THE MOTIVATIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND DECISION-MAKING OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

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THE MOTIVATIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND DECISION-MAKING OF

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The local control of public schools in the United States provides opportunities for everyday citizens to participate in governance and shape educational programs (Tyack, 2003). This study surveyed the people who volunteered to serve on Western Pennsylvania school boards, specifically examining their motivations for service including the recruitment process, experiences or interactions that motivated board service, interests, and socialization methods once on the board. The study also uncovered information regarding the decision-making processes employed by school board members and their relationships and patterns of communication with others in the school community. Additionally, the study collected information on the challenges of school board leadership and what would help board members in their service. The study found that the majority of respondents were self-motivated to seek election and were interested in giving back to the community, being most often interested in curricular issues or financial issues. Respondents chiefly used resources provided by the district to gather information for decision-making and learned about their roles primarily from other school board members or through state organizations. Respondents regularly communicated with other school board members and the superintendent, primarily in face-to-face conversations

or email. Seven themes emerged from the data generated by open-ended questions including the importance of personnel and financial decisions, the challenge of finances and community relationships, the importance and challenge of listening to and dialoguing with other board members, the personal challenges of board service, and the importance of the relationship and communication with the superintendent.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Local school boards are characteristic of educational governance in the United States. Canada is the only other country with locally elected school boards (Cistone, 2008; Lutz & Iannaccone, 2008). School boards govern public school systems and the work of those within the systems. They embody American representative democracy at the local level and are a tradition in school governance. The approximately 100,000 school board members in the United States working in over 15,000 school districts represent a large body of governmental officials (Hess, 2008). Jointly, they oversee more than $500 billion a year in expenditures (Hess, 2008). Understanding the people who serve on school boards, how they make decisions, and how they relate to others informs practice for superintendents and those who work with school boards.

1.1   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School administrators, especially superintendents, work with school boards on a regular basis. Their work seeks to engage board members and educate them regarding school issues. School administrators educate board members regarding agenda and policy needs, coalesce opinions and align views, and lead in order to accomplish an educational agenda. Understanding the volunteers who serve in these local positions and their motivations for service provides information that can inform practice, perhaps increasing effectiveness.

In Pennsylvania, the superintendent is a non-voting tenth member of the board. To advance an educational agenda for the district, the superintendent depends on educational expertise and leadership and relies heavily on the school board. Her relationships with board members and their trust of her knowledge and experience are critical for a strong working environment. Additionally, how those relationships play out in real life situations such as when dealing with controversy and disagreement may be the difference in the superintendent's ability to accomplish her goals.

School boards make decisions as part of their governance responsibilities. Understanding the decision-making process helps to illuminate governance structures and guide information flow in a school district with the ultimate goal of more effective leadership for school board members and administrators. Finally, school board members interact with many different groups including, but not limited to, others on the board, community members, teachers, and district administrators. Understanding these relationships and communication patterns provides insight for school administrators who work with school boards.

1.2   PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to understand Western Pennsylvania school board members' characteristics and motivations for service including the recruitment process, experiences or interactions that motivated school board service, interests, and socialization methods once on the board. Additionally, this study sought to uncover the decision-making process employed by school board members and their relationships and patterns of communication with others in the school community. This study also sought to understand the challenges of school board

leadership as well as what would help school board members in their service. The results from this study provide information for school leaders, especially those who work closely with school boards, and may provide a frame of reference that informs their work with school board members.

In Pennsylvania, the school board evaluates the superintendent, creates policy, and makes decisions for school governance in conjunction with the superintendent (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). The relationship between the school board and the superintendent helps to set the tone for accomplishing the work of the school district. An analysis of Pennsylvania school systems in 2015 showed that of the 499 Pennsylvania school districts with superintendents, over 60% had experienced turnover of the superintendent in the previous six years due to retirement, not having contracts renewed, or leaving the position for a different field (Tatu, 2015). The reasons for high turnover rates of superintendents may or may not be related to their work with school boards. However, the importance of a functional relationship between the school board and the superintendent is paramount to accomplishing goals for a school system. Gathering information from school board members through this study informs and may improve practice.

1.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to gather information from school board members who voluntarily served on Western Pennsylvania school boards to improve understanding of board members and their work and to inform school leaders' practice. This descriptive study surveyed sitting school board members in select counties in Western Pennsylvania to better understand their motivations for

school board service, decision-making processes, and relationship structures with others. The specific research questions included:

Q1: What motivates a person in Western Pennsylvania to serve on a school board?

Q2: How do Western Pennsylvania school board members make decisions?

Q3: How do Western Pennsylvania school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?

The research questions shaped the method for this study and its resulting survey. Additionally, the questions grounded the study and provided a framework for analyzing its data.

1.4   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Scholarly literature on the subject of the school board precipitated a 1975 National School Boards Association symposium. The symposium included scholars in the field at the time and resulted in a published volume of collected papers. Invited political science and educational administration scholars participated in the symposium that focused on local school boards and local school governance (National School Boards Association, 1975). The Executive Director of the organization at the time stated, "Research about school boards and the governance of education has developed steadily, although not systematically, during the past decade or so" (Webb, 1975, p. xi). At the time, research on local politics was not as prevalent as research on other educational topics such as teacher behavior or learning theory (National School Boards Association, 1975).

In 2008, three scholars working on a research project decided to repeat the symposium, 32 years after the initial symposium sponsored by the National School Boards Association

(Alsbury, 2008).   The three scholars invited researchers representing five generations of scholarly research to present papers and engage in discussion on specific areas of school board research at the second symposium. This symposium resulted in a published volume of collected papers as well. Even though 32 years had passed, the researchers at the second symposium noted the lack of school board research, especially empirical research and national survey information (Alsbury, 2008).

This research study facilitated gathering information from sitting board members and provided a framework to reflect on administrators' experiences. It also informed my work as a member of the district administrative team and may inform others who work in similar capacities or aspire to move into district administrative positions. Additionally, this study provided me with information to consider in my future roles and positions and perhaps better equipped me to move into the superintendency in the future.

1.5   BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

School districts in the United States of America are the province of the states, which delegate significant responsibility to the local school board. As a result, school districts are primarily locally organized and controlled entities implementing states' responsibilities in education at the local level. Special groups charged with overseeing the schools existed before the United States was even an officially organized country. As population centers shifted and society became more complex, these groups became formalized into school boards. This local control has evolved through time, but is still seen in today's school governance structures. As Ziegler, Jennings, and Peak (1974) state, "With the wide spread introduction of public education into the

country during the nineteenth century, it was perhaps inevitable that the lay governance of such a crucial institution should fall under the sway of the popular election ethic" (p. 39). The local control of school districts in the United States is part of the fabric of the governmental quilt in this country.

School boards are governmental bodies that are responsible for public education in the United States. They are imbued with the power to govern school districts through state constitutions, legislative actions, and court decisions. Public schools impart knowledge and skills and work to prepare students to be educated citizens. Additionally, public schools transmit tradition and social heritage from generation to generation through the ritual of a high school football game or the pomp and circumstance of a prom (Reeves, 1954).

School boards are either elected or appointed. In the United States, most school boards are publically elected, thereby citizens move into a position of power through the election process. For some school districts, mayors, city councils, or legislatures appoint other school boards with citizens moving into power through relationships or other characteristics of the appointment process. No matter the method to arrive in the school board room, board members govern local school districts, sometimes in conjunction with political figures or legislative bodies. School boards are responsible for specific functions such as determining policy, adopting a budget, and hiring staff. District administrators are responsible for other functions such as implementing policy, creating and managing a budget, and evaluating staff. Together, boards and administrators work to lead local school districts.

The individuals who are appointed and elected to school board positions accept important community governance positions. Their background, skills, and qualities can be assets to a school district and community. Who these volunteers are, how they come to office, and what

motivates them informs the work of school administrators. In the literature, common characteristics of board members emerged even though each board member is a unique individual.

School board members are usually volunteers who devote their time and expertise to serve their school districts. They tend to be socially and economically advantaged in the community (Counts, 1927; Hess, 2002). Board members are frequently well-educated, high-achieving individuals (Hess, 2002; Martin, 1962; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). As Hess (2002) determined, about one third of board members serve on multiple boards or community leadership groups.

Those who pursue school board seats are motivated by a variety of factors. Many see service as a way of giving back to the community (Counts, 1927; Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). Some even look at the position as a way to improve their occupational relationships or grow professionally by understanding governance and using skills in new ways (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). Board members are also motivated by policy, either to change policy or to be in a position to affect it within a school system (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). Others are motivated by community factors or perceived social benefits of the position (Mountford, 2004; Reeves, 1954).

Becoming a school board member is not usually an instantaneous process, unless one is appointed to a board and then, the process may unfold rapidly. Usually, members of a community endure a recruitment process in which some self-select to seek office and others are approached to consider the position. Recruitment is a process that takes community members from potential candidates to viable candidates for election.

Once selected for school board seats, novice board members engage in a socialization process (Cistone, 1975). Such a socialization process occurs in any social group and provides an avenue to share expected norms and information about responsibilities with new members of the group. Socialization is not an isolated event and it continues for a school board member, as the myriad of topics that a board deliberates on is vast. Novice board members learn concepts and expectations as they move through the business of the school district.

Board members are individuals, but the school board is a corporate board that makes decisions that govern school districts. To make decisions, school boards gather information, sometimes from multiple sources. Individual board members may connect with constituents, school district staff, or others to gather information for impending decisions. Boards may employ available decision-making structures and frameworks to inform their work in the school board room. Board members may approach decisions from different perspectives and may share these perspectives through discussion. If consensus develops, the board shapes a common understanding of an issue and acceptable pathways for the decision. At times, consensus does not develop among board members. Even so, decisions are made by a majority vote.

Board member behavior is generally determined by their role orientation, role conceptualization, and ability and disposition (Kowalski, 2008). Kowalski (2008) describes role orientation as referring to board members' personal attributes, interests, values, and needs. He goes on to describe role conceptualization as board members' expectations of themselves and their roles as well as the expectations that others have for them (Kowalski, 2008). Board members' ability and disposition represents board members' willingness to change and adapt as well as modify their personal behavior (Kowalski, 2008).

School board members have relationships with each other, members of the community, and members of the school district. The superintendent serves as a non-voting tenth member of the board in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and a commissioned officer of the state, providing guidance and professional expertise to board deliberations. Public school district-level administrators interact with school boards regularly, with both groups having responsibility for school systems. District-level administrators provide information, answer questions, and navigate political discourse while working with a school board. Board members provide their perspectives, lend their expertise, and share community expectations. The aim is to accomplish the goals of school district through representative governance. School administrators and board members have different roles, but share the responsibility of leadership. This leadership serves within the larger school district community and is subject to the pressures exerted by community beliefs and norms.

1.6   SUMMARY

Local school boards are a prevalent governing body in the United States tasked with governing school districts. They control the building blocks of district leadership by determining the direction of the district and its general control, ensuring accountability, creating methods and processes for adopting policy, and providing community leadership (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2008). School board governance may be effective or ineffective, but it plays a significant role in public education (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008). Those who serve on school boards are critical to the governance structure. Understanding school board members and their stories informs practice for the superintendent and those who work with school boards.

A school board enacts its governance responsibility by making decisions that result in the creation of policies, the approval of curriculum, and the adoption of budgets. Although individuals may make decisions as board members, the aggregate vote of the corporate school board determines the outcome of the decision. District administrators and the superintendent regularly work with school board members as they make decisions and are affected by the outcomes of those decisions.

As a governmental unit, the board is charged with many responsibilities, and the people on the board are the governmental officials who carry them out. Boards are responsible to make decisions, determine policy, allocate public resources, and levy taxes to ensure proper resources for schools (Bers, 1978; Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963). These responsibilities are great and are meaningful in the life of communities. Knowing that school boards are entrusted to guide public school institutions forward in concert with school administrators, understanding board members may assist the superintendent and those who work with school boards.

This study of school board members informs practice for school administrators and compares local board members' perspectives to the literature. Counts (1927) stated, "As a fountain cannot rise higher than its source, so an educational program can scarcely be expected to exhibit a quality which lies beyond the wisdom and good will of those who fashion its boundaries" (p. 82). If superintendents and other school leaders desire to have effective school programs, having the wisdom and will to effectively work with school boards is critical.

2.0   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historically, locally controlled school districts in the United States provided opportunities for citizens to be involved in government at the grass roots level and shape the future by influencing educational programs (Lutz & Iannaccone, 2008; Tyack, 2003). As public schools grew, so did the number of school board members. During the 1800s, school board members in the United States accounted for the largest body of public officials in the world (Tyack, 2003). Today, there are over 4,500 school board members in the state of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2013) and over 90,000 across the nation (National School Boards Association, 2013).

In most school districts, local citizens elect school board members to govern school districts (Cistone, 2008; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).   Elections are characteristic of the democratic process and school board members, as elected representatives, serve their communities. School boards link communities and their schools (Smoley, 1999). They provide a structure for citizens to make decisions about the educational programs and structures in a district. At the same time, school boards serve the school system, a specialized public within the community (Martin, 1962; Ziegler, 1975).

Both elected and appointed school boards work within an intricate web of entities responsible for public schools. Within the web are school administrators, state laws, judicial decisions, federal laws, community groups, and others with all of them affecting decisions

regarding the operation of school districts. Although school boards are not solely responsible for schools and share responsibility with administrators, the pattern of locally elected officials controlling the school system is uniquely American (Callahan, 1975; Cistone, 2008; Lutz & Iannaccone, 2008). This tradition harkens back to colonial times and the very beginning of the United States.

This review of the literature traces the origins of public schools and school boards to provide an historical perspective and context. It then discusses school board authority including information on state constitutional authority, legislative authority, federal authority, the courts, societal demands, and state boards of education. The literature review continues with information about the characteristics of school board members and their motivations for board membership including political or professional motivations, policy-based motivations, and community or social motivations. The election process is reviewed next, including recruitment for a school board position, election, and socialization and role performance once on the board.

The literature review continues with information on school board decision-making. The types of decisions and how school board members gather knowledge are key components to that section. Additionally, four different decision-making models are reviewed with commonalities highlighted. The literature review concludes with a discussion on decisions made in the context of the sociocultural school board system.

2.1   THE BEGINNING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL BOARDS

Public schools began in the original thirteen colonies, often as a function of religious groups, private groups, and charitable organizations (Reeves, 1954). These groups served as the

decision-making bodies for the educational process and sometimes charged fees for educational services. In different colonies, different school arrangements existed, frequently reflective of the composition of the colonists and their nationalities or religious beliefs (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1990).

In colonial Massachusetts, parents and masters of apprentices were responsible for educating students in reading and religion (Cubberly, 1922). The education of children was not required, but voluntary. As a result, it was often neglected in the face of other work that needed to be done in colonial life. This concerned the church such that it appealed to the General Court to compel education in religious obligations. As a result, the Massachusetts Law of 1642 passed, charging the chosen men of the town who served as governing selectmen to occasionally determine if parents and masters were completing their required educational duties. This law is extremely important, as it marks the first time that a legislative body required all children to learn to read, requiring those selected to govern to oversee the mandate (Cubberly, 1922).

In 1647, the government of the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed the Massachusetts School Act, also known as the Old Deluder Satan Act, starting the formalization of public schools (Cubberly, 1922; Laud, 1997). The law required the establishment and maintenance of schools in towns of fifty households or more. Local officials of the towns were responsible for making decision for schools, often at town meetings (Callahan, 1975). These selectmen were charged with overseeing the schools and had the power to levy taxes to support the schools with an affirmative vote of the town (Reeves, 1954). This law serves as the foundation of public schools in the colonies and eventually the United States, and of the practice of local officials making decisions about public schools. It influenced similar laws in other colonies in New England and throughout the middle colonies.

As schools grew and became more complex due to their size and geographical spread, towns appointed committees to assist in managing the public schools. In 1721, Boston created a committee to visit schools and perform necessary functions such as finding a location for the school or choosing a teacher for it (Reeves, 1954). Similar committees formed in other cities to attend to the needs of the expanding systems of schooling.

Laws that colonies passed regarding education indicated that governmental bodies controlled schools. Within the first 200 years of settlement in the colonies that subsequently became the United States, however, there were not specific school boards or school governing bodies (Campbell et al., 1990). Instead, overseeing the schools was encapsulated in the mechanisms of existing governmental structures.

In 1789, after the birth of the United States, a crucial law passed in the state of Massachusetts. This law required an elementary school to be in every town and grammar schools to exist in larger ones, teachers to be certified, and towns to create special committees to monitor schools (Callahan, 1975). Additionally, the law required the certification of teachers and authorized towns to create special committees to monitor schools. In 1826, the law was amended and required these special committees in towns. Through this law, school committees, precursors to school boards, were officially established (Reeves, 1954).

A Boston city law of 1789 established separate school committees as well. These committees were comprised of twelve members who were elected by the people in each ward of the city (Callahan, 1975). This democratic governance system for schools set a precedent for creating specific systems of school governance in the United States that were largely politically decentralized (Lyke, 1970). This decentralized approach to state government executed through specific delineated governing bodies continues in most public schools to this day (Epstein,

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2004). In most states and in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, school governance is a function of the state, but one that is carried out by specific governing bodies such as local and state boards of education.

Schools continued to grow and, as they did, school committees grew in size and in number. In 1851, Boston created the office of the superintendent of schools and the school board began turning some of its obligations and functions over to the newly created office (Callahan, 1975). Around the time of the Civil War, common schools designed to serve children from all classes, sects, and ethnic groups, blossomed and staggering numbers of school districts came into existence. These hundreds of thousands of school districts were financed with taxes, while special local groups oversaw the business of the schools (Epstein, 2004). Through the common schools, a comprehensive structure of public education with an egalitarian rationale emerged in the United States (Tyack, 2003).

As the number and size of schools grew, administering them became more of a challenge. School boards increased their membership numbers and boards continued to hire superintendents to oversee the daily operations in schools. School boards and superintendents struggled to determine the power structures for school districts. The debate regarding who should control schools is echoed in today's rhetoric. Eventually, the relationship between school boards and superintendents became widely accepted in American schools. There is no one, universal system of governance of public schools across the nation, but the elected school board system dominates the governance landscape.

2.2   SCHOOL BOARD AUTHORITY

Education in the United States is primarily a state responsibility. The constitution of every state contains an education provision (Epstein, 2004; Tractenberg, 2012). States create local school districts and school boards as the administrative arms to fulfill their governmental responsibilities at the local level (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). As such, the local school district and its school board are not legally independent from the state. Instead, school boards are the governmental entities created by legislatures and provided with power to govern state affairs in education at the local level (Goldhammer, 1964). In essence, school boards are agents of the state (Reeves, 1954).

School districts are quasi-municipal corporations, or political divisions of the state. Quasi-municipal corporations are created by state legislatures to carry out a specific function, such as education (Reeves, 1954). As a quasi-municipal corporation, districts are given authority only for specific powers granted by law, or general and discretionary powers permitted by law and necessary to carry out their functions. As such, state law limits action by its restrictions or by the absence of specific authorization within laws (Reeves, 1954). Even so, school boards usually have decisive influence and discretion over many aspects of school governance, such as selecting teachers, operating school facilities, approving curriculum, and policy formation (Kirst, 1970; Lyke, 1970).

In Pennsylvania, legislative education regulations guiding school boards are part of the Pennsylvania Code, Title 22 and in the Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, *Codes and Regulations*, 2014). The Pennsylvania Department of Education also publishes a regulatory agenda and a Basic Education Circular (BEC) providing further guidance for schools and the implementation of law, regulation, and policy. Additional

guidance for Pennsylvania schools comes from Act 24 of 2011 (Background Checks), Chapter 339 (Vocational Education Standards), Pennsylvania Child Labor Law, Act 197 (Children's Internet Protection Act), Act 174 of 1986 (Private Licensed Schools Act), and non-regulatory documents (Pennsylvania Department of Education, *Codes and Regulations,* 2014). This is not an exhaustive list of legislative sources for school authority, however it provides insight as to how multiple layers of statutes provide legislative authority and guidance for public schools in one state. Pennsylvania's myriad of sources is mirrored in other states.

The Federal Constitution does not specifically mention education in its language. The Tenth Amendment states that "the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (U.S. Const. amend. X). As such, it seems that power for the educational system resides at the state level (Reeves, 1954). The provisions of the Tenth Amendment, however, do not exclude federal involvement and influence in schools. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution states, "The Congress shall have Power…to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence [sic] and general Welfare of the United States…" (U.S. Const., art. I, § 8, cl. 1). Essentially, this part of the Constitution gives Congress spending power to provide for the people of the United States. Congress's spending powers permit the Federal government to create regulatory provisions attached to funding streams (Epstein, 2004). When states accept federal funding for education, such as Title I funding, they accept federal authority.

When school board powers are in question or a school board oversteps its authority, the court system is used as a way to interpret the constitution, statutes, and legal authority (Reeves, 1954). Court decisions often settle differences of opinion. Court decisions affecting schools,

whether through the state court system or the through the federal court system, are numerous and limit or further explain the powers of a school board.

2.2.1 Societal Demands

Although state constitutions, legislation, and court decisions provide legal authority and limits to that authority for school boards, society also places demands on a school board that influence its authority. Local communities often expect their elected school board members to attend functions, share information, create ad hoc committees, or entertain pet projects. Each school district has its own culture and constituency demands. School boards are linked to the electoral process and are in position to exercise social power and influence in a community (Lutz & Iannaccone, 1969).

