events. If you have any questions about this process, please contact the Adverse Events Coordinator at 412-383-1480.

The protocol and consent forms, along with a brief progress report must be resubmitted at least one month prior to the renewal date noted above as required by FWA00006790 (University of Pittsburgh), FWA00006735 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center), FWA00000600 (Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh), FWA00003567 (Magee-Womens Health Corporation), FWA00003338 (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Cancer Institute).

APPENDIX E

SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participates in goal setting retreat

1. Has the board participated in any board development activities such as board retreats or training sessions recently? If yes, was the development work productive? Why or why not?

Board has internal desire to improve student achievement

2. Can you describe action(s) the school board has taken that should result in higher student achievement?

Board competes with administration in running schools

3. Are there some matters brought before the board that you believe could be handled by the administration? If yes, give examples.

Board makes decisions based on personal agenda

4. Are there board members with special interests that make the board less functional? Please describe the “special interest.” How does it effect or not effect decisions?

Funding for professional development

5. Does your school board provide adequate funding for professional opportunities for staff members? Please describe the rationale.

Utilize Data for informed academic decisions

6. *How does your school board utilize data to help make informed academic decisions? If so, please provide a few examples.*

Formal assessment of superintendent

7. *How does your school board evaluate the performance of the superintendent? Formal/Informal? Please provide details.*

Evaluate superintendent of mutual goals

8. *If your school board utilizes a formal evaluation of the superintendent, is it based on mutual goals? Please provide examples.*

Board knowledgeable about district educational initiatives

9. In general, are your school board members able to speak accurately about the educational initiatives occurring in your district?

Board promotes academic success of students

10. Does your school board make an attempt to promote the academic success of your students? If so, please provide examples.

Board actively promotes the school district in community

11. Does your school board make an attempt to promote the school district in the community? If so, please provide examples.

Board considers superintendent as CEO

12. Does your school board consider the superintendent to be the CEO of the school district? How does it impact the overall academic success of your students?

Board actively involved in interview process

13. How active is the school board in the interview process of new teachers? Please describe the school boards role during the process.

Board prefers hiring local teaching candidates

14. Does your school board tend to prefer to hire local teaching candidates even when an equal or more qualified candidate is available? If so, please explain the rationale.

APPENDIX F

SUPERINTENDENT SURVEY

School District Name

The statements below describe various policies and practices your school board may use to advance student achievement within the school district. Please circle the answer that most closely reflects your school board's practices. When answering each question, please think of your school board as a whole or what the majority position would be.

Within the past 2 years, your school board has created or updated policies to:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Increase student achievement. | Yes | No |
| 2. Clarify academic achievement standards. | Yes | No |
| 3. Ensure productive learning environments (i.e. class sizes, hiring qualified teachers, etc.). | Yes | No |

Within the past 2 years, your school board has allocated funding to:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 4. Support professional development for teachers. | Yes | No |
| 5. Support academic improvement initiatives | Yes | No |

Within the past 2 years, your school board utilized data to:

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 6. Make informed decisions to improve student achievement. | Yes | No |
| 7. Determine if the district is reaching its academic goals. | Yes | No |
| 8. Help make informed budgetary decisions | Yes | No |

Within the past 2 years, your school board:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 9. Conducted a formal assessment of the superintendent's performance. | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|

10. Evaluated the superintendent based on mutually-agreed upon goals. Yes No
11. Asked for input from parents, teachers, and other school employees concerning the superintendent evaluation. Yes No
12. Set short- and long-term goals for improved academic achievement. Yes No
13. Participated in a goal-setting retreat. Yes No
14. Members attended workshops and training sessions to improve governance. Yes No
15. Provided an orientation for new members to help understand laws and responsibilities. Yes No

Please circle the response that most closely matches your school board’s practices. When answering each question, please think of your school board as a whole or what the majority position would be.

1= Strongly Disagree (SD) 2= Disagree (D) 3= Undecided (UD)
 4= Agree (A) 5= Strongly Agree (SA)

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA
16. Your school board believes that one of their primary responsibilities is to increase student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Your school board believes that all students can be academically successful.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Your school board is knowledgeable about the district’s educational initiatives.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Your school board has an internal desire to improve student achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Your school board promotes the academic success of students in your district.	1	2	3	4	5
21. School board members make decisions based on students’ best interests, both general and academic.	1	2	3	4	5
22. School board members make decisions based on their own personal agenda.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Your school board members want to be involved in the day-to-day decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Your school board competes with the administration in running the schools.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Your school board considers the superintendent as the chief executive officer of the district.	1	2	3	4	5
26. You have a positive working relationship with your school board.	1	2	3	4	5
27. There has been or often is conflict between you and school board members.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Your school board remains current in educational trends through reading educational publications.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Your school board accepts the administration’s recommendations when hiring new teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Your school board prefers to hire local teaching candidates even when a more qualified candidate is available.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Your school board is actively involved during the interview process of hiring new teachers.	1	2	3	4	5

32. When hiring new teachers, your school board bases their decision on quality rather than cost.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Your school board provides academic achievement results to the community.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Your school board keeps the community informed of educational needs.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Your school board actively promotes the school district in the community.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Your school board maintains a high level of professionalism at board meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
37. School board members argue between themselves and/or the superintendent during board meetings.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Your school board works as a “board as a whole” instead of standing committees.	1	2	3	4	5

Please answer the following general questions.

39. How many years have you been the superintendent in your <u>current</u> district?	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-10	10+
40. How many <u>total</u> years have you been a superintendent?	0-2	3-5	6-8	9-10	10+

41. Would you be willing to participate in a short interview to discuss school boards as it relates to achievement?	YES	NO
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42. Would you like a summary of the results of this research study?	YES	NO
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