School boards are not just affected by the demands of the local people. As the greater society deals with issues and problems such as health concerns, bullying, data privacy, or mistreatment of students, school boards are frequently called to respond in words and in actions. Societal demands sometimes provide authority for school boards to act in ways that are not specifically articulated in legislation, regulation, or policy. For example, the societal demands of a school district may demand stricter codes of conduct such as no tolerance clauses, even though these types of clauses are not formally articulated through other sources. Most of these actions, however, are classified as discretionary powers needed to function within the demands and needs articulated by society.

2.2.2 State Boards of Education

State school boards oversee regulations, policies, and practices in many states. In some cases, state legislatures may delegate their authority for schools to state boards of education (Legal Information Institute, 2014). Forty-seven states have state boards of education as of 2014 (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2014). The power for these boards of education comes from statutes, state constitutions, or both. In the three states without state boards of education (Minnesota, New Mexico, and Wisconsin), there is a chief state school officer to oversee the public schools. Occasionally in these three states, other groups are charged with implementing state legislative requirements or overseeing some functions.

Although each state defines the role and responsibilities of the state board of education differently, some common responsibilities emerge across states (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2014). State boards of education usually are responsible for setting the curriculum standards for the state, sometimes in conjunction with other organizations or groups. At the state level, boards of education are responsible for determining high school graduation requirements, accreditation of local school districts, teacher certification standards and accreditation standards for teacher and administrative preparation programs (National Association of State Boards of Education, 2014). State boards of education establish accountability and assessment programs to implement federal requirements. Additionally, state boards of education develop rules and regulations for state program administration.

Pennsylvania's State Board of Education has 21 members who serve six-year terms (Pennsylvania Department of Education, *Overview*, 2014). The governor appoints seventeen members to the board, all of whom are confirmed by the Senate. Four members from the General Assembly's House and Senate Education Committees complete the roster of the state

board of education. One non-voting member of the board is the Chairperson of the Professional Standards and Practices Commission, who serves as an ex-officio board member (Pennsylvania Department of Education, *Overview,* 2014).

Created in 1963 by the General Assembly, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education has the power and responsibility to adopt regulations for policies and principles as well as establish standards for education programs in the Commonwealth (Pennsylvania Department of Education, *Overview*, 2014). The Board also oversees the creation of new school districts and changes in school district boundaries. The Board has the power to perform educational research, create master plans, and adopt policies for basic and higher education. Additionally, the State Board of Education manages the State School Fund and receives federal grants, appropriations, and allocations. It administers these funds for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

2.3   SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Although a school board is a continuing unit, its membership may change from election to election (Reeves, 1954). The school board is a corporate board where a majority or a supermajority vote of its members rules. As such, the board acts as one in conducting its business, but is really a collection of many individual voices. The individual persons, typically unpaid volunteers who are appointed or elected to school board positions, devote many hours to public school governance and share some common characteristics.

Board members are usually drawn from those who enjoy social and economic advantages in a community (Cistone, 1974, 2008; Counts, 1927; Lutz, 1980; Martin, 1962; Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). Those who are socially connected have networks that

facilitate their recognition and nomination for board positions. Those who are economically advantaged often have enough financial stability to allow them to devote time to board service as well as the means to facilitate an election process and pay its expenses.

Those who serve on boards are often well-educated individuals (Counts, 1927; Verba et al., 1995). They bring knowledge from a myriad of educational programs and experiences from the world of work. For example, 75% of Pennsylvania school board members in 2014 were college graduates, with 39% with earned advanced degrees (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014).

School board members tend to be those who are high achieving (Eadie, 2003). Their achievements may be in other industries or in their personal lives. A small percentage of board members work professionally in the education field. In Pennsylvania, 9% of board members in 2014 were involved in the educational field (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). Interestingly, board members do seem to regularly have close family members who work in the education field, many of them in high positions in systems (Ziegler et al., 1974). These relationships may influence board member motivations for serving in an elected capacity.

In general, school board members are representative of a narrow slice of the larger community (Goldhammer, 1964). Those who are finally elected to the board are chosen from a small group of potential candidates. Elected board members frequently mirror the dominant racial and ethnic groups in a community (Verba et al., 1995). However, there does not necessarily seem to be a correlation between the demographic characteristics of board members and the manner in which they represent the community (Verba et al., 1995). As Verba et al. (1995) found, once on the board, members' representation is not greatly affected by their racial or ethnic backgrounds, as this is an imperfect predictor of behavior and policy position.

Those who serve on boards tend to be those in the prime of life (Counts, 1927). Counts noted that board members in his study ranged in age from 22 years through 85 years of age with a median age of 48.3 years. These ranges are echoed in modern data as well. For example, in 2014, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association surveyed its membership and found board members ranging from under 25 years of age to 70 years and older, with the largest group of individuals between 55 and 59 years of age (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). The wide range of board member ages reflects the wide age ranges of communities.

The social composition of school boards is rather stable according to the generally homogenous findings of hundreds of studies conducted over 75 years (Cistone, 2008). Although general characteristics of board members are evident in studies, each board member is still a unique individual. Generalities regarding board members provide insight, but not an exhaustive understanding of the people on a board. The motivations for board member service differ from person to person. The next section will show that, when examining motivations, some core ideas emerge to provide insight into what prompts school board membership.

2.4 MOTIVATIONS FOR BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Citizens choose to become involved in school board service for a variety of reasons. Candidates may have personal inclinations for service. Sometimes the structure of a race or the timing for the candidate may be amenable for involvement in school politics. Running for office may serve a myriad of reasons including those that are political or professional in nature, policy-based, and for community or social aims (Deckman, 2007). In the United States, about half of the school board members serve for personal reasons and about half serve for altruistic reasons (Mountford,

2004). Individuals may be motivated by the idea of service, the desire to affect policy, or for community and social reasons. Some board members may become involved in school boards for a mixture of reasons.

2.4.1   Political or Professional Motivations

Often, a motivating factor for board membership is the notion of becoming a statesman or a trustee of the public good (Reeves, 1954; Tuttle, 1958). Governance as a public service is a long-held tradition and belief in the United States. In fact, 43% of Pennsylvania school board members in 2014 cited their primary motivating factor for running for school board as a desire for public service and to give back or contribute to public education (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014).

The idea of becoming a statesperson may indicate a desire by board members to go on to higher offices. However, this does not seem to be reality for the majority of board members. More frequently, school board membership is a terminal elected position (Deckman, 2007; Ziegler et al., 1974). School board members may occasionally strive for higher positions within the state or even more broadly, but often seek out other local governmental positions (Ziegler et al., 1974). Local positions at the community or county level are holistically viewed as lateral movements, considering that local school board membership is similarly placed in power and responsibility to other local governmental groups in the hierarchy of governments. Rarely are local offices, such as that of a school board member, used for advancement to the national political stage (Schlesinger, 1966).

Professional motivations may drive board membership. An occupation greatly shapes an individual by dictating educational requirements and contributing to the financial status of an

individual. Indirectly, however, one's occupation may determine where one lives, what recreational opportunities one may be able to indulge in, one's friendships, and one's social standing (Counts, 1927). An individual sometimes is defined by an occupation, shaping one's philosophies, societal understandings, and loyalties. At the same time, some occupations have more visibility in a community due to the nature of the job (Ziegler et al., 1974). Highly visible occupations provide opportunities for interacting with others that may, in turn, motivate people to seek board membership.

Board membership may be a way for professional growth through an increased understanding of politics or school systems. Board service also provides an opportunity to use professional skills in a new arena. In a 2014 poll of Pennsylvania school board members, 47% felt that their skills in business, experience in education, or background in finance was most beneficial for them and for their boards (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). A person's professional background may spur a run for the school board by creating opportunities as well as providing skills that may be valuable to a community governmental body.

2.4.2   Policy-Based Motivations

Serving on a school board requires attention to school regulations and community norms. Although many board members do not understand the intricacies of their positions and responsibilities prior to taking office, they are elected officials representing what the community values in an individual (Ziegler et al., 1974). A community usually expects a board member's policy decisions and voting habits to reflect commonly held beliefs about how schools should operate in the district. Essentially, a board position is a functional trusteeship for the community (Reeves, 1954).

A community's values, however, may change with time. If board members do not respond to these changes, pressure develops to change the power structure and the people on the board (Goldhammer, 1964; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, 2008). A desire to change the policies on the board may motivate some individuals to seek office, thus assuming a position that permits them to apply personal values to decisions. In 2014, 17% of Pennsylvania school board members cited dissatisfaction with the existing board as a primary motivation for running for office, ranking only behind public service (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014).

Policy-based motivations may not be due to dissatisfaction, though. Deckman (2007) found that many board members wanted to return school systems to traditional values. In this study, men cited this reason significantly more often than women, although both genders gave this reason at a high rate compared to the other available choices. Men also declared that they wanted the chance to apply religious or moral beliefs to educational policy at a significantly higher rate than women.

Seeking school board membership places a person in a position of formal and legitimate power to affect policy (Mountford, 2008). Being in a position of power to affect policy decisions in a school district motivates some to seek office on a school board. Policy motivations that propel board membership may inspire an individual to change something that is incongruent with personal ideals or help one to shape a district with personally held beliefs.

2.4.3 Community or Social Motivations

Prior to election, many school board members serve in local civic groups, educational committees, occupational organizations, or religious groups (Cistone, 1975; Ziegler et al., 1974). Community groups provide forums for individuals to discuss concerns with those who are

usually like-minded and share common interests, goals, or values. Through familiarity, group members may share concerns regarding larger community needs such as the schools and may, in turn, be motivated to run for the school board. Board members do cite their desire to make the community a better place as a motivation for service (Deckman, 2007). Additionally, through community or religious work, people may assume leadership roles, thus providing important experience toward working with others and experience in making decisions in a local arena.

Many board members want to help improve the schools for their children or grandchildren. Often, after involvement in parent-teacher organizations or other school district committees, individuals will express motivation to run for office (Ziegler et al., 1974). Desire may arise as a result of seeing issues in the school system and wishing to improve the schools for the children. In Pennsylvania, 16% of surveyed board members reported being motivated by a desire to improve educational outcomes and achievement for students (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). This is the third highest-ranked motivation listed in this particular survey, behind dissatisfaction with the existing board and a desire for public service.

At times, individuals may be motivated to seek office on a school board for social reasons. Seeking elected office may be a means to improving an individual's status within the larger community (Mountford, 2004; Reeves, 1954). School board membership effectively propels an individual into a public role. It can include notoriety, newspaper coverage, and special privileges given to board members such as special seating at school events. This advancement in community standing motivates some to run for office. Improving one's social standing has implications for power elsewhere in the community (Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963).

Additionally, some board members reference a desire to work with similarly minded people as a motivation for seeking office (Deckman, 2007). Board members may share

personality characteristics and may share similar motivations for service. The sense of belonging and the ability to work together as part of a board can be a motivating factor to seek election.

2.5   BECOMING AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

In the United States, citizens elect more public officials than in any other western nation (Ziegler et al., 1974). Elections for school board members provide an opportunity for the community to determine who will govern the school system. Although it is a separate governmental entity, the business of the school system is intimately entangled with the business of the rest of the community. Strong school systems improve communities and weak school systems hinder progress. Considering the small number of people who exercise authority in school systems as board members, the process of electing community members to fill school board positions is important. The chosen individuals affect policies, practices, and budgets (Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963; Martin, 1962). Even if a person shares similar characteristics with board members and is motivated for service, the election process is a demanding one.

2.5.1   Recruitment

To become an elected official, one needs to either self-select or be recruited for a position. Recruitment is essential in the functioning of a governmental system (Cistone, 1975). Recruitment is more than just looking for individuals to fill political positions, but rather to find candidates within a community who are electable to open offices. There are steps in the recruitment process for office that take a person from a potential candidate, to a viable public

official.   Through the recruitment process, key constituencies consider individuals' ideas, talents, and political eligibility. During recruitment, community members are essentially "allocated" for political positions (Cistone, 1975).

Social institutions, such as school boards, play major roles in stimulating political activity and recruiting others to join the cause (Verba et al., 1995). Sitting school board members regularly recruit individuals for open school board seats. By recruiting individuals for positions, board members are able to scout candidates who will serve with them (Ziegler et al., 1974). Outgoing board members may also recruit in an effort to ensure that their ideas and values perpetuate with future board members.

Recruitment may take the form of self-selection with individuals being motivated for any number of reasons. Becoming excited about an issue, being interested in office, and wanting to give back to one's community may stimulate involvement in politics (Verba et al., 1995). Just because one self-selects candidacy for a school board position, though, does not mean that one is a viable option for the community.

In a democratic society, the privilege of competing for an office for which one is legally qualified is a basic ideal (Martin, 1962). A person may have a legal opportunity for service because of meeting eligibility requirements, but an effective opportunity comes through available resources and other processes (Cistone, 1975). In reality, local norms may affect who runs for a political office. Every community has hidden imperatives for elected officials. These may be political affiliation requirements, social status needs, or even racial preferences (Martin, 1962). Able-bodied candidates may not be recruited for political positions because of these more hidden reasons. Instead, individuals who will represent certain values and characteristics appreciated by the influential members of the community are usually desired as these individuals are thought to

be in a position to maintain community stability (Goldhammer, 1964). Recruitment is a process that encompasses these hidden requirements as well.

Recruitment into political activity is not a random process (Verba et al., 1995). Those who are targeted are likely prospects and are often culled from personal networks and associations as well as organized groups, family members, and other governmental entities (Ziegler et al., 1974). Recruitment provides time and opportunity for the community to consider candidates, their experiences and backgrounds, and how they may behave in an elected position. This is an essential step to determining who will lead any political organization, including a school system.

2.5.2   Election or Appointment

After recruitment or self-selection, election to the school board occurs (Cistone, 1975). Those who turn out for elections may be those who feel they are affected by the actions of the school or those that are interested in other races, such as presidential elections, and turn out for elections where these offices are being decided along with the office of school board. School boards elections, like other elections in the United States, do not regularly enjoy a large turnout of voters. Instead, school boards are generally elected by a small group of eligible voters in a community (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). This small voter turnout provides the potential for minority interests to control the elections to school board positions (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970).

In Pennsylvania, most school boards consist of 9 members and most school board members are elected by their neighbors to govern local school districts within their communities. Some school board members in Pennsylvania are appointed to the post. In Pennsylvania school districts of the first class (having a population over 1.5 million) or first class A (having a

population of 350,000 to 1.5 million), the county judges of the court of common pleas appoint five of the fifteen school directors in the district (Pennsylvania School Code of 1949, Article II, Section 202; Pennsylvania School Code of 1949, Article III, Section 302). Currently, The School District of Philadelphia is the only district in this category in Pennsylvania. In 2001, however, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over The School District of Philadelphia, removed its board of education, and established a five-member School Reform Commission with three members appointed by the Governor of Pennsylvania and two members appointed by the Mayor of Philadelphia (The School District of Philadelphia, 2016).

In districts of the second class (30,000 or more but less than 350,000), third class (5,000 or more but less than 30,000), and fourth class (less than 5,000), elections of school board members occur every other year according to the plan of the school district (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2016). When a school district's plan calls for electing school board members "at large," then residents who live in any part of the school district elect five candidates for school board in a municipal election and four candidates for school board in the next municipal election (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2016). This plan provides for some continuity on the school board.

School boards or the electors of a school district equal to at least "25 per centum of the highest vote cast for any school director in the last municipal election" may develop a plan approved by the court of common pleas to elect school directors differently than this "at large" arrangement (Pennsylvania School Code of 1949, Article III, Sec. 303, (b) 2). One possible election plan requires school board members to be elected from nine established regions of similar population size in the school district, with residents of each region electing one school board member who is a resident of the established region. Another possible election plan

establishes three regions in the school district with three board members who are residents of the defined regions being elected by the voters in that region in a defined pattern at municipal elections, with representatives from each region always being represented on the school board by a school board member from that region. A third possible election plan combines regional elections and at "at large" elections, but stipulates that the three defined regions should have an equal number of school board members hailing from that region. In this combination election plan, a defined number of school board members are elected regionally and others are elected at large, but each region should always be represented on the school board at all times (Pennsylvania School Code of 1949, Article III, Sec. 303).

Through elections, school board members become part of the governing body of a community. Board members take control of the schools as representatives of the people of the community (Martin, 1962). This exemplifies the ideals of the democratic process and honors the long-held tradition of locally controlled schools. As elected officials, school board members are not required to have expertise in governing organizations (Eadie, 2003; Houston & Eadie, 2002; Lutz, 1980). Tuttle (1958) found that to be effective, however, board members do need to govern and need to possess an understanding beyond their local communities. Once elected, board members are socialized to the norms of the board and the expectations of the community as they begin to perform their newly assigned roles.

2.5.3 Socialization and Role Performance

Newly elected school board members are often largely unfamiliar with the role of a school board, the school program, and associated responsibilities (Kerr, 1964). Board members may not understand the laws and regulations that govern public schools, the financial processes in school

districts, or contractual obligations with labor groups. Additionally, board members may not understand how to work with other board members, how to make decisions as a board, the role of the superintendent and other administrators, and school district policies. Board members often need to learn more about their roles and responsibilities.

After winning an election, one way that novice school board members may become bona fide members of the social system that is the school board is through socialization (Cistone, 1975). Socialization is the process by which new members to an organization learn about the culture, values, and system-specific ways of operating in the group. Through socialization, those who are new become part of the group as they learn established norms. At the same time, new individuals may influence the existing structure of the group by exerting influence as a result of becoming part of the whole.

If newly elected school board members do not represent a clear constituency in the community, socialization with veteran board members and district administrators may occur more freely (Kerr, 1964). Kerr (1964) found that without factional community groups watching novice board members' behaviors for consistency with their beliefs, a new political office holder is free to be highly receptive to conforming with current norms and pressures from existing board members or district administrators. This still may be the case as the novice board member moves through a few months of office, as rarely does a small factional community group have distinct views on the full range of matters that a school board handles in its business. As a result, the factional group may not exert pressure on a new board member for decisions that are not of primary interest for the group (Kerr, 1964). For example, if a constituency group is fiscally conservative and expects a newly elected board member that the group supported to emulate these ideals, the same constituency group may not have strong opinions about policies unrelated

to fiscal matters. As interest from this group waxes and wanes, the school board member may more freely conform to the existing norms.

For school board members, socialization may also occur through an official induction or orientation process. Frequently, district administrators and even veteran board members will offer an induction or orientation process to help novice board members understand the key workings of the district and the requirements of their new positions. School board associations may also provide orientation trainings to new board members. These orientation processes frequently exert pressure on novice board members to conform to current district and school board expectations and practices. Additionally, board members continue to be pressured to conform as they are confronted with confusing school regulations, mandates, and complex contractual issues.

Socialization sets the range of conformity and deviance within a social system such as a school board (Cistone, 1975). After election, socialization helps a board member to acclimate to the role. The process of socialization has consequences for the board member and the school system. A smooth socialization process may lead to amicable relationships in the future. A difficult socialization process may indicate contentious working relationships as a board or with the administration.

2.6   SCHOOL BOARD DECISION-MAKING

A board of directors oversees an organization's activities. Any board of directors, including school boards, makes decisions as part of its responsibilities (Bailey & Peck, 2013). A decision is a choice that is made that commits a person or organization to action (Mintzberg, Raisinghani,

& Théorèt, 1976). Any decision involves questions of facts and of values (Taylor, 1965).

School boards, faced with competing values and demands, make decisions that determine the

course for a school district (Kirst, 2008). The decisions of the school board and the decisions of

administrators, teachers, staff, and others in the school system affect school processes.

School boards are legally authorized corporate bodies and act as a unit (Goldhammer,

1964; Reeves, 1954). Individual board members do not have independent authority or power to

make decisions for the district. Instead, each board member decides how to vote on matters

before the board. Usually, decision-making power rests in the aggregate vote, rather than any

one individual's vote determining the school board's decision and subsequent course of action

(Björk, 2008).

Ultimately, a school board's most important decisions deal fundamentally with education

and how the school relates to the social order (Counts, 1927). Through its actions, a board

manages school district affairs and determines the direction of the school district. It outlines

what is acceptable and what is not acceptable through policy. It hires personnel who will act on

behalf of the district. It determines what programs and initiatives are important to support and

which are not congruent with its beliefs or the wishes of the community. School boards

determine how the school will interact with other local organizations. Ultimately, however,

school boards are responsible for making decisions that create favorable conditions for teaching

and learning and to determine what needs to be done to improve schools (Gemberling, Smith, &

Villani, 2000; Kowalski, 2008).

2.6.1 Types of Decisions

School boards deal with a variety of topics during their meetings and in their work. Although the number of individual decisions required of a board may seem extensive, many of the decisions share similar traits. School board decisions fall into three basic categories: housekeeping decisions, administrative decisions, and policy decisions (Cunningham, 1962).

Housekeeping decisions encompass the operations of a school district. This category may include accepting formal reports, handling correspondence, and acknowledging accomplishments through specific votes and actions. Housekeeping decisions often determine procedures, outlining how to perform a task and when to assign tasks to district personnel. Overall, housekeeping decisions are perfunctory in nature and routinely come before the board.

Administrative decisions fulfill the business requirements of the school district. Administrative decisions authorize purchases, pay bills, and execute other financial actions. Only school boards perform administrative decisions and boards may not legally delegate these tasks to other employees of the district. Cunningham (1962) describes administrative decisions as terminal action decisions.

Policy decisions require a board to set guidelines for action within the district. A primary responsibility of a school board is to set school policy (Goldhammer, 1964; Martin, 1962; Reeves, 1954). Policy informs administrators and outlines processes for district functions. Policy guides the actions of the school district and reflects the values of the board and community, providing a reference point for future decision-making (Cunningham, 1962). It describes the will of the board and the legal obligations of the district, thus providing guidance for those who come in contact with the school district.

Decision-making is not a simple process. Often, school boards seemingly make many decisions because they vote on many issues throughout the school year. Decision-making as a process, however, is much more than just voting on issues. Decisions are usually made within a social context (Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963). People interact with each other, learn from each other, consider alternatives, and eventually make decisions on a topic. School board decision-making often follows defined stages, beginning with gathering knowledge for a decision. Multiple models exist for group decision-making such as that of a school board.

2.6.2   Gathering Knowledge

Elected or appointed boards of education include a broad array of citizens, each bringing something unique to the governing process. Individual school board members may or may not inherently understand how a school district operates or be intimately familiar with relevant background knowledge on long-standing educational issues. School boards, therefore, need to acquire knowledge in order to make informed decisions. Boards acquire knowledge about issues as individual members and as a group (Newton & Sackney, 2005).

Knowledge comes from many sources. Knowledge may be garnered from the district superintendent, who is the chief advisor for the school board. Other administrators may provide knowledge toward decision-making through reports and interactions. Board members may receive information from each other, often with experienced board members sharing historical information and board members with expertise in an area sharing their knowledge with others in the group. Community members and organizations may provide input and information to board members as well. Board members may also learn about issues through school board publications and other media sources.

Both tacit and explicit sources of knowledge may be uncovered through decision-making processes (Newton & Sackney, 2005). Explicit knowledge is easily recorded and transmitted from person to person. An example of explicit knowledge is a school policy manual. It is written and formally shared with others. Tacit knowledge is less formal, but no less powerful. Tacit knowledge may be shared through discussion and reflection (Newton & Sackney, 2005). It may be transmitted as part of the culture of the board. Board culture is reflected in the pattern of behavior that may not be explicitly articulated, but is implicitly understood. Board culture influences the mechanisms of knowledge gathering for decision-making.

When gathering knowledge about a subject in order to make a decision, board members may employ two crucial skills: facilitating civic engagement and communicating with the public (Kowalksi, 2008). As elected representatives, communicating with those in the school district and engaging them in discussion provides a rich tapestry when considering decisions. Those who may be interested in a particular issue may shift as the issue shifts (Gittell, Hollander, & Vincent, 1970). However, the presence of a variety of community groups and participants may affect the responsiveness of the school board to the demands of the public (Gittell et. al, 1970).

School boards may use multiple approaches to arrive at decisions. Through knowledge sharing and decision-making structures, many school boards work together to reach decisions. Consensus, however, may not be easily achieved for some school boards. When, during discussion, members clarify their ideas, listen to each other, and provide rationales to their thought processes, groups may move from merely understanding different perspectives to accepting their legitimacy (Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001). This process supports cognitive consensus, or when group members define and conceptualize issues in similar ways. This cognitive consensus may not affect immediate decisions but helps a board to understand issues in

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similar ways. Cognitive consensus may impact long-term productivity and buy-in for decisions (Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001).

School board members may employ leadership styles when working with each other to make decisions. These leadership styles may be considered in three broad categories: goal-oriented leadership, involving leadership, and engaging leadership (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005). Goal-oriented leadership is when a leader focuses on setting direction for the organization and leads others in achieving these goals. Involving leadership is when a leader works with others to set direction and determine how to achieve organizational goals. Engaging leadership is when a leader helps others to achieve as members of the organization. School board members may gravitate toward a particular leadership style when making decisions, thus influencing how they interact with other school board members in the decision-making process.

As school board members gain knowledge and ultimately make decisions, each person's norms and expectations of being a public servant eventually filter his or her behavior (Bers, 2013). His or her motivation for becoming a board member and motives within the context of a decision affect the decision-making process (Björk, 2008). Board members use their conceptual understanding of the issue and of their positions to inform their actions. Board members frequently draw on their own experiences as well as discussions with others (Dahl, 1989).

As individual board members are gaining knowledge, the board as a whole begins to conceptualize the issue as a group, experiencing shared mental models (Bailey & Peck, 2012). These shared mental models allow group members to achieve a similar understanding of an issue. Because of the nature of school board authority as a corporate board, each individual member votes, and the aggregate vote determines the decision for the board. The nature of the voting process ultimately forces members to make decisions in and as a group (Mountford &

Brunner, 2010). Shared mental models may assist in a cohesive understanding of the issue and a subsequent vote on the issue.

2.7   THE PROCESS OF DECISION-MAKING

All school boards make decisions within their realm of responsibilities and the limits of statute. Each board handles the decision-making process in its own way, within the limits of school code. Multiple models of decision-making, however, do emerge from the research. These models share similarities and illuminate the decision-making steps. Additionally, models provide insight as to the influencing factors on school board decisions.

Models for decision-making exist in many professions and for many situations. Four models are outlined in this section. These models were chosen because of their relevance to the work of school boards. Three of the models specifically describe school board decision-making: Cunningham (as cited in Goldhammer, 1964), Goldhammer (1964), and Smoley (1999). Because these models come from the study of school boards, they are pertinent to this discussion. The Mintzberg et al. (1976) model emerges from the business literature. Although the model did not emerge from observing educational boards, it is an extremely detailed model that provides exploration of additional elements of the decision making process.

Cunningham's (as cited in Goldhammer, 1964), Goldhammer's (1964), Smoley's (1999), and Mintzberg et al.'s (1976) decision-making processes are just a few articulations of how a board of individuals makes a decision. All of the processes include defining the problem and gathering information about the topic. The processes include discussing and deliberating the issue to inform thinking. Part of this deliberation process includes considering alternative

options. Finally, each process ends with an action of some sort either through a decision or through deferring action to a later date. The next sections describe each of the four chosen decision-making processes in more depth.

2.7.1   Cunningham's Five Phases of Decision-Making

Cunningham (as cited in Goldhammer, 1964) studied a specific school board over a prolonged period of time. Through his observations, a decision-making structure emerged for this school board. Cunningham used this information to outline five phases of school board decision-making.

The first phase initiates the policy-making process for the board. This occurs when a problem emerges from an internal or external source. The school board learns of the problem either formally or informally. Once the board knows of the problem, it initiates the policy-making process.

Cunningham's second phase defines the policy problem. When a group needs to make a decision, it needs to orient itself to the problem. Through dialogue and reflection, a board defines the problem and gains a common orientation to the issue. School boards may define the problem in relation to the values of the board or board members' personal goals. Boards may also define problems in relation to initiatives in the district or relevant movements in the community. This orientation process may take extensive time so that board members are able to commonly understand the problem at hand.

The third phase is the deliberation phase. This phase includes gathering information about the problem and considering options. Board members deliberate and bargain with each other, sometimes developing coalitions. At times, the problem is redefined during this phase,

adjusting as school board members maneuver for position and to be heard by the rest of the group. In the deliberation phase, the board strives to reach a workable conclusion to the problem.

The fourth phase described by Cunningham (as cited in Goldhammer, 1964) is enacting the policy. Once the workable conclusion emerges, the board creates the policy and votes on its implementation. The policy acts as a guide for district affairs and informs the work of the superintendent. The enacted policy usually reflects the dialogue and deliberations of the board, as well as the values of the school community.

The fifth phase of decision-making is reviewing the consequences of policy implementation. Once a policy is implemented, the ramifications of the decision emerge as a result of its requirements. Evaluating the policy after implementation permits the board and the school community to see its consequences and implications and determine policy effectiveness for the school district (Cunningham, as cited in Goldhammer, 1964).

2.7.2   Goldhammer's Five Phases of Decision-Making

After an in-depth study of a school board in one district, Goldhammer (1964) articulated his interpretation of the decision-making process. It is similar to Cunningham's decision-making phases. Goldhammer's five stages derive from not only analyzing the process, but also studying the content of decision-making in a district. His stages allude to the patterns of interaction within a board during their work.

The first stage occurs when someone introduces a problem to the school board. The problem may be articulated by the superintendent or by a school board member. It may also

come from another source. Introducing the problem begins the decision-making process for the school board.

During the second stage, the board hears background information on the problem. In Goldhammer's observations, this information regularly comes from the superintendent. After providing information on the problem and its history, the superintendent usually makes a recommendation to the board.

Goldhammer's third stage provides time for board members to ask questions about a problem. Usually the superintendent answers the questions, giving more information as necessary to satisfy board members' queries. Sometimes, the board requests additional data to enhance their understanding of the problem or to better grasp the superintendent's recommendation.

In the fourth stage of decision-making, board members raise questions about the problem. Questions lead to dialogue among the board. At times, board members introduce alternative proposals to the superintendent's recommendation. Discussion prevails, with board members considering the problem and determining whether to accept the superintendent's recommendation, modify it, or agree on a different course of action.

Goldhammer (1964) notes that the fifth and final stage of the decision-making process shows three possible courses of action. One possible path happens when a board member makes a motion, it carries, and the meeting continues with its regularly scheduled business. In this course of action, the decision is made at the meeting. A second alternative course of action includes the head of the board asking if a motion is actually necessary since the board already reached consensus through their discussion. Action happens, but is not codified in a formal vote. In this scenario, the board decides that a formal motion is unnecessary, but agrees on a course of

action. The third alternative course of action occurs when the board feels information is not sufficient to render a decision. The board defers the decision for a future time, sometimes asking for more information from the superintendent to help in their deliberations.

2.7.3 Smoley's Four Factors

Smoley (1999) analyzed interviews with board members, specifically focusing on how they made decisions. After reviewing the information, four factors emerged to support rational decision-making. Board members use these factors to make effective decisions in their work as a governing body.

Smoley's first factor is to access and use relevant information. Obtaining this information involves pursuing multiple sources. At times, the superintendent or other administrators provide information. Sometimes a district committee or an expert provides pertinent information to shape the dialogue. No matter the source of the relevant information, it needs to be accurate and balanced, honoring the board's core mission and long-term goals.

After gathering information, the second factor is to discuss the issue deliberately. Through deliberations, board members frame the issues and spend time listening to each other. Board members ask questions to better understand the problem as well as other points of view. Discussing deliberately means providing the necessary time to understand the context of the situation. Adequate time is also important to reach an informed decision. Deliberations are more effective if board members put differences aside and are open with their perspectives. Hidden agendas derail deliberate discussions and harm the bonds of trust on a board.

The third factor for effective decision-making is to consider alternative actions according to Smoley (1999). Hearing all sides of an issue and honestly considering different points of view

helps to clarify the problem and provides important insight for the board. Discussion needs to reflect multiple points of view, especially when dealing with emotional issues or strong community opinions. Hearing divergent opinions and considering alternatives allows a board to work through the problem in its entirety, thus assisting understanding.

The final factor identified by Smoley (1999) is to work toward consensus. A unanimous vote is not necessary for a board to take action on most items. If, however, votes are regularly split between different factions of a board, dissention may take root. By looking for areas of commonality and striving for consensus, boards enhance community support and pave the way for smoother administrative action on decisions. Building consensus may mean compromise for a board. Compromise, however, shows tolerance for differing views and helps to make a decision strong, often earning more community support.

2.7.4   Strategic Decision-Making

Through a field study of 25 strategic decision making processes, Mintzberg et al. (1976) determined a structure for strategic decision making. This structure consists of three main phases with supporting routines in each phase. Additionally, six dynamic processes color the overall decision-making structure.

The first phase of strategic decision-making is the identification phase (Mintzberg et al., 1976). During the identification phase, those who are making the decision engage in what is called the decision recognition routine. This routine occurs when the need for a decision is recognized such as through a crisis, newly learned information, or an emerging opportunity. After the need for a decision is recognized, a diagnosis routine occurs. During diagnosis, an

organization either formally or informally investigates a situation in order to understand and define key factors.

The second phase of strategic decision-making is the development phase (Mintzberg et al., 1976). During development, an organization literally develops options for solutions to the identified problem. This may be done through a search routine or a design routine. During a search routine, an organization searches for solutions, relying on past events in the organization or looking to other organizations that may have faced similar problems. The search routine is essentially looking for a "ready-made" solution. In contrast, the design routine requires an organization to create a custom-made solution or modify an existing solution for the identified problem. Whether searching or designing, the development phase is a critical time in the decision-making process as it explores options and potential solutions.

The third phase of strategic decision-making as defined by Mintzberg et al. (1976) is the selection phase. During selection, an organization considers its options and chooses one or more to respond to the defined problem. This may be accomplished through the screen routine. Screening allows a group to remove options that are not feasible and consider which options may be appropriate to solve the problem. Another way to accomplish selection is by employing the evaluation-choice routine. In this routine, an organization evaluates decisions and chooses one either through judgment, bargaining with others, or through an analysis of the choices. Eventually, the selection phase ends with the authorization routine. Through authorization, an organization takes official action using prescribed protocols to officially make a strategic decision.

Mintzberg et al. (1976) propose three supporting sets of routines for the three phases of strategic decision-making: decision control routines, communication routines, and political

routines. Decision control routines guide the overall decision-making process, usually in implicit or informal ways. For example, a member of an organization may delineate boundaries on decisions through imposing a schedule, delineating a budget for the solution, or other means of constraint. These types of actions guide the decision making process and control its implementation.

Communication routines abound in the strategic decision making process. Those charged with making decisions communicate in formal and informal ways. Communication may be explorative in nature such as looking for information to inform a segment of the process. It may also be investigative in nature, focusing the search for solutions or narrowing the dialogue. Communication may also be more disseminative in nature. Information may be disseminated within an organization or to others, essentially expanding those involved in the decision.

Political routines affect decision-making and are an important element in the process. Through political activities, individuals work to further their personal goals and influence decisions. Additionally, political activities tie those who are making decisions to those on the outside who may support them. Political activities highlight power relationships and alliances in an organization, potentially affecting the current decision-making process and future work.

Strategic decision-making is rarely a linear task that flows easily from one phase to the next. Although strategic decision-making in this model consists of three main phases with supporting routines in each phase, the overall process is colored by six sets of dynamic processes. These dynamic processes include interruptions, scheduling delays, feedback delays, timing delays and speedups, comprehension cycles (looping back on portions of the decision making process for clarification and better comprehension), and failure recycles (rejecting a solution and recycling back to the an earlier phase to continue the process). Strategic decisions

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are not made in isolation within an organization. Instead, these dynamics push and pull on the process, creating multiple pathways for its completion.

2.8 DECISIONS IN THE SOCIOCULTURAL SCHOOL BOARD SYSTEM

School boards, like public schools, are part of the larger sociocultural system in the United States (Lutz, 1975a). Public school governance connects citizens to their schools and provides a democratic opportunity for shaping school culture in line with the values of the larger community. School board meetings provide opportunities for individuals and groups to express themselves and their needs while board members debate, negotiate, and compromise to make decisions (Björk, 2008). When school boards make decisions, their behavior and their processes are enmeshed in the culture of the board. The decisions of the school board are informed by community norms, ideals, and warring concepts.

Lutz (1975a) studied the socioeconomic patterns of communities and school board governance in the communities. Using a cultural lens, Lutz (1975a) identified five propositions regarding the cultural nature of school boards, their decisions, and their responsibilities (pp. 72-73). These five propositions support the position that the concept of culture is valuable as a way to understand and evaluate school board behavior at the local level.

2.8.1 Proposition 1: Decisions are Political

Proposition 1: All educational decisions are either political decisions or have political implications.

When considering school board decisions and the decision-making process, it is important to remember that school boards are political entities. Some see "politics" as a tainted word, referencing nefarious motives and hidden agendas. Politics is a way of conducting business to further an organization. Politics is more than the manipulation of people and relationships in order to achieve a goal (Martin, 1962). Instead, politics is a process of influence that results in a decision (Lutz & Iannaccone 1969). The decisions reflect values and how scarce resources are allocated in an organization (Björk, 2008). School boards, as political entities, engage in the political process when making decisions.

People tend to act in concert with their political beliefs and emotions (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). One expects, then, that school board decision-making will honor the political values of the sociocultural school board system and the larger community. One cannot separate politics from the school board, thus one cannot ignore the political nature of school board decisions.

2.8.2 Proposition 2: School Boards are *the* Decision-Makers

Proposition 2: Local school boards are *the* decision-makers about specific public education programs, regardless of the wide range of pressures from all levels.

Although different entities pressure public school boards, the decision-making responsibility for school systems is still the purview of the school board. Community pressures,

state regulations, federal requirements, and other forces may seem to dictate school board action. In reality, however, school boards retain the power to make decisions for the district even if, at times, these decisions are constrained by outside parameters. Sometimes school boards act as "metamediators," taking competing demands and reshaping them into decisions that support the operations of the district (Lutz, 1975b). A school board may not decide without being affected by the pressures it faces, but it is still the decision-making entity of the district.

2.8.3   Proposition 3: Local School Boards as Sociocultural Systems

Proposition 3: Local school boards are themselves sociocultural systems and behave in fashions dictated by prescribed cultural parameters.

School boards are sociocultural systems within the larger context of American society. Lutz (1975a) outlined that boards have elements of a cultural system, such as artifacts and resources. School boards have values and beliefs, as well as roles and traditions that guide action. Additionally, boards have literature in the form of policies, minutes, and guidebooks. This literature is useful for transmitting culture to future members of the district. School boards behave according to the cultural system, often with recognizable patterns or similar styles (National School Boards Association, 1975).

2.8.4   Proposition 4: School Boards Serve Heterogeneous Cultures

Proposition 4: Local school boards are elected or appointed to serve larger, more heterogeneous cultures (school districts) whose subcultures may have needs, values, aspirations, etc., that differ from those of the school board.

Although school boards are elected or appointed from representatives of community, the limited number of individuals on a school board rarely represents all of the heterogeneous cultures and demographics in a school district (Cistone, 2008). School districts have subcultures that have differing perspectives and competing interests, sometimes not congruent with the board's perspectives and interests. Subcultures in the district may not see the whole picture or understand the issues in the same way as the board members who engage in decision-making through deliberation. At times, the ideas of the board and the ideas of the community are in dissonance in any school system.

2.8.5   Proposition 5: Decisions Advantage Some and Disadvantage Others

Proposition 5: A monolithic decision-making system cannot effectively serve a heterogeneous culture; further, any one decision made by a local school board will likely advantage one subculture of the school district while disadvantaging another in the heterogeneous culture.

A school board as an institution cannot serve every facet of district culture. Instead, some groups enjoy advantages while others deal with disadvantages. Multiple constituent groups appeal to the school board. These constituents exert influence on leaders directly, and often indirectly (Dahl, 1989). Those who make policy are sensitive to inputs from citizens, but

not necessarily equally sensitive or accessible to all citizen groups (Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963; Verba et al., 1995). Although board members are the representative decision makers for the district, they may not be the real decision-makers. Instead, they may actually be spokespeople for the more influential people in the community who may not even be in public office, but who may be advisors, confidants, or technical experts (Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963; Dahl, 1989). These pressure groups and individuals exert power in the process of school board decision-making without being formally part of the process. Resulting school board decisions may help some groups and stifle others.

2.9   CONCLUSION

School boards are authorized by the states to oversee public education. Their authority comes from state constitutions, legislation, and court decisions. The demands of society also affect school board authority, specifically in its use of discretionary powers. Although not specifically mentioned in the United States Constitution, the Federal Government does directly affect public schools through its legislation, and therefore indirectly compels school boards to act to comply with federal laws.

In Pennsylvania, a school board consists of volunteers who devote many hours to governing a local school district. Although the people who serve on school boards are unique individuals, the literature reveals they share some common characteristics. Board members tend to be socially and economically advantaged in the community. They are frequently well-educated and high achieving individuals who mirror the larger community in racial and ethnic composition. Board members have a wide range of ages and are motivated by a variety of

factors. Recruitment, election, and socialization on the board are a process for those who end up serving as board members.

School boards are charged with making decisions for a school system. The decisions set the course for the policies and programs of the school district. The body of decisions influences the actions of district employees and the culture of the district. Ideally, the decisions reflect the values of the school community as well.

The decision-making of a school board follows a process or a structure. Multiple decision-making structures exist in the literature, but similarities do emerge from these specific models. After defining a problem, a board gathers information about it. Through discussion and deliberation, the board informs its thinking, often considering alternative options for the decisions. Finally, the board either makes a decision or postpones action into the future.

School boards are sociocultural systems, with the cultural aspects of the board and the district influencing communication with the public and the decision-making process. Although the board is elected to represent the community, it usually does not represent every subculture in the community. As such, when making decisions, the board favors some groups and may not favor others.

3.0   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1   DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

School boards govern public school systems. A school board is made up of individual people who bring different experiences, motivations, and desires to their positions as school directors. The school board is a corporate board and the governance structure is designed for individual school board members to work jointly with other board members to eventually make decisions and govern as a unit. Additionally, the school board works in collaboration with school administrators to oversee school affairs such as budgets and policies. Working relationships and communication on school boards and between school board members, community members, and school personnel affect school governance in a myriad of ways. Considering that school boards are an integral part of school systems, conducting a study that focused on the attributes of school board members shed some light on the intricacies of the position and provided insight for superintendents and those who work with school boards.

This study looked at the perceptions of school board members in Western Pennsylvania related to their motivations for service, methods for making decisions, and relationships with other board members, the community, and district personnel. By querying board members and asking them to share their experiences, this study uncovered information further describing those who govern schools. This investigation provided a deeper understanding of a sample of board

members including who they were and how they approached their positions, thus providing insight for those who work as superintendents and with school boards.

This study surveyed school board members from specific counties in Western Pennsylvania using a survey instrument that was divided into five key areas: becoming a school board member, relationships, leadership, demographic information, and contact information. Specifically, the survey questions gathered information from sitting public school board members regarding their experiences in becoming school board members, including what persuaded them to enter an election or an appointment for a school board seat and how they became acclimated and socialized to the school board. The survey gleaned information regarding school board members' relationships with those in the community as well as those in administrative positions, including information about how school board members communicated with their constituents, other board members, and district personnel. The survey also collected data uncovering information on decision-making for school board members, specifically how time was spent in the decision-making process, what decisions elicited pride or were particularly difficult, and how other school board members influenced decision-making on the school board. Additionally, the survey asked a few questions regarding leadership to gain insight into what challenged board members and what would assist them in their positions. Finally, the survey collected basic demographic and background information.

3.2   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The local control of public schools in the United States provides opportunities for everyday citizens to participate in governance and shape educational programs (Tyack, 2003). School

board members hail from different backgrounds and approach their positions in different ways. There are over 90,000 school board members in the United States (National School Boards Association, 2013) and 4,500 in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2013). These individuals and their work shape the public school experience for millions of students.

In Pennsylvania, public school board members volunteer their time and effort to serve in local political positions. Understanding their motivations for becoming school board members informs superintendents and those who work with school boards, thus influencing the administrators' interactions with board members. This information assists those who have close interactions with board members and may lead to more effective school governance practices. Additionally, school board members make decisions as individuals, but then collectively act as a corporate board. The method for making these decisions includes examining information flow and decision-making processes. Finally, how school board members interact with others on the board, their communities, and district administrators provides insight as to the workings of a school board and informs those who work within this structure.

Knowing that locally elected citizens volunteer their time to govern school districts and understanding why they choose to serve on a school board was enlightening. The literature provided information about the general characteristics of school board members and their motivations for service. This information, however, did not provide detail about specific board members' stories. Understanding the backgrounds, motivations, and thoughts of Western Pennsylvania school board members in more depth provides insights for superintendents and those who work with school boards in Western Pennsylvania. Additionally, the school board evaluates the superintendent and both parties share leadership responsibility for the school

district.   Since this superintendent/school board relationship is a critical aspect of the superintendency and its effectiveness, a better understanding of board members informs practice for superintendents (Grissom & Anderson, 2012).

In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, superintendent contracts may be for three to five years in duration (Pennsylvania Department of Education, *Commissions*, 2015).   This is a relatively short period of time for a superintendent to acclimate to a school district, establish a vision, and implement improvement.   To establish large-scale improvements in a district, it usually takes six to eight years (Fullan, 2000).   It is very difficult to reconcile the improvement process timeline with superintendent contract realities.   Additionally, superintendent turnover rates can be high, with Grissom and Anderson (2012) citing a 45% turnover rate for all but the largest school districts.   The typical tenure of an urban school district superintendent is even more alarming, with most staying two to three years (Glass, 2015).   In a 2015 analysis of Pennsylvania School systems, of the 499 Pennsylvania school districts with superintendents, over 60% had experienced turnover of the superintendent in the previous six years due to retirement, not having contracts renewed, or leaving the position for a different field (Tatu, 2015).   Although the reasons for high turnover rates of superintendents may or may not be related to their work with school boards, understanding school board members in deeper ways may help smooth transitions in and out of the superintendent positions and may provide superintendents with knowledge to help them have more effective relationships with school board members.

The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the school district and of the local school board (Hoyle, Björk, Collier, & Glass, 2005). The school board hires and evaluates the superintendent as well. It is important that superintendents understand school board members in

order to effectively navigate board relationships. This study investigated school board members in an effort to better understand their perspectives and inform school superintendents and those who work with school boards.

3.3   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research study examined school board member motivations for service, decision-making processes, and relationship structures. The specific research questions included:

Q1: What motivates a person in Western Pennsylvania to serve on a public school board?

Q2: How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members make decisions?

Q3: How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?

The research questions served as the overarching themes for the study and provided a construct for considering the ensuing data.

3.4   RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

This descriptive study used a descriptive survey to collect data. The survey was distributed electronically to school board members in Western Pennsylvania. The use of an electronic survey allowed data collection from a larger number of people in a wider geographic area compared to interviewing, observing, or other qualitative approaches to research (Mertens, 2010). School board members were also able to access the survey at a time that was convenient

for them. This was important considering that a school board position in Pennsylvania is unpaid and its work is often wedged between careers, families, or other responsibilities. The asynchronous and convenient nature of collecting electronic survey data provided more responses from a wider range of participants to subsequently inform the research questions.

The qualitative design employed a simple descriptive approach that showed the sample group's perspectives at one point in time (Mertens, 2010). People and their perspectives evolve over time, but the survey data reflects the moment of survey completion. It is probable that the survey was influenced by other social realities such as budget parameters, educational mandates, and current events faced in individual school districts and across the region. Even so, the survey questions were informed by an extensive literature review spanning almost a century of work that distilled primary themes affecting school board members and their service. Because these are recurring themes, the descriptive survey employed in this study generated data that is not just descriptive for a moment in time, but illuminates themes evident within the field.

The survey gathered information in five basic categories: becoming a school board member, relationships, leadership, demographic information, and contact information. Data from the survey was analyzed, specifically looking for patterns, perspectives, and anomalies. The survey data was used to explore the identified research questions and, consequently, provide a better understanding of school board members and the issues that they face in their work (Babbie, 2013).

3.5   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study emanated from a review of the literature about school board members and two pilot studies conducted by the researcher. The literature and the pilot studies helped to identify key concepts regarding school board members' motivations for service, decision-making frameworks, and relationships to others. Using the literature review and pilot studies as a backdrop, the researcher created this study's survey instrument as a way to gather knowledge from school board members related to these major concepts.

This research is situated in a constructivist paradigm where the researcher attempted to understand others' lived experiences from their point of view (Mertens, 2010). Each individual board member had his or her own socially constructed reality of the position and his or her own experiences. The goal of surveying board members about their experiences, opinions, and thoughts was to understand the meaning-making activities for individual participants, and to see generalities for the participant group. In the constructivist paradigm, the interaction of physical and temporal data with participant values, beliefs, opinions, hopes and dreams helps to inform the meaning of the data (Lincoln, 2005). The survey captured board members' responses in a particular moment of time, relevant to themes evident in the field. It provided insight into their lived experiences, thus informing this research study.

3.6   PILOT STUDIES

Two previous pilot studies informed this research project. The first pilot study was very small. For the first pilot study, the researcher observed a school board meeting in an unfamiliar school

district, collecting field notes and artifacts and creating a three-columned script of the meeting to organize the field notes from the experience. The first column recorded the time, the second column recorded the events or narrative of activities, and the third column recorded notes, impressions, or questions for further consideration. After this experience, the researcher conducted a short literature review. Using the field experience, the literature review, discussion with colleagues, and personal experiences, she designed an interview protocol and questions to ask sitting school board members. She interviewed two school board members from a different local school district than where the meeting was observed because she was unable to gain access to board members in the district whose meeting was initially observed for the project. The interviews took place in two separate face-to-face meetings. She had not met the school board members prior to the scheduled interviews. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for emerging themes. Hatch's (2002) interpretive analysis framework was used as a guide for analyzing the data. The data analysis and ensuing themes were recorded in analytic statements that became an analytic memo for the research project.

In the first pilot study, it was very difficult to find a district's superintendent to cooperate with sharing pertinent contact information with board members in order to set up interviews. The researcher was initially denied access to board members by superintendents and was finally able to find a retiring superintendent who agreed to pass along contact information to his board members to see if any were willing to participate in an interview. Two board members from the retiring superintendent's district contacted the researcher, and interviews were arranged at a mutually agreeable time and place. During the interviews, the first pilot study's interview questions did not always generate the desired information related to the research questions and topics. The interview process became very long and it was difficult to keep the board members

being interviewed on topic to inform the research questions for the project. During transcription of the interviews, board members veered away from a question multiple times and never answered it, even when redirected during the interview with additional questions. The first pilot study informed the second pilot study and, as a result of the experience, the questions were redesigned and the method adjusted for the second pilot study.

In the second pilot study, the researcher continued to explore the literature and crafted a slightly more extensive literature review. Using this literature review, the interview protocol from the first pilot study, the experience of the first pilot study, and discussion with colleagues, she developed a qualitative survey using the Qualtrics electronic survey system, provided for student research through the University of Pittsburgh. The survey questions were carefully considered and received feedback from mentors and colleagues before being finalized for the pilot study. The second pilot study received Institutional Review Board approval through the University of Pittsburgh and was distributed to school board members through superintendents in the local area. A total of 32 school board members from 19 different school districts completed the entire survey, providing data that was analyzed for themes and described in a written analysis.

Although a strong constructivist stance may indicate the need for more individualized attention such as is possible with an interview process, the experiences from the first and second pilot studies informed the research design for this study. The interview process was cumbersome and did not garner enough desired data to inform the research questions. Although the interviews were interesting, they did not provide the expected quantity or quality of information and gaining access to school board members met with resistance in districts. The second pilot study's design of using a qualitative survey provided a larger quantity of data with plenty of rich

information for analysis. It was supported by multiple superintendents as evidenced by the 19 different school districts represented by responding board members. The second pilot study's approach of using an electronic survey seemed to provide better access to the desired participants and data that directly informed the research questions due to the survey design.

The two pilot studies provided important insight that assisted with this study's research design and method. Additionally, the survey for the current project was significantly informed by the survey for the second pilot study. Additional modifications to the survey instrument were made based on the more extensive literature review conducted for this study and additional colleague feedback.

3.7 RESEARCH SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

This study targeted school board members in Western Pennsylvania, specifically in Intermediate Units 1, 3, 4, 7, 27, and 28. Intermediate Units are regional educational agencies that provide service to school districts throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There are 29 intermediate units in Pennsylvania, each serving a regional cadre of school districts. Intermediate Units 1, 3, 4, 7, 27, and 28 serve 136 school districts in the following Western Pennsylvania counties: Allegheny (excluding Pittsburgh Public Schools), Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer, Washington, and Westmoreland County. Pittsburgh Public Schools is located in Intermediate Unit 2 and was excluded from this investigation, as it is an outlier in the region because it is the only large, urban public school in the chosen region and has its own, difficult Institutional Review Board process. Additionally,

public charter and cyber charter schools as well as career and technical centers were excluded, as their governance structures are different than traditional public school governance structures.

Franklin Regional School District was initially to be excluded from the study, as this was the district of employment for the researcher. When a third party distributed the survey electronically, however, the third party sent the survey to school board members in the Franklin Regional School District, thus veering from the expected distribution list. At least two respondents identified themselves from Franklin Regional School District and completed the survey. Because the survey did not require board members to identify themselves, it is impossible from the data to know how many more board members from Franklin Regional School District completed the survey. Consequently, the respondents from Franklin Regional School District were included in the participant group.

In the 136 school districts in the identified Intermediate Units, there were 1,224 school board members. All board members in these districts formed the population of potential study participants. Of the potential respondents, 124 board members or 11% of the potential respondents participated in the study. The regional perspective of the chosen six intermediate units is indicative of what is generally considered to be the workforce development region of the greater Pittsburgh area (Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, 2015; Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, n.d.). Although all school districts have commonalities and differences, the purposive sampling of districts in these six intermediate units narrowed the field to provide a regional perspective (Babbie, 2013).

3.8   THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument used a simple descriptive approach, essentially capturing responses at a single point in time (Mertens, 2010). The goal of the survey was to gain information from a larger population of school board members to inform the research questions. Specifically, the study gathered information from school board members in six intermediate units serving school districts in eleven counties in Western Pennsylvania.

The survey was divided into five key areas: becoming a school board member, relationships, leadership, demographic information, and contact information. The main survey sections emerged from the literature, the previous pilot studies, and discussions with colleagues through the research design process. The researcher created the survey, with survey questions being vetted in trials with colleagues and faculty advisors as well as a pilot study. Additionally, texts on survey question design by Converse and Presser (1986) as well as Fowler (1995) were used to craft clear questions that would elicit desired responses. The completed survey instrument text appears in Appendix A and the Qualtrics online survey view appears in Appendix B. A chart linking each survey question to its associated research question and the related literature is in Appendix C.

3.8.1   Becoming a School Board Member

The first section of the survey directly informed the research question concerning school board member motivations. This section asked participants to identify how they were recruited to become a school board member, what specific experiences or interactions interested them in becoming school board members, and what topics interested them in running for the school

board. Respondents viewed a list of potential reasons in alphabetical order and checked all that applied. Respondents were able to add their own reason(s) by choosing "Other" and providing explanation. The provided response choices included reasons that were personal, political, professional, policy-based, community-based, and social as highlighted by the literature. Additionally, this survey section included information about socialization on the board and asked if respondents had other political aspirations.

3.8.2 Relationships

The relationships section of the survey addressed the research question regarding how school board members relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district. The initial question in this section asked respondents to identify how often they conversed with specific groups in their service as a school board member. Respondents saw individuals and identified groups listed in the question and responded using a four-item Likert scale with the responses of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Frequently" to identify whom they regularly conversed with and the frequency of those conversations. Respondents were able to add their own responses to this question by choosing "Other" and providing explanation. Gathering information on communication patterns illuminated relationships of board members, superintendents, and, in a subtle way, the established or perceived power structures within communities.

The groups that school board members communicated with may affect their decision-making. Additional questions asked about methods of communication and frequency of communication with constituents using the same format as the previous question with a list of

potential communication methods. Understanding how school board members communicated with others informed this investigation's understanding of relationships.

The relationships section of the survey also included questions on decision-making, directly addressing the research question regarding how school board members make decisions. In the first survey question related to this research question, respondents were asked where and how often they independently gathered information about issues in order to make decisions as school board members. Respondents marked potential choices that included both tacit and explicit knowledge sources and could add their own choices by choosing "Other" and providing explanation. Respondents marked the choices using a four-item Likert scale with the responses of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Frequently."

The second survey question regarding decision-making asked respondents to consider a recent decision that they made in their service as a school board member and determine how much time they spent on identified decision-making stages. The decision-making stages were derived from multiple decision-making structures described previously in the literature review. Respondents used a Likert scale with the responses of "None of my time," "Very little of my time," "Some of my time," "A lot of my time," and "Most of my time" to indicate their responses.

The first of three additional open-ended questions asked respondents to describe a decision made as a member of the school board that made them proud. Next, respondents were asked in what ways other school board members influenced their decision-making on the school board. The survey continued by asking respondents to describe decisions related to their service as a school board member that "keep you up at night." The purpose of these open-ended questions was to further explore decisions made in the sociocultural school board system.

The literature review described five propositions concerning school board decision-making in the sociocultural system of the school board (Lutz, 1975a). The first two propositions included the idea that all educational decisions are political or have political implications and that local school board members are *the* decision-makers regarding public education programs. The next proposition stated that local school boards are sociocultural systems that behave within cultural parameters. The last two propositions shared that local school boards serve larger, heterogeneous cultures and that a decision-making system cannot effectively serve all members of a heterogeneous culture. The responses to these particular survey questions informed these propositions as well as articulated what constitutes a key decision.

3.8.3   Leadership

The third section of the survey provided context to the investigation and its research questions. In this section, participants were asked to respond to five questions. The first question asked respondents to show on a scale of 1-10 how frequently they used each type of leadership style as a school board member. There were three identified leadership styles including engaging leadership, involving leadership, and goal leadership. Next, respondents were asked to identify their largest challenges as a school board member by answering an open-ended question. Answers to this question further informed the research questions as well as provided context to the issues facing school board members. The next open-ended question in this section asked respondents what information or experiences would make their job as a school board member easier. This question informed understanding regarding decision-making and relationships. The fourth question in this section was open-ended and asked participants what they would say if they could give advice to superintendents working with school boards.   The

purpose of this question is was to gather information about relationships with school personnel, including what was important for school board members to share with superintendents. The final question in this section asked respondents what else they wanted share that was not already covered in the survey. The purpose of this question was to provide respondents with an opportunity to share additional information that they deemed important.

3.8.4   Demographic Information

The purpose of the demographic information questions in the survey was to accumulate general information about the school board members. This general information provided context for understanding the survey respondents. The section also provided key information about the board members including their years of serving on a school board, gender, age, race/ethnicity, educational levels, and occupations, if applicable. The section also asked respondents to share their total household income in the past 12 months and if the respondent or a close family member were employed in the education field.

The literature review in the previous chapter revealed that those who served on school boards were often well-educated individuals (Counts, 1927, Verba et al., 1995). Additionally, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) provided educational levels and years of service in their profile of Pennsylvania school directors. Collecting educational levels and years of service from the participant groups allowed comparisons to the larger population from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) profile.

3.8.5   Contact

The final section of the survey asked respondents to identify the school district in which they were currently serving as a school board member. The section also included a question asking if respondents would be willing to be contacted to provide clarifying information in the future, if needed. If so, respondents were asked to provide contact information. The purpose of this section was to collect information in case additional insight or clarification was needed. During data analysis, no additional clarification was necessary as the respondents' answers were clear.

3.9   DATA COLLECTION

Many school board members' email addresses or contact information were not listed on school district websites, so emailing school board members directly was a challenge. Additionally, the researcher was a sitting assistant superintendent in the region. If she approached school board members directly without notifying the superintendents of the districts, she may have risked professional implications such as diminished trust, troubled relationships with other administrators, and the narrowing of future professional opportunities in the region. To assist in contacting school board members, the researcher contacted the Pennsylvania School Boards Association for assistance.   The Pennsylvania School Boards Association agreed to help distribute the survey and sent an email with a link to a letter from the researcher to its members in Intermediate Units 1, 3, 4, 7, 27, and 28. The email sent to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association is in Appendix D.

The letter for school board members embedded in the link of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association email invited potential participants to the research study and provided some basic information about the process as well as the confidentiality of collected data. The letter invited board members to complete an online survey by clicking on a survey link in the letter. The link took participants to the Qualtrics Survey System, provided for student research through the University of Pittsburgh. This system allowed electronic survey distribution, response collection, and basic analysis in a confidential and secured environment. Board members were informed that the survey, if desired, could be completed over the phone or in a face-to-face environment by contacting the researcher through the provided phone number or email address. The letter for board members is in Appendix E.

If a board member elected to complete the survey over the phone or in a face-to-face environment, the researcher scheduled a mutually convenient time and place (if applicable) to complete the survey. The researcher would have provided the respondent with a copy of the letter in a face-to-face environment and read the letter in a phone situation in order to receive verbal consent from the respondent to participate in the study. One board member elected to complete the survey via phone and no board members elected to complete the survey in a face-to-face format. If one had elected to complete the survey in the face-to-face environment, the researcher would have asked permission to record the respondent's answers to the survey in order to create an accurate transcript of the respondent's survey responses. If permission were given, the researcher would have recorded and transcribed the survey completion. If permission to record were not given, the researcher would have manually noted the survey responses on a paper copy of the survey. For the one phone interview, the researcher manually noted the survey responses on a paper copy of the survey. The researcher engaged in member checking, rereading

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the recorded answers to the respondent to ensure accuracy. The researcher then entered the data into the Qualtrics system to permit more efficient data analysis of all data collected in the study. Any notes were maintained in a confidential, secured electronic and physical location until completion of the study and, if recordings had been generated in this study, they would have been secured in the same fashion. After the study was completed, raw data was destroyed in a secure fashion.

The survey was implemented through the Qualtrics survey system. Survey questions incorporated a combination of closed-ended format and open-ended format questions. Some of the closed-ended format questions permitted participants to select "Other" and provide a short answer. Survey respondents were able to choose to skip any question in the survey. Survey responses were confidential, but were not anonymous in all cases. The last question in the survey asked respondents if they were willing to provide contact information in case the researcher needed additional clarifying information. If a respondent chose to provide contact information, his or her answers were not anonymous.

Approximately two weeks after the initial email was sent to school board members, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association sent a second email to those who received the first email but did not click through to the survey, again asking school board members to participate in the survey. This increased the response rate for the survey. After approximately another two weeks, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association sent a third email to school board members who had received the email but who had not clicked through to the survey and who had not responded, asking a third time for them to participate in the survey. This generated additional responses for the survey.

3.10   DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher analyzed the survey data in multiple ways. First, the researcher completed a general descriptive analysis for each survey item. For example, the demographic information section of the survey was tabulated and described using tables and narratives to outline the characteristics of the respondents. The use of the data from this section of the survey was used to describe the respondents and generate an understanding of who provided input into the study. Some of the questions were analyzed to show the percentage of respondent answers to gender (question 19), race/ethnicity (question 20), highest level of education (question 22), total household income before taxes (question 24) and involvement in the education field (question 25). Other questions were analyzed by categorizing the descriptive data. This method was used specifically for years of service as a school board member (question 18), age (question 20), and occupation (question 23). The percentage of respondents from each intermediate unit (question 26) was also calculated and analyzed.

After reviewing the results, the researcher conducted an exploratory analysis using cross tabs and groups/subgroups by filtering the data. For example, the analysis explored the relationships between board members of different genders (question 19) conversing with others about issues (question 6) in different ways. The researcher also analyzed those who had specific experiences or interactions (question 2) that motivated board service in relation to the topics that interested them in board service (question 3). No patterns emerged in the data, but if interesting patterns would have emerged after exploring the data using descriptive analysis and exploratory analysis using cross tabs, groups/subgroups, and filters, the researcher would have completed additional cross tabs and potentially chi square tests to further explore the data.

In the sections of the survey for becoming a school board member, decision-making, and relationships, some questions had defined answer responses and some were open-ended, requiring respondents to generate written answers. Questions that had defined answer responses were analyzed descriptively. These survey questions were analyzed for number and frequency of responses to each question. If respondents selected "Other" and added their own answers to these questions, the answers were reviewed for congruity to the provided responses and, if responses written-in by respondents were the same as provided responses, they were added to the descriptive data for those responses. The written-in responses that did not fit provided responses were categorized and reported along with the descriptive data.

Open-ended questions were analyzed and coded for emerging themes as well as linkages to the defined response questions in the survey and the articulated research questions for this study. Hatch's (2002) interpretive analysis framework steps were used as a guide during this process. These steps included reading the data for a sense of the whole, reviewing impressions previously recorded in the data, reading the data for impressions and recording them in memos, studying the memos to determine important interpretations, rereading the data for places where interpretations are supported or challenged, summarizing the interpretations in a draft, reviewing them again, and revising the summary identifying excerpts from the data to support the findings.

Specific themes for the coding were informed by the collected data. After initial categories and themes were identified, the data was reread and the researcher used a focused coding approach, creating more abstract and general codes informed by the initial coding scheme. Moving from the initial to focused codes was a reductionist approach, distilling key information from the raw data. The researcher labeled the themes evident in the data and used them to inform the initial research questions.

After coding, the themes and trends were converted into written analytic statements of emerging themes. The analytic statements were compared to concepts from the literature review for coherence as well as divergence. The analytic statements formed the basis for interpreting the data. The researcher wrote memos to organize the themes and continued to analyze the data. The memos became the draft analysis. After further review and refinement, the draft analysis eventually became the final analysis of the data.

Once the analysis was complete, the researcher interpreted the results. The results described Western Pennsylvania school board members and their experiences. The data also provided insight and generated recommendations for superintendents and those who work with school board members.

3.11   RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The researcher acknowledged that she was a sitting assistant superintendent who regularly worked with school board members. She participated in the orientation process for six new school board members in her district of employment. The researcher also regularly observed school board members making decisions and communicating with others in her school district. Admittedly, the researcher was only able to observe some of these activities and was not fully aware of those orientation processes, decision-making processes, or relationships that were not overt or were hidden from her administrative view. Additionally, as the assistant superintendent, the researcher was not the one primarily responsible for communicating with the school board. Although she was privy to information shared by the superintendent about his interactions with the board, this information was reported by a secondary source.

The researcher's professional responsibilities and knowledge informed her perspective. The researcher acknowledged her role and experiences, but also felt that these were useful in understanding the data collected through the research design. The researcher was confident that the data and ensuing analysis were completed in a way that minimized the effects of any potential researcher bias.

3.12   METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research project and methods were products of the researcher's previous explorations and value judgments, but this was consistent with the constructivist paradigm (Mertens, 2010). The research design relied on some methodological assumptions. It assumed that the Pennsylvania School Boards Association sent the email and the letter inviting participants to the study to all school board members in the identified intermediate units and school districts in this study. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association may have had erroneous emails for some members or may have inadvertently left an email address out of their distribution list. Additionally, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association may have passed on the survey request to school board members, but may have added its own comments that were either helpful or harmful toward generating completed and forthright survey responses.

The researcher was unaware of most comments to school board members from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, but one respondent shared a copy of the first Pennsylvania School Boards Association email with the researcher because he was having trouble accessing the survey. In that email, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association asked respondents from targeted counties to assist with the study on school director motivations for

service, relationships, and decision-making process. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association also stated that the researcher would be sharing the results of the survey with the organization anonymously as a way for them to better tailor their programs and services to school directors, especially in the western part of the state ([Respondent], personal communication, February 9, 2016). The researcher was not privy to the second or third email communications sent by Pennsylvania School Boards Association. The researcher assumed that all survey respondents provided honest answers based on the assurances of confidentiality regarding responses and the security of survey data.

This study presented several possible limitations. The primary limitation was that the study uses a purposive sampling method, choosing to approach potential participants from six intermediate units in Western Pennsylvania. If the response rate were 100%, the data would still only represent 136 individual school districts or approximately 27% of the school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The researcher assumed a response rate that was less than 100%, and the study generated responses from 124 board members for a response rate of 11% of potential respondents. Therefore, the final population was rather small. As a result, the conclusions from this study were not necessarily generalizable to the Western Pennsylvania region or the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Additionally, the participants were regionally situated and the ensuing results were not necessarily applicable to other regions of Pennsylvania.

Another limitation of the study was the potential effect of researcher perspective. The researcher acknowledged that as she was studying this topic as she was also participating in many of the studied processes with board members from her district. Although she believed this work would further expand her understanding of the topic, there was potential that her role also biased her perspectives.

3.13 CONCLUSION

Through the collection of survey data, the researcher planned to better understand the perceptions of school board members in Western Pennsylvania in regards to their motivation for service, methods for making decisions, and relationships with other board members, the community, and district personnel. Specifically, the survey was designed to collect detailed data on school board members' background information, the path to becoming a school board member including recruitment and socialization, decision-making, relationships, and leadership. This investigation sought to build a deeper understanding of a sample of board members within a specific region of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The intent was to analyze this information and provide insight for those who work as superintendents and with school boards.

4.0   DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1   DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONDENTS

The board members of 136 public school districts in roughly the greater Pittsburgh workforce development region formed the potential participant pool in this research study. Of the 1,124 potential respondents, 124 board members or 11% of potential respondents participated in the study. All survey questions were optional for participants to answer; therefore, there are different numbers of respondents for the questions. Additionally, the survey directed respondents to mark "all that apply" for many of the questions. The descriptive statistics were calculated according to the actual number of respondents for each question in the representation of the findings.

4.1.1   Intermediate Unit Representation

When asked, 104 respondents gave their school district name. Respondents represented every Intermediate Unit targeted for this study. Intermediate Units are regional education agencies that provide service to school districts throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. IU1 includes 25 school districts in Fayette, Greene, and Washington Counties and had respondents from 11 distinct school districts representing 12% (n=12) of all respondents. IU3 encompasses 42 school districts in Allegheny County and had respondents from 20 different districts representing 28%

(*n*=29) of respondents. IU4 covers 27 school districts in Butler, Lawrence, and Mercer Counties and had 14 different school districts' school board members respond, representing 18% (*n*=19) of total respondents. IU7 handles the 17 school districts of Westmoreland County and had representatives from 11 school districts comprising 18% (*n*=19) of total respondents. IU27 includes 14 school districts from Beaver County and had respondents from 7 of those districts representing 9% (*n*=9) of the total. IU28 covers Armstrong and Indiana Counties and had respondents from 8 different school districts making up 9% (*n*=9) of total respondents. Two respondents answered the question without providing the names of their school districts, so their school districts remain unknown.

4.1.2 Gender, Age, and Experience Levels

Forty-five males (42%) and 64 females (60%) of 109 respondents provided their gender. One hundred seven respondents provided their age, and resulting ages ranged from 28 years through 74 years. One respondent (<1%) was in his/her 20s, while 6% (*n*=6) were in their 30s, 27% (*n*=29) were in their 40s, 22% (*n*=24) were in their 50s, 36% (*n*=38) were in their 60s and 8% (*n*=9) were in their 70s. The majority of respondents (85%, *n*=91) ranged in age from 40-69. Table 1 reflects this information.

Table 1: Age of Respondents

	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s
n	1	6	29	24	38	9
%	<1	6	27	22	36	8

(*n* = 107)

The proportion of males to females in this study differs from a Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) profile of Pennsylvania school directors where respondents were 59% male and 41% female. The age ranges in this study are consistent with the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) profile of school board members that showed 81% of respondents between the ages of 40-69.

Respondents' experience on a school board ranged from those who just began their tenure to those who have had 30 years serving in their positions. All respondents were school board members from school districts classified through the Pennsylvania School Code of 1949 by population as second class (30,000 or more but less than 350,000), third class (5,000 or more but less than 30,000), and fourth class (less than 5,000). Elected respondents were serving four-year terms. At least one respondent shared that he/she was appointed to a vacant seat on a school board. This appointment and its ensuing term may have been for less than 4 years, depending on when the vacancy happened and the results of the subsequent municipal election.

The analysis divided experience levels on the school board into four-year increments to match the term length of elected board members in the districts represented in this study. Of the 108 total respondents, 47% (n=51) reported between 0-4 years of experience and 28% (n=30) reported between 5-8 years of experience. The majority of respondents (n=81, 75%) reported 8 years of experience or less. This is similar to the 2014 Pennsylvania School Boards Association profile that found 77% of its respondents to have 10 years or less of experience on the board. Table 2 reflects respondents' experience levels.

Table 2: Respondents' Years of Experience

	0-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20	21-24	25-28	30
n	51	30	10	7	5	2	2	1
%	47	28	9	6	5	2	2	<1

(*n* = 108)

4.1.3 Race and Affiliation with the Education Field

Of the 109 respondents who provided their race, 98% (*n*=107) were white, less than 1% (*n*=1) were Asian, and less than 1% (*n*=1) were black. Seventy-two respondents answered the question, "Are you or a close family member employed in the education field?" Ziegler et al. (1974) noted that having close family members in the education field predisposed individuals seeking election to a school board. Of the 72 respondents to this question, 14% (*n*=10) were employed in the education field, 53% (*n*=38) had a close family member employed in the education field, and 26% (*n*=19) were employed in the education field and had a close family member employed in the education field. Therefore, 40% (n=29) worked in the education field and 79% (n=57) had family in the field of education. These findings for those employed in the education field are higher than data from a 2014 Pennsylvania School Boards Association study that found 9% of board members surveyed for that study were in the educational field.

4.1.4 Levels of Education, Occupation, and Income

One hundred nine respondents reported their highest level of education. Twelve percent (*n*=13) completed some college coursework, 6% (*n*=7) had an associate's degree, 33% (*n*=36)

completed a bachelor's degree, 37% (*n=40*) completed a master's degree, and 9% (*n=10*) earned

a doctoral degree. Counts (1927) and Verba et al. (1995) found that well-educated individuals

often served on school boards. Likewise, in this study, the majority of respondents (*n=86*, 79%)

completed a college degree or an advanced college degree. Table 3 shows this information.

Table 3: Respondents' Levels of Education

Level	*n*	*%*
High School Diploma	2	2
Some college coursework	13	12
Associate's Degree	7	6
Professional Certification	1	<1
Bachelor's Degree	36	33
Master's Degree	40	37
Doctoral Degree	10	9

(*n = 109*)

Respondents hailed from a variety of occupations as evidenced by the 108 respondents'

answers. These occupations were categorized in the same groups used in the Pennsylvania

School Boards Association (2014) annual profile of school board members. There were 29%

(*n=31*) in the education field and 24% (*n=26*) from other fields including homemakers, retired

people, advocates, and volunteers. There were 15% (*n=16*) who worked in office and business,

11% (*n=12*) from engineering and technical fields, 7% (*n=8*) from medical and related industries,

and 6% (*n=6*) who worked in other professions including law enforcement, safety, social work,

and the clergy. There were 5% (*n=5*) from the financial field, 2% (*n=2*) from manufacturing and

production, less than 1% (*n=1*) who worked as a tradesperson, and less than 1% (*n=1*) from the

legal field. Counts (1927) made an interesting observation that there was a lack of members of

the clergy serving on the boards that he studied, yet the clergy were integral in establishing

educational systems. This survey showed a similar lack of clergy with only one respondent stating that he/she was a clergy person.

In this survey, given response choices for income levels roughly reflected 2015 data regarding what defined the middle class based on the US Census Bureau's 2013 American Community Survey (Kane and Kiersz, 2015). One hundred seven respondents provided their income level. In Pennsylvania, households earning less than $34,999 were below the middle class (Kane and Kiersz, 2015). Less than 1% (*n*=1) of respondents answered in this range. Households earning between $34,999 and $104,999 were middle class in Pennsylvania (Kane and Kiersz, 2015). There were 45% (*n*=48) of respondents in this category. When a household earned $105,000 or more, it was above the middle class according to Pennsylvania data (Kane and Kiersz, 2015). There were 39% (*n*=42) of respondents in this category. There were 15% (*n*=16) of respondents who chose the "Prefer not to answer" response. The literature reviewed for this study found that school board members usually represented those who enjoy social and economic advantages in a community (Cistone, 1974, 2008; Counts 1927; Lutz, 1980; Martin, 1962; Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2014). The majority of respondents in this study were of the middle class or above the middle class, thus being consistent with the reviewed literature. The descriptive data for the respondents themselves sets the context for who participated in the study. The next section shares descriptive data regarding the first research question.

4.2   MOTIVATIONS FOR SERVING ON A WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

The first research question asked, "What motivates a person in Western Pennsylvania to serve on a public school board?"   The respondents answered a number of questions to reveal their motivations for seeking their school board seat. For each question, respondents read a choice of responses and could check all that applied to them. Each question also provided an opportunity to choose "Other" and write-in a response. In the first step of the analysis, descriptive statistics outlined the number of times a response was chosen and the percentage of respondents that answered that question and chose the response. In the second step of the analysis, the write-in responses showed items that fit into the given responses as well as patterns of responses for those that remained. It is important to note that respondents could choose more than one response for questions so as to capture all of their potential motivations for serving on the school board.

4.2.1   Recruitment to the Board

Of the 123 respondents, the majority (69%, *n*=85) stated that they were self-motivated to run for office. A number of write-in responses fit into this category as well, including a respondent who had been a member of the school board 25 years earlier and decided to seek election again and another who realized there were not enough declared candidates to fill the available seats and chose to run as a write-in candidate rather "than waiting for a more crowded field of candidates." One respondent articulated that he/she ran with four other people against a seated board due to "inaccuracies over budget" and another submitted her name for appointment upon the resignation of a board member. Ziegler et al. (1974) found that 23% of their interviewees were self-starters

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and were motivated on their own for school board service instead of asked by others. Those in this study chose self-motivation at a higher rate than the Ziegler et al. (1974) study.

Community members asked 41 (33%) respondents and school board members asked 40 (33%) respondents to run for a school board seat. Ziegler et al. (1974) found that by recruiting individuals for positions, board members scouted candidates to serve with them. In the written-in responses, one person stated that a citizen's group approached him/her about running for office. Another stated that a friend asked him/her to pursue the seat. Verba et al. (1995) noted that social nexuses often result in people asking other people to become involved in politics, a concept echoed in this survey's data. In fact, in Cistone's (1975) study, 97% of his sample was active in organizations within the community or school prior to election to the school board, thus providing social connections in the community. Two written-in responses were of particular note. One stated that the Pennsylvania School Boards Association asked him/her to run and another stated that a local political party official recruited him/her for office. Table 4 shows the data from this question.

Table 4: Reasons for Running for School Board

Reason	*n*	*%*
Was self-motivated to run	85	69
Asked by a community member	41	33
Asked by a school board member	40	33
Served as a school volunteer	21	17
Other	16	13
Asked by the superintendent	8	7
Asked by a family member	7	6
Asked by a governmental official (not part of the school district)	4	3
Asked by the teacher's union	3	2

$(n = 107)$

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

4.2.2 Experiences or Interactions that Sparked Interest

Respondents identified specific experiences or interactions that interested them in becoming a school board member. The majority of respondents (76%, *n*=94 of 124 responding) cited giving back to the community as a primary reason for seeking a board seat. This was much higher than the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) profile finding of 43% of school board members serving for similar reasons. The literature echoed this sense of civic duty (Reeves, 1954; Tuttle, 1958; Verba et. al, 1995).

There were two other frequently chosen responses. Concern regarding taxes, the budget, and expenses interested 43% (*n*=53) of the respondents. Many (42%, *n*=52) cited disappointment with the school board as a reason that interested them in board service. Other responses to this question included being pleased with the teachers (25%, *n*=31) and wanting to work with like-minded people in the community (22%, *n*=27).

It is of interest that a similar number of people stated that they were disappointed with the superintendent (17%, *n*=21) as those who chose that they were pleased with the superintendent (13%, *n*=16). Additionally, a similar number of respondents chose that they were disappointed with administrators other than the superintendent (12%, *n*=15) as chose that they were pleased with administrators other than the superintendent (10%, *n*=13). Some respondents (10%, *n*=13) cited they were pleased with the school board and some were disappointed with the teachers (8%, *n*=10).

In the list of response choices, there were four response choices rooted in being "disappointed" with people including the school board, the superintendent, administrators other than the superintendent, or the teachers. Overall, 79% (*n*=98) of the reasons cited by respondents were one of these disappointing reasons. This seems consistent with the literature that found that

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if board members do not respond to changes in the community's values, pressure develops to change the power structure and the people on the board (Goldhammer, 1964; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, 2008). There were also four response choices focusing on being "pleased" with people including the school board, the superintendent, administrators other than the superintendent, or the teachers. When combined, 59% (*n*=73) of the reasons given by respondents were for one of these positive reasons. Therefore, negative reasons interested respondents in serving on the school board more prevalently than positive reasons according to these results.

A number (34%, *n*=42) of respondents chose "Other" and supplied their own specific experiences or interactions that interested them in becoming a school board member. One theme that emerged was interest in the educational program in the district with some respondents citing negatives about the educational program such as being dissatisfied with the achievement and being concerned about the skills of graduates. Others focused on positive aspects of the educational program with responses such as "wanted to be a part of a group that could affect the educational possibilities of students in my district" and "wanted to support and shape education." Two responses showed an interest in education with text including, "genuinely interested in the proper and comprehensive education of our youth" and "abiding interest in public education."

Additional written-in responses included having children in the district or having been involved with the district in the past and wanting to run for the school board. Ziegler et al. (1974) echoed this idea that after involvement in parent-teacher organizations or other school district committees, individuals will express motivation to run for a school board seat. A number of respondents also shared that they were educators and wanted to bring their perspectives and experiences to the board, an idea also reflected in Ziegler et al.'s (1974) work. Some even felt that they had skills to share with answers such as "bring my skills to bear" and "unique skill set

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to contribute" that interested them in seeking a spot on the school board. One person explained

that there was an opening on the board and "…no one at that time was willing to step up. I felt

compelled to offer." Table 5 reflects this data.

Table 5: Experiences Sparking School Board Interest

Reason	*n*	*%*
Interested in giving back to the community	94	76
Concerned about taxes, the budget, and expenses	53	43
Disappointed with the school board	52	42
Other	42	34
Pleased with the teachers	31	25
Wanted to work with like-minded people in my community	27	22
Disappointed with the superintendent	21	17
Pleased with the superintendent	16	13
Disappointed with administrators (other than the superintendent)	15	12
Pleased with administrators (other than the superintendent)	13	10
Pleased with the school board	13	10
Disappointed with the teachers	10	8
Wanted to be an elected official	5	4

$(n = 124)$

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

4.2.3   Topics that Sparked Interest

To learn if specific topics interested people in becoming school board members, respondents

checked all topics of interest from a given list and/or marked "Other" and added their own topic.

The majority of respondents (67%, *n*=83 of 123 responding) were interested in curricular issues such as programs of study, course offerings, etc.   Fifty-four percent (*n*=66) of respondents marked financial issues.   Extra curricular issues interested 41% (*n*=51) of the respondents. Similar numbers of respondents chose many of the remaining answer choices.

Twenty-two respondents (18%) marked "Other" and provided a written-in response. Of the 22 respondents, 10 of their written-in topics of interest (8% of all respondents) centered on buildings and grounds citing the need to build new buildings or close existing buildings. There were 5 written-in topics of interest (4% of all respondents) that focused on the educational program in some way with providing responses such as "supporting public education in general" and "overall education of ALL the children in our district." One respondent commented about the school board as a whole by sharing "the school board needed the help." Table 6 shows the information from this question.

Table 6: Topics Sparking School Board Interest

Reason	*n*	%
Curricular issues (such as programs of study, course offerings, etc.)	83	67
Financial issues	66	54
Extra curricular issues (such as clubs, sports teams, etc.)	51	41
Policy issues	46	37
Instructional issues (such as how teachers were teaching, etc.)	44	36
Technology issues	39	32
Hiring issues	38	31
Assessments (such as standardized tests, etc.)	32	26
School safety	30	24
Special education	29	24
Other	22	18

(*n* = 123)

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

Some key connections emerged when comparing the information from this survey question to the reviewed literature. Verba et al. (1995) wrote that involvement in politics happens for people when they become excited about issues or connect their service to their interests. A number of issues sparked school board interest for this respondent group, thus supporting this idea. Additionally, Deckman (2007) found that respondents had some interest in shaping policy at the local educational level as a part of their interest in school board service. These opportunities existed in most of the response choices in the survey. Dahl (1989) simply stated, "The goals and motives that animate leaders are evidently as varied as the dreams of men" (p. 95).

4.2.4 Political Aspirations

Often, a motivating factor for board membership is the notion of being involved in governance as a statesman or trustee of the public good (Reeves, 1954; Tuttle, 1958). Of the 124 total respondents to this question, 86% (*n=107*) reported that they did not have additional political aspirations and 14% (*n=17*) reported that they do have additional political aspirations. The school board is usually not a stepping-stone for political advancement (Ziegler et. al., 1974) and the majority of respondents in this survey did not have additional political aspirations. Respondents explained their choice, thus providing some additional insight into the descriptive data.

Goldhammer (1964) concluded that school board service must have personal satisfaction for individuals to be interested in the positions, a concept that emerged in respondents' answers. Of those who stated that they were not interested in pursuing additional political positions, many shared that they were pleased with their school board positions. Comments along these lines

included, "After 30 years as board member, I feel my experience is best used by continued service" and "I feel that this is where I can do the most good for our community." One respondent stated, "This is my second term and I think everyone should do it; I have learned a lot about how the school and politics operate." Another respondent stated, "I have a strong distaste for politics. Most people have some type of agenda. I just want to help and do the right thing."

Others that answered "no" to additional political aspirations seemed to have more negative explanations for their answers. For example, one respondent stated, "It's a thankless job…someone is always unhappy" while another shared, "I am educational, not political." Some respondents were to the point with their comments sharing, "None at all, "Definitely not," "Simply, No," and "The responsibilities of being a board member is enough." One poignant comment was, "I never wanted to do this. I felt I had to. I'll be happy to be back out of politics."

There were a wider variety of responses for those that did not plan to pursue additional political positions than for those who did have other political aspirations. For those who answered "yes," their explanations showed some uncertainty with comments such as, "Not quite sure, maybe higher elected office, depends on circumstances" and "Maybe, local municipal government." Others responded with generalities such as, "Unsure at this time but I would like to continue" and "I wish to make my community better, so I would like to find a way to do so."

Some respondents were more specific about their political aspirations. Multiple respondents mentioned positions at the state level with comments such as, "Really would like to run for state house," "State Government," and "I have privately considered running for state rep." One respondent shared that he/she has been encouraged to run for a state congressional seat, but that it is still an idea.

One respondent stated, "I have found that the school boards are not true decision makers when it comes to education and local taxes. Harrisburg is where those issues need addressed." Harrisburg is the capital of Pennsylvania and the seat of the Commonwealth's government. The school board and local school district are not independent of or equal to the state (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). School board members serve as agents of the state, but must work within the state's regulatory structure (Campbell et. al, 1990). Knowing that the school board is a quasi-municipal corporation or political division of the state, this respondent sees a stronger opportunity to make decisions at the state level rather than at the local school board level as the arm of the state.

Respondents provided information about their motivations to serve on a public school board. Their answers informed the first research question, "What motivates a person in Western Pennsylvania to serve on a public school board?" The following section delves into the second research question.

4.3   DECISION-MAKING ON A WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

The second research question asked, "How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members make decisions?" To inform this question, respondents answered a number of items including questions about their socialization on the school board to learn how it worked, about how they gathered information about issues affecting the school board, and about the stages of decision-making. Respondents also provided information about the ways that other school board members influenced their decision-making. Additionally, respondents described a decision that they made as a school board member that made them proud and identified decisions that "keep

you up at night." The analysis included statistics (when available for the question) and emerging themes from written-in responses. These emerging themes appear in the next chapter of this dissertation.

4.3.1 Socialization on the School Board

Newly elected school board members are often largely unfamiliar with the role of a school board, the school program, and associated responsibilities (Kerr, 1964). Therefore, learning about how the school board operates once elected to it is important for a new member. In fact, socialization is vital to the continuance and effectiveness of the social system that is the school board (Cistone, 1975). To understand how this occurs, respondents identified how they learned about how the school board operated by choosing all applicable answers from a given list. One hundred twenty-three respondents provided answers to this question.

The two primary ways that respondents learned how the school board operated were through other school board members (64%, $n=79$) and through literature from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (59%, $n=72$). Another significant learning experience for new board members was learning from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association orientation session(s) (50%, $n=61$). Additionally, 57 respondents (46%) learned about their roles from the superintendent outside of an orientation process.

Approximately a third of respondents learned about school board operations from the school district. This learning came specifically through district-organized orientation session(s) (34%, $n=42$) and from literature from the school district (31%, $n=38$). School level administrators such as principals also assisted outside of an orientation process for 22% of

respondents (*n=27*) and district level administrators other than the superintendent helped outside of an orientation process for 20% of respondents (*n=25*).

Thirty-three respondents (27%) marked "Other" for this question and provided explanation as to how they learned their position. The majority (10% of overall respondents, *n=12*) who marked "Other" either served in education in some capacity as an administrator or teacher or had family members previously on the board. Additionally, a number of respondents cited their prior exposure to the board by attending meetings before being elected with responses such as, "I had attended over 95% of the meetings in the five years prior to running for a seat on the board which gave me a unique perspective on how things ran" and "I also attended meetings for about one year prior to my election so I had some good basis of operations." Learning is social and situated in context (Facer, 2011). The ways that respondents in this survey learned about their role on the school board echoes these social and situational characteristics of learning. Respondents shared that they learned from others or from attending meetings, thus learning through social and contextual interactions. Table 7 represents all of these data.

Table 7: Learning How the School Board Operated

Method	n	%
Other school board members	79	64
Literature from the Pennsylvania School Board Association	72	59
Pennsylvania School Board Association Orientation session(s)	61	50
Superintendent (outside of an orientation process)	57	46
District-organized orientation session(s)	42	34
Literature from the school district	38	31
Other	33	27
School level administrators, such as principals (outside of an orientation process)	27	22
District level administrators other than the superintendent (outside of an orientation process)	25	20
Community members	8	7
Teachers	8	7

($n = 123$)

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

4.3.2 Gathering Information for Decisions

A board of directors makes decisions as part of its responsibilities (Bailey & Peck, 2013). Before making decisions, board members gather information about issues to inform themselves on the topic. Respondents identified how often they independently gathered information about issues from listed sources using a four item Likert scale with the choices of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Frequently." Respondents could also mark "Other" and provide a written explanation of another source of information and the frequency with which they used it.

There were 117 respondents who provided information on where they gather information regarding a decision. The two primary sources of information for the respondents were school district financial documents such as the budget, audits, etc. (86%, $n=101$) and school board

packets or meeting information provided by the school district (85%, *n*=99). The school district

policy manual was the third most populous choice with 56% of respondents (*n*=65). These were

the only choices in the provided list that were part of the school district's documentation.

Therefore, the primary sources of information chosen by the respondents were from the school

district and these sources represented formal knowledge in the form of official documents (Sallis

& Jones, 2002).

Other sources for gathering information included the Pennsylvania School Boards

Association (38%, *n*=45) and newspapers (28%, *n*=33). Five respondents (4%) chose "Other"

and wrote in responses. Their responses included "talking to constituents" and information from

the Intermediate Unit. Additional responses included, "scholarly articles about issues we are

considering" and "academic literature." One respondent noted that his/her personal experience

in teaching was a source of information. Table 8 shows the data for this question.

Table 8: Gathering Information

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
School district financial documents (such as the budget, audits, etc.)	0		0		16	15	101	86
School board packets or meeting information provided by the school district	1	<1	0		17	15	99	85
School district policy manual	2	2	7	6	42	36	65	56
Pennsylvania School Boards Association	2	2	9	8	60	51	45	38
Newspapers	9	8	18	15	56	48	33	28
Websites	22	19	27	23	48	41	17	15
Magazines	22	19	33	28	48	41	11	9
Other	6	5	0		1	<1	5	4
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	55	47	34	29	23	20	3	3

(*n* = 117)

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

4.3.3 Decision-Making Stages

According to the literature, decision-making occurs in stages (Cunningham as cited in Goldhammer, 1964; Goldhammer, 1964; Mintzberg et al., 1976; Smoley, 1999). Respondents considered a recent decision made in their service on the school board and articulated the time spent on given decision-making stages. Respondents used a five item Likert scale with choices of "None of my time," "Very little of my time," "Some of my time," "A lot of my time," and "Most of my time" to provide information for the question. One hundred seventeen respondents answered this question, however some respondents only marked answers for some of the provided stages of decision-making instead of all of them. The reported percentages were calculated based on the 117 total respondents for the question. The results report the respondents' combined total of "A lot of my time" and "Most of my time" for each decision-making stage.

Overall, the respondents reported that gathering information while making a decision takes more of their time (63%, $n=74$). Deliberating with others (55%, $n=64$) and working for consensus with other board members (55%, $n=64$)) were the next most frequently chosen responses, followed closely by making the final decision (54%, $n=63$). Considering alternative actions (48%, $n=56$) and defining the issue (43%, $n=50$) also garnered some attention, but respondents reported that these two decision-making stages took the least amount of their time.

The school board, like other organizations, is a governing body designed to make decisions (Feldman & Kanter, 1965). The data for this question, however, did not generate large differences in time spent on each decision-making stage. Overall, all of the decision-making stages seemed to take "Some of my time" or "A lot of my time" for most of the respondents.

Interestingly, very few respondents chose "None of my time" for the provided decision-making stages. Table 9 shows this information.

Table 9: Decision-Making Stages

	None of my time		Very little of my time		Some of my time		A lot of my time		Most of my time		Total of A lot and Most of my time	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Defining the issue	0		6	5	61	52	44	38	6	5	50	43
Gathering information	1	<1	2	2	40	34	64	55	10	9	74	63
Deliberating with others	0		9	77	44	38	55	47	9	77	64	55
Considering alternative actions	0		4	3	57	49	49	42	7	6	56	48
Working for consensus with other board members	2	2	16	14	33	28	46	39	18	15	64	55
Making the final decision	1	<1	12	10	40	34	47	40	16	14	63	54

(*n* = 117)

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

The second research question asked, "How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members make decisions?" In relation to the second research question, three additional questions required open-ended responses. In one, respondents shared the ways that other school board members influenced their decision-making on the school board. In the other two, respondents described a decision that they made as a school board member that made the proud and decisions related to their service that "keep you up at night." The emerging themes from these open-ended questions as well as other open-ended questions in the survey showed commonality. The emerging themes cut across multiple survey questions and research questions.

As a result, they appear in the next chapter. The following section presents data related to the third research question.

4.4 COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

The third research question asked, "How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?" For this research question, respondents provided information on their frequency of communication with different types of people. Respondents also shared their communication methods and the frequency of using these methods for board matters.

4.4.1 Conversation Partners for School Board Members

School board members converse with many people as they fulfill their roles. Understanding with whom board members converse helps to illuminate sources of information and relationships. Respondents viewed a list of people that they may communicate with in their role as a school board member and used a Likert scale with choices of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Frequently" to show the frequency with which they communicated with the identified individuals. One hundred seventeen respondents answered this question, however some of the respondents only provided answers for a few of the people on the given list. All percentages were calculated based on the 117 total respondents for the question.

The majority of respondents frequently communicated with either other school board members in their district (74%, *n*=87) or the superintendent (72%, *n*=84). Considering the superintendent is the 10th member of the school board (non-voting) in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the data indicated that the majority of conversations related to board service happened between and among those on the board. These were overwhelmingly the most frequently chosen responses. Because of the complexity of running a school district, school board members often rely on the recommendation of the superintendent (National School Boards Association, 1975). Considering that the superintendent is someone that respondents shared they communicate with frequently, he/she has multiple opportunities to provide recommendations to this respondent group.

Respondents also indicated that they communicated with parents rather frequently (51%, *n*=60). Additionally, 33% (*n*=39) of respondents identified that they communicated frequently with community members who are not parents of school age children. Respondents also communicated with school district level administrators (other than the superintendent) at approximately the same frequency (32%, *n*=37). There were 28 respondents (24%) who shared that they communicated frequently with teachers and 27 respondents (23%) who frequently communicated with students. Similarly, 26 respondents (22%) marked that they communicated with school building level administrators (other than the superintendent) frequently. Policy makers are sensitive to the inputs from constituent groups (Verba et. al, 1995) and this respondent group communicated with a variety of constituents in their roles as school board members.

Respondents shared that the people that they communicated with the least frequently were political party leaders in their region (3%, *n*=3). Interestingly, 25% (*n*=29) of respondents

marked that they never communicated with members of their religious community and 23% (*n*=27) of respondents indicated that they never communicated with political party leaders in their region in their role as a school board member. Those who responded "Other" to this question provided very few written-in responses with some citing what they hoped to do in regards to communication instead of what they currently were doing as board members. Table 10 represents information from this question.

Table 10: Frequency of Communication with Others

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Other school board members in my district	0		6	5	23	20	87	74
Superintendent	0		4	3	29	25	84	72
Parents	0		7	6	50	43	60	51
Community members (not parents of school age children)	1	<1	13	11	64	55	39	33
School district level administrators (other than the superintendent)	1	<1	17	15	62	53	37	32
Teachers	5	4	17	15	66	56	28	24
Students	8	7	26	22	54	46	27	23
School building level administrators (other than the superintendent)	2	2	24	21	65	56	26	22
Business leaders	3	3	36	31	59	50	19	16
School support staff (such as secretaries, custodians)	7	6	30	26	61	52	19	16
School board members from other districts	16	14	45	38	37	32	18	15
Senior citizens in my school district	3	3	38	32	57	49	16	14
Members of your religious community	29	25	31	26	43	37	14	12
Other governmental officials	7	6	30	26	68	58	11	9
Political party leaders in my region	27	23	52	44	34	29	3	3
Other	5	4	3	3	0		2	2

(*n*=117)

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

The school board and school board members cannot serve or communicate with every constituent group. Constituents, however, exert influence on leaders directly, and often

indirectly (Dahl, 1989). The respondents communicated with school board members within the district and the superintendent more frequently than with other groups. Although the substance of the communications is unknown, other school board members and the superintendent had more opportunities to exert influence by the sheer frequency of conversations.

4.4.2 Methods of Communication for Board Members

Respondents identified the methods that they used to communicate on their own with their constituents regarding board matters and the frequency of use for the chosen methods. To indicate frequency, respondents used a Likert scale with responses of "Never," "Rarely," "Sometimes," and "Frequently." Respondents could also mark "Other" and provide explanation. One respondent answered "Other," but the answer actually fit into one of the provided categories. One hundred sixteen total respondents answered this question, but some respondents only provided answers for some of the given choices instead of all of the given choices. The percentages were calculated based on the 116 total respondents.

Face-to-face conversations dominated as the method of communication most frequently used with 44% (*n*=51) of respondents choosing it. Other frequently chosen communication methods included email (22%, *n*=25) and school events (20%, *n*=23). Seventeen respondents (15%) cited telephone calls as the most frequently used method of communication. Viewed together, these results show that respondents talked to people in person, at school events, or on the phone as well as engaged via email more frequently than the other given methods. Establishing strong communication systems and relationships with stakeholders is a hallmark of effective boards (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2016). The respondent group regularly did this in personal ways such as conversations and email exchanges.

It is interesting to note that 93% of respondents (n=108) never used Twitter to communicate with others. Newer technologies such as Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms may help improve citizen representation in government by allowing for more direct interaction with government officials (Graham, 2014). It seems that this respondent group shied away from those newer technologies as methods for directly communicating with constituents in their role as a school board member. Table 11 represents the information from this question.

Table 11: Methods of Communication with Others

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Frequently	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Face-to-face conversations	2	2	6	5	49	42	51	44
Email	19	16	27	23	41	35	25	22
School events	8	7	15	13	70	60	23	20
Telephone calls	14	12	38	33	47	41	17	15
Meetings outside of school board meetings	31	27	40	34	35	30	6	5
Facebook	76	66	19	16	12	10	5	4
Websites	82	71	17	15	11	9	3	3
Newsletters	92	79	15	13	3	3	2	2
Text messages	46	40	35	30	32	28	2	2
Twitter	108	93	3	3	0		2	2
Mailings	94	81	15	13	2	2	1	<1
Other	6	5	0		1	<1	0	

(*n*=116)

Note: Responses were not mutually exclusive and so do not total 100%.

4.4.3 Leadership Styles

Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) identified three types of leadership styles: involving leadership, goal leadership, and engaging leadership. Involving leadership is when a leader works with others to

set direction and determine how to achieve organizational goals. Goal leadership is when a leader focuses on setting direction for the organization and leads others in achieving these goals. Engaging leadership is when a leader helps others to achieve as members of the organization. Respondents used a sliding scale from 1-10 to show how frequently they used each type of given leadership style as a school board member. The higher the number for a given item, the more frequently the respondent used that type of leadership style.

The respondents used involving leadership at a higher rate (average value=7.56) than the other choices. Knowing that the school board is responsible for governing the school district and setting direction through its decision-making, it is not necessarily surprising that respondents marked involving leadership as more frequently used than the others since involving leadership is working with others to set direction and determine how to achieve organizational goals. Additionally, leaders in a system influence each other, often in a way that honors the leader's beliefs and is palatable to the other leaders in the system (Dahl, 1989). Involving leadership supports leaders influencing each other as they work together to set direction and determine organizational goals. Table 12 shows all of the responses to this leadership question.

Table 12: Leadership Styles of Board Members

Leadership Style	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Average Value	Standard Deviation
Involving Leadership (I work with others to set direction and determine how to achieve organizational goals.)	2.00	10.00	7.56	1.87
Goal Leadership (I focus on setting direction for the organization and leading others in achieving these goals.)	1.00	10.00	6.93	2.34
Engaging Leadership (I help others to achieve as members of the organization.)	0.00	10.00	6.88	2.19

(n=107)

Note: Respondents used a scale with values of 1-10; the higher the number, the more frequently the style was used.

The third research question asked, "How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?" Two additional open-ended questions informed the third research question. In the first question, respondents shared the information or experiences that would make their job easier as a school board member. For the second open-ended question, respondents gave advice to superintendents working with school boards. The data for these questions were coded for emerging themes, but these emerging themes showed commonality with other emerging themes from other open-ended questions in the survey. Because the emerging themes spanned multiple survey questions and research questions, a separate chapter presents the data to show the broader concepts in the data. The next chapter (Chapter 5) presents the emerging themes from the open-ended questions in the survey.

4.5   CROSS TABS AND FILTERS

After completing the descriptive analysis of the data, the data were explored using cross tabs and filtering analysis procedures. Multiple cross tab relationships were explored through the analysis using gender, level of education, income, and employment in the education field in comparison to other questions and their variables. For example, gender was explored in relation to methods of communication and level of education was explored in relation to communication partners. Additionally, experiences or interactions that motivated board service were viewed in relation to topics of interest for board service. Communication partners were explored in relation to the methods of communication of respondents. In all, 35 different cross-tab and filtered analyses were conducted on the data. No relationships emerged from the data.   This is consistent with the reviewed literature where almost no relationships were regularly reported, with only a few studies finding that the male and female motivations for seeking a board seat may differ (Bers, 1978; Deckman, 2007).

5.0   EMERGING THEMES AND ANALYSIS

5.1   DATA ANALYSIS AND CREATION OF EMERGING THEMES

The survey posed multiple open-ended questions, responses to which are the subjects of this chapter. The responses for each question were read to gather an initial sense of the data. Responses were reread and coded inductively for emerging themes for each individual question. As the data analysis continued question after question, it became evident that the emerging themes were not question specific, but rather applied across survey questions and research questions. Considering the broader nature of these emerging themes, they appear with accompanying analysis under their own chapter of this dissertation. The themes primarily support the second research question, "How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members make decisions?" and the third research question, "How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?"

Different numbers of respondents provided answers to each of the questions. The specific questions analyzed for emerging themes and their numbers of respondents included:

- In what ways do other school board members influence your decision-making on the school board? (n=109)

- Please describe a decision that you made as a member of the school board that makes you proud. (*n=103*)

- What decisions related to your service as a school board member "keep you up at night"? (*n=108*)

- What would you say is your toughest challenge as a school board member? (*n=107*)

- In your work as a school board member, what information or experiences would make your job easier? (*n=101*)

- If you could give advice to superintendents working with school boards, what would you say? (*n=104*)

- What else would you like to share that is not already covered in this survey? (*n=57*)

5.2   EMERGING THEMES

5.2.1   Emerging Theme #1: Personnel and facilities decisions stand out to school board members

It is the school board's responsibility to hire personnel for the school district and to make decisions regarding facilities. Respondents noted decisions related to these two topics as those that made them proud as well as those that "keep you up at night." Additionally, these themes showed themselves in respondents' answers regarding to their toughest challenges as board members.

Administrative teams may conduct personnel interviews and recommend candidates for employment, but the school board hires personnel by voting at board meetings. It is only

through their work at a board meeting and their action as a corporate board that hiring takes place (Reeves, 1954). Through their answers to three questions (decisions that made them proud, decisions that kept them up at night, and their toughest challenges), 27% of respondents (*n*=85 out of a total of 318) regularly shared that hiring is something that was difficult or that it was something that made them proud. One respondent shared, "It is critical we hire the best people" while another offered that something that kept him/her up at night is "Hiring the right people for the job." Hiring was also something that elicited pride. A respondent mentioned, "I am proud of the many hires we have made over the years." This sentiment echoed in multiple respondents' answers. Another cited that hiring administrators was a source of pride, a concept that many other respondents repeated, sometimes with specific positions mentioned such as the Assistant Superintendent, the Business Manager, teachers, and even the Solicitor.

For the Western Pennsylvania public school boards surveyed for this project, the school board is responsible for hiring the superintendent. No school board can successfully accomplish the demands of their governance without a working partnership with the superintendent (Eadie, 2003). Multiple respondents mentioned that the hiring of the superintendent was a source of pride. One eloquently shared that she was proud of, "Our decision to hire our superintendent. That is the best decision ever made as a board member." Another offered that the hiring process for the superintendent elicited pride for him/her, but for other reasons, sharing, "Actually it was pushing/convincing the remaining members of the board that an internal candidate was not suitable for the Superintendent vacancy."   All of the respondents who mentioned a superintendent's hire did so for the question that asked them about a decision that made them proud.

In a Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) profile of school directors, 13% shared that personnel/negotiations were the most difficult area of school board operation to understand for board members. In this survey, respondents also shared that personnel issues were a challenge. One respondent stated that his/her toughest challenge was "Dealing with contractual obligations and the limitations that are put in place by collective bargaining agreements." A number of respondents said that the teachers' unions were challenging. One respondent simply stated that his/her toughest challenge was "Dealing with personnel issues."

In addition to personnel decisions, school boards are responsible to make decisions regarding facilities in a school district. The board, as the policy-making arm of the school district, determines changes in the school system, including facility deletions and additions (Reeves, 1954). They approve or deny upgrades, renovations, building configurations, construction, and the closing of schools. These school facility decisions may be impacted by a number of factors including demographics, constituent demands, policies/standards/institutional factors, school board decision-making practices and attitudes, and site considerations/land availability (Norton, 2007). Even with all of these influences, there were 25 respondents (24%) who shared that decisions regarding facilities elicited pride for them.

Respondents were proud of construction projects in their districts. One shared that he/she was proud of the "Decision to move forward with new school buildings and renovations" and another mentioned, "We're building a new school and renovating an older one." Multiple respondents shared that they were proud of upgrading buildings for safety, comfort, and program needs. Some were proud of closing buildings or consolidating schools and the decisions made to support these actions. One respondent mentioned being proud for "Consolidating schools in the school district because of declining enrollment." Another was proud of closing a building

because it saved millions for the district and a different respondent mentioned being proud of closing an underutilized building.

A few respondents were proud of decisions *not* to support building projects. One mentioned being proud of the "Fiscally responsible decision not to support a new gymnasium at this time." Paring back a gymnasium project was a source of pride for another respondent. A respondent even shared that he/she was proud that "I voted against building a new school in downtown [town name]." Considering the financial implications of building projects, it seems appropriate for board members to be pleased when they voted against them as well as when they voted for them.

5.2.2 Emerging Theme #2: District finances challenge school board members

Financial issues emerged as a challenge for school board members. Respondents mentioned finances or related concepts in their answers to multiple questions. Some noted that financial decisions kept them "up at night" while others mentioned financial decisions as a source of pride. Financial issues were some of the toughest challenges for school board members. Some members desired better financial information or a better understanding of financial concepts as something that would help make their jobs easier.

Financial issues overwhelmingly surfaced as something that keeps board members "up at night." Responses included, "Anything related to tax increases, additional spending, or job eliminations" as worrisome. Another said that "Costs and taxes" keep him/her up at night while another shared simply, "Budget, budget, budget." A few respondents shared that furloughing teachers is troublesome as well, with answers such as "Potential furloughs" and "Budget and furloughs." This struggle with financial issues was consistent with the profile completed by the

Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) where directors felt that budget/funding issues (37%) as well as pension issues (37%) were some of the most important issues facing public schools.

Balancing fiscal needs with educational needs was also a source of stress for the respondents. One respondent shared that it was hard, "Keeping responsible stewardship of community resources in balance with the needs of students." Multiple respondents' answers echoed this balance of spending responsibly while meeting district needs. A respondent lamented this fact by stating that the "Inability to get what the kids need" keeps him/her up at night. One respondent shared that his/her toughest challenge was "Keeping the balance between being fiscally responsible and giving the greatest number of opportunities to the students." Another mentioned that it was difficult to consider "Equality versus equity in making decisions with great financial repercussions." One respondent, however, shared that he/she was proud of "Budgetary issues that put the students first." School boards, through their decisions, decide the future (Reeves, 1954). The respondents in this study indicated that they felt the weight of that responsibility as they tried to balance financial realities with educational needs.

The fiscal implications of the decisions of the board concerned respondents. Some mentioned the community in their answers, with one specifically stating, "Financial decisions that will affect community members" as particularly difficult. Another worried about financial issues in the future and one respondent simply wanted "More precise budgetary numbers." Multiple responses discussed the absence of a budget for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and subsequent lack of school funding, an issue that plagued Pennsylvania school districts when the respondents completed the survey. Another shared that the toughest challenge was "Explaining to the public how the budget process and taxes actually work in the

Commonwealth." One respondent, however, mentioned as a source of pride the "Development of a financial plan to facilitate General Obligation Bond issues," thus providing a plan for the financial future in that district.

Respondents shared their struggles with understanding finances in a school district. Respondents provided some specific thoughts as to what would make their jobs easier. One respondent stated, "I would like to have a better understanding of school finance, taxes, and budget development" and another mentioned that he/she would like "More education on fund-based accounting practices." One respondent desired "Easy to slice and dice financial information" to make his/her job easier. A candid respondent shared, "I feel like I need to take an accounting class. Better financial information and education would be excellent." One of the most difficult areas to understand for school board operations in a Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014) profile included school finance/budget with 20% of that profile's respondents mentioning it.

One of the school board's primary responsibilities is to make decisions regarding the finances of the school district. Newly elected school board members are often largely unfamiliar with the role of a school board, the school program, and associated responsibilities (Eadie, 2003; Kerr, 1964; Lutz, 1980). Respondents affirmed this idea in their responses to multiple questions, sharing that finances were something that were unfamiliar or challenging for them.

5.2.3   Emerging Theme #3: Community relationships can be difficult for school board members

Relationships with community members surfaced as a theme in the open-ended survey questions. Some respondents wished that communication from and to the community were easier. One

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shared, "Communication is sometimes an issue. I don't always hear the same information from outside the school as do some of our other members who are more involved in the community." Goldhammer (1964) noted that in general, school board members are representative of a narrow slice of the larger community. If, however, a school board member is not part of a subset of the community, he/she may not hear information from that particular group.

Other respondents wished for better ways to communicate with the community. One respondent thought that "If my constituents would be able to be informed easily" that his/her job would be easier. Another noted that "A better educated public would help in the decision making process." Other respondents mentioned that it would be helpful if taxpayers understood the school board's roles and duties, especially surrounding budgeting, taxation, hiring, and contractual obligations. Kirst (2008) noted that the public is largely ignorant of the specific board roles and functions, supporting the comments of the respondents.

Some respondents wanted to gain the trust of the community, with one respondent specifically sharing, "Members of the public trusting us and believing we will do what is best" would make the job easier. A few respondents noted that board meetings do not enjoy many audience members unless there is an issue, and one particular respondent shared it would have helped to have "Better feedback systems with the district's stakeholders, as very few people attend the meetings." Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) mentioned the fact that very few people attend school board meetings, which they attributed to the more ceremonial nature of meetings instead of opportunities for conducting rigorous discourse, thus making them uninteresting and rather meaninglessness for the public. This low attendance rate emerged as a concern in respondents' answers.

5.2.4   Emerging Theme #4: Listening to and dialoguing with other school board members is beneficial and challenging

Listening to others emerged as a critical theme in respondents' answers. One respondent seemed to represent the theme by saying, "I listen and weigh the opinions of all other members (opposition included) as part of my decision making process." Another respondent continued the theme by stating, "I listen a lot to find common ground." Other respondents echoed these ideas by saying that listening helped them to hear different viewpoints from their board colleagues. For many, listening led to dialogue and more clarity on a topic. One respondent shared, "Other board members bring perspectives (of constituents or students) and implications (consequences) of decisions that I may not have considered or contemplated." Another respondent added, "By discussing issues, other members can sometimes help me to see things from a different perspective and that can lead me to a different decision." Multiple respondents saw the differing perspectives as a way to challenge their thinking and open up new possibilities in their minds. This supports the idea that meetings are opportunities for deliberation (Reeves, 1954).

Many respondents also discussed how the knowledge and expertise of others helped them when making a decision. One respondent answered, "I rely on their expertise and knowledge to provide a different point of view sometimes, in areas where I don't have much information or experience, this helps guide me to make up my mind." Another respondent mentioned, "Learning from colleagues is extremely valuable." One respondent shared, "We are fortunate with our current board to have a balance of people with a wide-range of talents and experiences. We rely on each others' areas of expertise as we consider educational issues and the direction of our district." When a school board makes decisions, it does so in a social context with input

from others (Bloomberg & Sunshine, 1963; Kirst, 1970). These respondents valued the input and expertise from their board colleagues.

Some respondents mentioned that they listen to others, but that they made up their own mind about issues. Some were guided by what they felt was best for the students and the district and others appreciated hearing how and why decisions had been made in certain ways in the past to inform their thinking about a current issue. Even for those who said that they made up their own minds, their responses often shared that they listened to and learned from others while making decisions.

The way that organizational skills are applied affects decision-making for a school board (Kirst, 1970), and frustrations with others who are also deliberating on those decisions may affect the efficacy of the system. In this survey, working with others was something that kept respondents "up at night," and some of the toughest challenges for the respondents. One shared that it kept him/her up at night "When I fail to persuade my colleagues on an issue" while another mentioned that it is a challenge "Gaining consensus on difficult decisions." Another respondent confided that, "Being patient when other people don't see the issues the way I think they should is a challenge." Multiple respondents shared answers similar to one that simply stated that the "Lack of knowledge of other board members" is tough for them. Another shared, "You cannot govern on ideology. Governing requires compromise."

Although respondents shared that working with others on the board was challenging for them, many respondents also offered ideas of ways to improve their board and its work. Multiple respondents wanted to see how other boards hold meetings and accomplish tasks, with one who shared that "Attending board meetings at other districts and trying to determine best

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practices" would make the job easier. Another wished that his/her board could see how other boards do their work.

Some respondents commented specifically on the backgrounds of their fellow board members. A respondent shared that his/her job would be easier if there were a "Better understanding by all members exactly what a board member's job is." Boards comprised of lay people are not expected to understand their governing roles (Houston & Eadie, 2002). A few respondents mentioned a desire for more requirements to be eligible for election to the board or that more training for board members once elected would be helpful. One respondent stated, "School board members need to remember that their three roles involve working with the superintendent, developing a budget, and creating policy. Parent concerns, while always present, are better left to those administrators that are directly involved."

5.2.5 Emerging Theme #5: Being a school board member comes with personal challenges

Multiple respondents shared their personal challenges in being a school board member. Many cited that the time required for school board service was difficult to balance the volume of work and the needs of the position. One respondent shared, "School board members put in hours and hours of work behind the scenes." This lack of time for completing board work showed up in the 2014 Pennsylvania School Boards Association member profile as well, with 3% of responding members listing it as a difficult to understand area of school board operation In 1954, Reeves stated that school board members spent over twenty million hours every year conducting school district business. In the current time, the number of hours may even be higher due to increased mandates and the increased complexity of issues.

Other respondents mentioned personal characteristics that were tough challenges such as, "Keeping my emotions in check" and "Keeping my opinions to myself." A few respondents provided an indication of the challenge of the position with comments such as, "Knowing things I can't tell the public" and "Remembering that I am a school board member and not the district superintendent." Boundaries between the superintendent and the school board are often unclear (Kirst, 2008). The lack of clarity may create tension or role confusion (Smoley, 1999). Some respondents echoed these ideas from the literature.

Decision-making emerged as a personal challenge for many respondents. One respondent shared that, "Recognizing the complexity of issues" was a challenge. Others shared personal challenges with decisions using comments such as, "Accepting the vote of the board when it is in direct opposition of my vote" and "Keeping my mouth shut and making decisions based on fact and not on knee jerk reactions." One respondent confided that his/her toughest challenge is "Standing up for what I feel is the best direction to be pursued by the district." Board members, however, receive very little training on how to collaboratively make decisions (Mountford, 2008). Respondents mentioned challenges that support this idea from the literature.

Some respondents shared knowledge that would help make their job easier. One respondent mentioned that he/she wanted a "Clearer definition of my role from the beginning" while another stated that it would be easier to know "Protocol and legal understanding." Another respondent wanted to "Learn all of the educational acronyms," but did continue this response by saying, "just kidding" after that phrase.

Although many personal challenges emerged from the data, some positive personal feelings were evident. One respondent shared, "Being part of a school board is a very rewarding job." When asked what else he/she would like to share, a respondent shared that his/her role as a

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school board member was very rewarding and stated, "To help make positive changes to move a district forward for the betterment of the educational experiences for our students is one of the most important volunteer opportunities I can think of." Another simply said, "I really like what I'm doing."

5.2.6   Emerging Theme #6: Communication is critical to board-superintendent relationships

Communication as a critical element of the board-superintendent relationship emerged from respondents' answers. The data specifically showed an emphasis on sharing information, listening, and improving the working relationship between the board and the superintendent. This theme emerged primarily from the survey question asking what advice respondents would give to superintendents working with school boards. It also emerged when respondents shared what information or experiences would make the job easier and when they shared information not covered in the survey.

Respondents regularly expressed that the superintendent needed to communicate with the board for success, with one respondent giving the advice to "Be responsive." Other responses included, "Maintain a strong line of communication with your board" and "The best relationship between the superintendent and the board requires open communication." One respondent offered, "Communication is key" while another simply stated, "Communicate, communicate, communicate." Multiple respondents shared that communication should be open, honest, and transparent. One respondent cautioned, "Don't ever lie to the board." Another respondent shared that the openness and honesty should go both ways, stating, "I also believe that school board members need to be open and honest with the superintendent and other administrators."

Houston and Eadie (2002) suggested that superintendents provide their boards with information about major events, their work in the district and outside of the district, and major developments in the educational field. Respondents echoed this wish through their comments.

When sharing information, respondents suggested to "Try not to use too much industry jargon." Some asked for a plethora of information from the superintendent with comments such as "Over share and let us tell you when you've given us more than we need" and "Provide us with as much information as possible. There is no such thing as too much information." Access to information is a source of power (Pettigrew, 1972). When superintendents communicate information with their board, they help to empower board members to make decisions.

Another respondent, however, suggested, "Be able to, and have your staff be able to summarize information in the 'USA Today' quick and easy format." Eadie (2003) suggested providing reports in easy-to-read formats and including executive summaries with key points to assist in educating board members. One respondent mentioned that, "A school board can only be as good as the information they are given."

Respondents' answers highlighted the importance of listening in the superintendent-board relationship. One respondent offered, "Open your ears" while another suggested, "Be a good listener and stay strong." Some suggested that the superintendent needs to listen to board members with responses such as, "Listen to what the board is saying and consult with them on the decisions that affect the constituency" and "Listen to what we have to offer and consult others more knowledgeable." If a superintendent has a poor relationship with his/her board, it threatens the ability of the district to meet its goals (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2008). Listening is critical to developing that relationship.

Responses surrounding the working relationship between the board and the superintendent also emphasized how communication was key. One respondent mentioned, "When presenting an issue to the board, be sure and cover all considered alternatives and the reason the administrative staff has arrived at a particular recommendation." Eadie (2003) provided recommendations to superintendents that supported this comment noting the need to have the district administrative team on board with the governance needs and to share the responsibility for clear communication. Another respondent reminded, "Board members should always feel free to question actions proposed by the administration. Questions do not indicate a lack of trust." A respondent cautioned, "Don't play politics with your board."

Some respondents offered advice about how to grow the board-superintendent relationship. One shared, "Build relationships with your board knowing this takes time." Another respondent talked about the superintendent being a member of the board stating, "You are the tenth member of the board. Work with the board. Help with education and orientation of new members so that members can better do the job" while another simply offered, "Never stop educating your board members."

When giving advice to superintendents working with school boards, one respondent shared, "Engage them, understand the issues that keep them up at night. It is a team of 10, not 9 vs. 1." Another, when asked what would make his/her job easier, stated, "I'm not sure my job should be 'easier.' A superintendent that provides timely agendas, supporting documentation, and transparency throughout the process makes the school board member's work reasonable and fair." One humorously offered, "Working with a board is like driving a herd of cats. There sometimes seems to be no direction."

Some respondents seemed to want superintendents to understand board members more with comments such as, "Understand that we all have very different backgrounds and experiences and respect us for who we are. Be patient with us and offer us advice and guidance" and "Respect our role as board members. We are part of the checks and balances of this system." Another suggested, "Know your board their strengths and weaknesses, use their strengths to your advantage." One respondent shared a particularly poignant response with "Just know we all have a job to do and coming together as one makes our goals successful."

5.2.7   Emerging Theme #7: School boards want superintendent leadership

When asked to give advice to superintendents, a number of respondents focused on the leadership of the superintendent. Comments supporting this theme included, "Be a strong leader, fully engaged," "Be the Leader not the facilitator," and, "Take charge." Martin (1962) noted that the superintendent's role shifted over the years to more of a leader of the board. Respondents mentioned their desire for the superintendent to be a leader through their comments.

Multiple respondents wanted to affirm the superintendent's knowledge. One respondent stated, "Be open with information and assert your expertise" while another offered, "First and foremost, speak your mind on educational matters." Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) noted that the superintendent's perceived expertise is a source of influence. Goldhammer (1964) found that school board members see the superintendent's role as an educational leader. Respondents supported these ideas with their answers.

Respondents also offered personal suggestions for the superintendent such as, "Be thick skinned" and "Do what you think is right." Some offered leadership ideas for working with the board including, "Define expectations," "Be consistent," and "The best superintendent keeps the

attention on the longer term goals and sets agendas that actively work toward fulfilling those goals." Another respondent suggested, "Be honorable and hold our district to a high standard."

At the end of the survey, respondents provided any other desired information not already covered in the survey. One respondent answered the question with a simple, but telling, response directed at other board members. The respondent offered, "I would encourage other boards to find the right Superintendent and then clear a path for her/him to do the work."

5.3   CONCLUSION

Seven themes emerged from the data from multiple open-ended questions:

- Personnel and facilities decisions stand out to school board members;

- District finances challenge school board members;

- Community relationships can be difficult for school board members;

- Listening to and dialoguing with other school board members is beneficial and challenging;

- Being a school board member comes with personal challenges;

- Communication is critical to board-superintendent relationships; and

- School boards want superintendent leadership.

The themes articulated broad concepts that emerged from the data.

6.0   CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

This study was designed to inform practice for superintendents and others who work with public school board members by providing a deeper understanding of the school board members who govern Western Pennsylvania school districts. This study gathered information from 124 public school board members in the Western Pennsylvania counties of Allegheny (excluding Pittsburgh Public Schools), Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer, Washington, and Westmoreland. The survey for this study specifically queried these board members regarding their motivations for service including the recruitment process, experiences or interactions that motivated board service, interests, and socialization methods once on the board. The study also uncovered information regarding the decision-making processes employed by school board members and their relationships and patterns of communication with others in the school community. Additionally, the study collected information on the challenges of school board leadership and what would help board members in their service.

6.1   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Three research questions guided this study designed to better understand the people who voluntarily govern school systems in Western Pennsylvania. The three research questions provided a framework for understanding the respondents. My goal for conducting this research

was to inform my practice as an assistant superintendent in preparation for a future superintendent position. Additionally, I wanted to provide information to help administrators and others who work with school board members to be more effective in their work and to better assist school board members in their governance roles. The next four sections provide summaries for each research question and for the emerging themes. Some contextual remarks are also included in the summaries.

6.1.1 What motivates a person in Western Pennsylvania to serve on a school board?

The respondents were primarily self-motivated to seek election to the school board and were interested in giving back to the community. Additionally, the majority of respondents were not interested in pursuing additional political offices beyond the school board. These data show a sense of local civic responsibility and interest on the part of Western Pennsylvania school board members. This sentiment is informative for superintendents and those who work with school boards as it indicates that focusing on what is best for students and the community will support the goals of the school district as well as the motivations of many of its board members. Although school board members reported to also seek office for more personal reasons or to affect personal interests, the knowledge that the majority of respondents were interested in serving their community is encouraging for the work of school boards and the school administrators and others who strive to engage them.

If not self-motivated to run for election, community members or school board members asked respondents to run for election. School administrators should be cognizant of the influential people in the community and the influential people on the school board who may be recruiting candidates for positions. Cultivating relationships with these individuals may assist in

better communication of issues and ideas as well as a better understanding of the wishes of the community, thus informing superintendent practice. Not understanding the wishes of the community could limit the superintendent's ability to identify community dissatisfaction. When the community is disaffected regarding school district matters, the school board tends to change members. When the school board changes members, superintendents need to reestablish connections or may be at risk for continuing in their jobs.

Respondents were most often interested in curricular issues or financial issues in their school districts. Both curriculum and finance are key responsibilities for school boards in Western Pennsylvania. Some school board members, however, may not feel as empowered in these two areas considering that a good deal of the work in these subjects is usually handled by district staff. Knowing this, superintendents and others who work with school boards should strive to keep curricular issues and financial issues in the spotlight with the board and provide meaningful opportunities for board members to work in and contribute to these areas.

6.1.2 How do Western Pennsylvania school board members make decisions?

Respondents primarily used resources provided by the school district to gather information for decision-making. This information included financial documents, board meeting materials, and policy manuals. Superintendents and district administrators should be cognizant of how this information presents so that it clearly communicates and provides school board members with desired information for effective decision-making. The more transparent and thorough the information is for board members, the better according to the respondents. The respondents indicated that they spent the most time gathering information in the decision-making process.

The district-prepared documents are a key component for transmitting information in a formal fashion.

School board members make decisions in their roles, but also need to learn how the board operates through a socialization process. Respondents primarily learned about their role as a school board member through other school board members. This information illustrates the importance of the relationships among school board members. Superintendents may be able to help this socialization process by providing orientations for new school board members that include veteran board members, providing work sessions that permit and even facilitate sharing and conversation between board members, and assisting with or supporting mentoring relationships for board members. Actively helping board members to make personal and professional connections with each other and with the superintendent helps the socialization process. How board members socialize into their roles can affect how they operate throughout their tenure on the board. Helping the socialization process to be as effective as possible sets board members and superintendents up for success in the future.

Respondents also learned about their role as a school board member through the work of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, specifically through literature and orientations provided by this group. As a result, superintendents should maintain awareness of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and its work, providing input to shape programming. Additionally, it would be important for the Pennsylvania School Boards Association to maintain connections with key personnel at the district level to inform their work. Since the group is a key provider in the socialization process to the school board, how it accomplishes its work affects the future of school board members' success. Superintendents, in their sharing and orientations, may find it helpful to complement the information shared through the Pennsylvania

School Boards Association orientations and literature and to fill in the locally specific gaps in knowledge that may be present for board members.

6.1.3 How do Western Pennsylvania school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?

The respondents in this survey regularly communicated with other school board members and with the superintendent in their districts. This illustrates the importance of relationships among board members and relationships with the superintendent. Communication is critical to developing a working relationship, generating ideas, illuminating issues, and creating a strong governance structure. Those that communicate more frequently with board members have more opportunities to influence board members. According to the respondents, they communicate with others on the school board and the superintendent more frequently than other groups.

Respondents valued face-to-face communications and these were the most frequently cited method for communication. Face-to-face conversations are more personal, allow for one to read facial expressions and body language, and provide real-time reciprocal conversation compared with electronic or other asynchronous communication methods. Many respondents also cited email as useful, but other electronic methods did not receive many responses. Respondents also mentioned that communication at school events, probably in a face-to-face manner, was a preferred method of communication. Therefore, the respondents valued face-to-face communications more than other options. Superintendents and those who work with school boards may want to engage in more face-to-face interactions to support this frequent and seemingly preferred method of communication of board members.

6.1.4 Emerging Themes

Seven themes emerged from the data:

- Personnel and facilities decisions stand out to school board members;

- District finances challenge school board members;

- Community relationships can be difficult for school board members;

- Listening to and dialoguing with other school board members is beneficial and challenging;

- Being a school board member comes with personal challenges;

- Communication is critical to board-superintendent relationships; and

- School boards want superintendent leadership.

Essentially, the themes showcased key concepts for school board members and important ideas for superintendents and those that work with school boards.

The respondents indicated that being a school board member is personally challenging, but rewarding as well. Personnel issues, facilities issues, and financial issues cause the greatest sense of pride and some of the biggest worries and challenges. Respondents shared that it was helpful listening to and talking with other school board members, but it also proved challenging at a personal level. Helping those in the community to understand their roles and their work was a struggle. The relationship with the superintendent and the superintendent's leadership, however, are critical for the school system's success.

Superintendents and others who work with school boards may use these themes to ground their work. Understanding the trials and tribulations of school board members may help superintendents to support the work of their boards in helpful ways. Additionally,

superintendents who understand the things that elicit pride such as facilities and personnel may be better equipped to facilitate school board leadership with those initiatives to increase engagement and provide opportunities for meaningful school board work. Respondents wanted superintendent leadership, but also voiced the wish to be a contributing member of the leadership team with the superintendent.

6.2   SUGGESTIONS FOR RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE

This inquiry surveyed school board members in roughly the workforce development area of Western Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh Regional Alliance, 2015; Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, n.d.). The goal of the study was to understand regional school board members in ways that inform practice for me personally, as well for others in the field. After analysis, the data from this study suggested areas for further research, policy implications, and implications for improve practice. The following sections will specifically address these areas.

6.2.1   Suggestions for Further Research

The respondents to this survey represented a small sample of potential participants who were regionally located in the areas surrounding the city of Pittsburgh. As a result, the data elicited from this study may not be generalizable to Western Pennsylvania or to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Future inquiry opportunities with larger sample sizes or samples from other areas of the Commonwealth may yield comparison data to place this study in context. Similar studies in other regions of the country could also provide comparison data to illuminate how Western

Pennsylvania school board members' experiences are the same as or different from others in the United States of America.

When the crosstabs and filtering analysis were completed on this study's data set, no differences emerged related to gender, race/ethnicity, age, or educational experience. In many areas, however, the minimum number of respondents for all categories did not exist; therefore the analysis could not be completed properly. Although the reviewed literature did not yield a plethora of differences between and among these demographic groups, it seems probable that with a large enough or diverse enough sample size, differences may emerge from the data. Future inquiries along these lines may tease out the nuances between demographic groups that could further inform practice for administrators and those who work with school boards, especially for those who work in diverse racial, socio-economic, or multi-generational regions.

The data analysis produced information on specific topics such as recruitment to the school board, topics that sparked interest in board service, political aspirations, communication, and challenges of the position. As I questioned the data to inform my research questions, additional lines of future inquiry emerged from the analysis. The key questions for future inquiries include:

- Should school board members recruit others to run for election to the board? Are they recruiting candidates who are like-minded to serve with them? Are they recruiting candidates for political reasons? Are they recruiting candidates for ideological reasons?

- What kind of training would help school board members to be more comfortable in their roles and more effective in their positions?

- Once a person is seated as a school board member for a time period, do the topics that sparked their interest in seeking election still interest them? Do sitting school board members feel that they are meaningfully affecting the topics that sparked their interest in seeking election to the board?

- Is the school board a stepping-stone to future political office at the state level or at the national level? Why or why not?

- What is challenging about finances for board members? Is there lacking knowledge? Are there lacking skills?

- What does the public understand about school board members, their roles, and the powers and duties of the school board? What does the public not understand or only have limited information about school board members, their roles, and the powers and duties of the school board? How does the school board publicize material to inform the public about their role?

- Do school board members who are parents or grandparents of current students see issues in similar ways or different ways as compared to school board members without children in a school district?

- How do school board presidents work with the superintendent and exert leadership for the board?

- Do superintendents view the motivations of board members, their relationships, and their decision-making in similar ways to the board members themselves? (Using similar questions could provide additional insight.)

A challenge of reviewing literature for this study was finding studies that discussed board members as individuals, not the board as a whole. I was interested in learning about the people

who served on a school board, not the characteristics of effective boards. The literature on boards as a whole and the literature concerning the relationship of the superintendent with the school board outweighed the available literature on individual board members. As a result of the relative lack of studies focusing on the people on a school board, the reviewed literature needed to draw from a wider time period to provide the necessary depth of understanding to conduct my research. Additional inquiries regarding board members as people would help to fill this gap in the research literature.

6.2.2   Policy Implications

In Pennsylvania, school boards are the instruments through which the state government enacts its constitutional obligations. School boards are the administrative arm of the state charged with the power to govern state affairs in education at the local level (Goldhammer, 1964). State governments are also responsible to implement federal programs regarding education, with local school boards being delegated responsibility for implementing federal requirements. Policy regarding school boards is primarily set at the state level. Local school boards, however, set local policies regarding school board governance operations as well.

A few respondents in this survey cited frustration with the lack of knowledge of other board members as a challenge or something that they struggled with in their roles. Some respondents also cited a desire for orientation sessions to make their work easier. One respondent suggested nominal compensation to draw better candidates to seek school board seats. A few respondents suggested that school board members be required to undergo training for their positions. These responses from the research suggest policy implications. Board

members may benefit from more stringent requirements or expectations for service, compensation, or additional training.

As of April 2016, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's House of Representatives was considering an amended version of House Bill 1906 (2015). This bill would amend the Pennsylvania Public School Code of 1949 and add requirements for school director training programs. The bill, as currently written, requires school directors to complete eight hours of training during their first year of service. The proposed training would be required to include information on instruction and academic programs, personnel, fiscal management, operations, governance, and ethics and open meetings. School directors within the first year of each subsequent elected term would be required to complete four hours of advanced training to include information on relevant changes to federal and state public school law and regulations, fiscal management, and other information deemed appropriate. The training programs would be implemented through a statewide organization representing school directors, or the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, in consultation with a statewide organization representing school business officials, or the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials. The training is to be at no cost and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association can approve alternate training programs from other organizations.

Interestingly, this is not the first time that the Pennsylvania General Assembly put forth legislation regarding school board member requirements. In 2006, the Pennsylvania Senate considered Senate Bill 298 (The Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2006). That bill required a minimum of 40 hours of training to include instruction in school budgeting, school finance, collective bargaining, academic standards, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), assessment and accountability, and other subjects as determined by the Pennsylvania Department

of Education. According to the legislation proposed in 2006, those who took the course would need to pass an exam to be eligible to become school board members and currently sitting board members who did not pass the exam needed to resign their position or their school district would risk losing one ninth of its funding. This legislation from 2006 did not pass into law.

Looking nationally at training requirements for school board members using a survey from the National School Boards Association (2012), 23 states in the United States mandated training for school board members. This survey was last updated in October 2012. Of those 23 states that required training for school board members, all but two mandated specific topics for the training.

Adding training requirements for board members in Pennsylvania would have policy implications. At the same time, mandated training puts a new requirement on an elected office and could potentially burden individuals who earn school board seats. It may not be reasonable or legally enforceable to require an elected official to undergo training for a position. The balance between supporting those who become elected school board members and recognizing the voluntary nature of their service may be part of the discussion as the Pennsylvania General Assembly discusses the current (as of April 2016) House Bill 1906 (2015).

Local school boards do have the authority and the responsibility to pass local policies regarding governance practices for the local school board. These policies outline how the board will operate, its committee structure, when it will meet, and how it will formulate policies, among other things. Considering that the respondents in this survey noted that they primarily learned how the board operated from other school board members and that they gathered information from school district resources including the policy manual when making decisions, a local school board could articulate in policy or in regulations ways that it will assist new school

board members or how it will work together. This may include a mentoring process, orientation guidelines, or other structures that may help to socialize a new board member to his/her new position.

6.2.3   Implications for Practice

My primary purpose for completing this research was to learn information that could improve my practice as well as improve practice for superintendents and those who work with school boards. The analysis of the data provided information about what respondents appreciated and what they struggled with in their work. The respondents directly shared what would make their jobs easier and provided advice for superintendents working with school boards.   After reviewing the data, some implications for practice emerged from the analysis.

Multiple respondents shared that it was difficult to understand the role of a school board member upon election. For those interested in seeking election, educational sessions regarding the school board may be beneficial before recruitment to foster understanding. Respondents also shared that it continued to be difficult to understand their school board role while conducting business. Knowing this, superintendents, veteran board members, and organizations that work with school board members should emphasize defining the role of a school board member and provide assistance to help members assimilate into their role. At orientation sessions, this should be a topic of conversation. Superintendents may want to dialogue with board members about their roles, and use that conversation as a jumping off point of how the superintendent plans to work with board members in the district and expectations for their communication. Superintendents may want to assist veteran board members in examining what they struggled with so that they, together with the superintendent, may assist new board members accordingly.

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Discussion about the role of a school board member should not be confined to when a board member is newly elected. Instead, as the board faces new challenges, the superintendent and board should work together to continue to define the role of school board members to alleviate confusion and increase effectiveness.

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association provides orientation sessions to new school board members and offers continuing education sessions on a variety of topics. Respondents' answers regarding their lack of understanding of their role and of topics indicate that more training or more effective methods of training may be beneficial. School board members' attendance may be affected by how trainings are publicized, the cost, when they are offered, and the usefulness of the information.

Respondents to the survey primarily learned how the school board operated from other school board members. Providing mentor training to veteran board members may help them to assist new board members in positive ways. Just as a school district frequently provides mentor training to mentor teachers working with new staff, the superintendent or organizations that work with school board members may want to consider providing mentor training to veteran board members assisting new board members. These mentoring relationships could be formalized within a school district, thus providing a "go to" person for new members to learn from in their socialization process. Mentoring relationships could also be formalized within a region, thus providing opportunities for collaboration between districts.

In the data, respondents articulated that it would be helpful to them to see how other school boards operated, perhaps even by watching their meetings. Since school board meetings are open to the public, school board members are free to attend meetings in other districts. With the time commitment that it takes to be a school board member, though, this may not be possible.

A superintendent could provide articles on governance practices for the school board to study together or video clips of segments of other board meetings that a school board may want to study or emulate. A superintendent may be able to help board members improve their governance by facilitating and modeling conversations to hear what is working and what is not working for school board members. Often, districts conduct meetings according to institutional history and are slow to change governance practices. A superintendent working collaboratively with a school board can help to determine what governance practices will serve the current board and school community and what strategies will help to make these governance practices a reality. Additionally, organizations that work with school boards may want to provide mock meetings, board member exchanges, or roundtable discussions on governance practices during conferences and workshop sessions so that board members may learn from each other.

Interestingly, this study did not examine the role of the school board president. It also did not emerge in any of the responses in any way. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association sometimes offers additional leadership training and opportunities to school board presidents through the Pennsylvania School Boards Association. The fact that the role of the school board president did not emerge in the data from any respondents is noteworthy. If the superintendent is relying on the school board president for leadership of the board, the superintendent may need to further examine if this leadership is occurring and provide guidance and mentoring to assist in its effectiveness.

School board members are usually not trained in collaborative decision-making processes, yet when a board works together to deliberate and make a decision regarding a topic, it collaborates to make a decision. Collaborative decision-making does not negate the individual's responsibility to make that decision, but reaffirms that the board, as a whole, makes

decisions for the district. Working with others to make a decision may be an experience that individual board members do not have in their personal or professional lives. Superintendents or organizations that work with boards could assist school board members by providing structures for decision-making or steps for the board to follow to generate discussion and collaboration. Articulating the decision-making process may provide a way of doing business that will improve the effectiveness and satisfaction of board members.

Respondents from this study shared their desire to have information on topics before the board and to understand more about school districts. Specifically, respondents shared through their answers a desire to understand school finance, school law, and personnel practices among other topics. Knowing that information is a source of power and a board member having information can be empowered to make a better-informed decision, superintendents and those who work with school board members should consider how to regularly share information in a clear and concise manner. Superintendents and district administrators could provide one to two page talking points about a topic or an issue for its school board members. Organizations that support the superintendent, business manager, human resources personnel, curriculum personnel, technology personnel, etc. could produce very short one to two page executive summaries, infographics, or explanations of specific topics for their members to be able to provide to their school boards to assist in communication. For example, short summaries on following a contract, hiring practices, bonds, fund balances, taxes, data security, assessment systems, etc. could provide a cadre of resources for administrators to share with their school board. Additionally, these short executive summaries may help administrators to share with parents, staff members, and the public, thus increasing understanding and perhaps efficacy across a school system. Some of these types of executive summaries currently exist, but enhancing the

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dialogue about how to use them or how to share them effectively with a board could make them more valuable. Encouraging board members to then share these types of communications or talking points with their constituents could create common messages and better dialogue throughout the community. These types of short informational pieces could also assist a superintendent in the continuing education of his/her school board members.

Finally, respondents affirmed the importance of the relationship between the superintendent and the school board through their answers. Superintendents should foster their relationship with board members by listening and communicating regularly. Organizations that support superintendents and organizations that support school board members should maintain purposeful focus on how to develop and sustain this relationship as well as how to improve relationships that are not working. A board and a superintendent need to work together for effective governance, and the strength of their relationship is critical to the success of their work.

6.3   CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the people who serve on school boards. Specifically, the study examined the motivations, decision-making processes, and relationships of school board members in Western Pennsylvania. The data analysis produced findings that informed this study and that generated suggestions for future research, policy implications, and ideas to improve practice.

My goal for this research was to inform my practice as well as to contribute to the field of education. Through this study, I now work with the school board in my district looking through a more informed lens. The knowledge that I have gained through this study is already assisting

me in communicating with and working with the school board members in my district. When I make presentations and create materials, I consider how to clearly communicate the ideas with board members. As I answer questions or participate in discourse with board members, I consider their motivations and goals and try to provide information for them to consider. I advocate for my opinions, but value the opinions of those on the board as well. I see the power of working collaboratively to create our best efforts as a district. I know that as my experiences in educational administration continue, this work will continue to inform my practice, and I hope it proves helpful to others as well.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SURVEY INSTRUMENT TEXT

Motivations, Relationships, and Decision-Making of School Board Members

The purpose of this survey is to gather information regarding school board members' motivations, relationships, and decision-making. You may leave the survey while it is in progress and come back to finish it within two weeks. The survey is accessible through a computer or on a mobile device.

There is minimal risk in completing this survey. The primary potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but everything possible will be done to protect your privacy. You do not need to identify yourself to complete this survey, however there is a voluntary section that does give you an opportunity to identify yourself, if desired. All records pertaining to your involvement in this study will be kept confidential and any data that includes your identity will be stored in secured files. Your identity will not be revealed in any description or publication of the

research. Data will not be shared with your superintendent, any other superintendent, or any board members.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study and you will receive no compensation for your participation. You will receive no direct benefit for participation in this study, but may feel satisfaction at being able to discuss your work as a school board member. You may decline to answer any question and may withdraw your participation in this study at any time.

If you consent to completing the survey, please click to continue.

Becoming a School Board Member

Q1. How were you recruited or asked to run for election to become a school board member? (Check all that apply.)

_____ Asked by a community member

_____ Asked by a family member

_____ Asked by a governmental official (not part of the school district)

_____ Asked by a school board member

_____ Asked by the superintendent

_____ Asked by the teacher's union

_____ Served as a school volunteer

_____ Was self-motivated to run

_____ Other (Please explain):_____

Q2. Were there specific experiences or interactions that interested you in becoming a school board member? (Check all that apply.)

_____ Concerned about taxes, the budget, and expenses

_____ Disappointed with administrators (other than the superintendent)

_____ Disappointed with the school board

_____ Disappointed with the superintendent

_____ Disappointed with the teachers

_____ Interested in giving back to the community

_____ Pleased with administrators (other than the superintendent)

_____ Pleased with the school board

_____ Pleased with the superintendent

_____ Pleased with the teachers

_____ Wanted to be an elected official

_____ Wanted to work with like-minded people in my community

_____Other (Please explain):_____

Q3. Were there specific topics that interested you in becoming a school board member? (Check all that apply.)

_____ Assessments (such as standardized tests, etc.)

_____ Curricular issues (such as programs of study, course offering, etc.)

_____ Extra curricular issues (such as clubs, sports teams, etc.)

_____ Financial issues

_____ Hiring issues

_____ Instructional issues (such as how teachers were teaching, etc.)

_____ Policy issues

_____ School safety

_____ Special education

_____ Technology issues

_____ Other (Please explain):_____

Q4. Once you were elected to the board, how did you learn about how the school board

operated? (Check all the apply.)

    _____ Community members

    _____ District level administrators other than the superintendent (outside of an

        orientation process)

    _____ District-organized orientation session(s)

    _____ Literature from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association

    _____ Literature from the school district

    _____ Other school board members (outside of an orientation process)

    _____ Pennsylvania School Boards Association orientation session(s)

    _____ School level administrators, such as principals (outside of an orientation

        process)

    _____ Superintendent (outside of an orientation process)

    _____ Teachers (outside of an orientation process)

    _____ Other (Please explain):_____

Q5. Now that you are a school board member, do you have other political aspirations?

    _____ No (Please describe): _____

    _____ Yes (Please describe):_____

<u>Relationships</u>

Q6. How often do you converse with the following people in your role as a school board member? (Choices include: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently)

_____ Business leaders

_____ Community members (not parents of school age children)

_____ Members of your religious community

_____ Other governmental officials

_____ Other school board members in my district

_____ Parents

_____ Political party leaders in my region

_____ School board members from other districts

_____ School building level administrators (such as principals)

_____ School district level administrators (other than the superintendent)

_____ School support staff (such as secretaries, custodians)

_____ Senior citizens in my school district

_____ Students

_____ Superintendent

_____ Teachers

_____ Other (Please explain):_____

Q7. Which methods do you use to communicate on your own with your constituents regarding board matters and how frequently do you use these methods? (Choices include: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently)

_____ Email

_____ Face-to-face conversations

_____ Facebook

_____ Mailings

_____ Meetings outside of school board meetings

_____ Newsletters

_____ School events

_____ Telephone calls

_____ Text messages

_____ Twitter

_____ Websites

_____ Other (Please explain):_____

Q8.   Where and how often do you independently gather information about issues in order to make decisions as a school board member? (Choices include: Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Frequently)

_____ Magazines

_____ Newspapers

_____ Pennsylvania School Boards Association

_____ School board packets or meeting information provided by the school

district

_____ School district financial documents (such as the budget, audits, etc.)

_____ School district policy manual

_____ Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)

_____ Websites

_____ Other (Please explain):_____

Q9. Decision-making may be thought to occur in stages. Consider a recent decision that you made in your service on the school board. How much time did you spend on the following decision-making stages? (Choices include: None of my time, Very little of my time, Some of my time, A lot of my time, Most of my time)

_____ Defining the issue

_____ Gathering information

_____ Deliberating with others

_____ Considering alternative actions

_____ Working for consensus with other board members

_____ Making the final decision

Q10. Please describe a decision that you made as a member of the school board that makes you proud._____

Q11. In what ways do other school board members influence your decision-making on the school board?_____

Q12. What decisions related to your service as a school board member "keep you up at night"?_____

Leadership

Q13. On a scale of 1-10, show how frequently you use each type of leadership style as a school board member? (The higher the number, the more frequently you use the type of leadership.)

_____ Engaging Leadership (I help others to achieve as members of the

organization.)

_____ Involving Leadership (I work with others to set direction and determine how to achieve organizational goals.)

_____ Goal Leadership (I focus on setting direction for the organization and leading others in achieving these goals.)

Q14. What would you say is your toughest challenge as a school board member?_____

Q15. In your work as a school board member, what information or experiences would make your job easier?_____

Q16. If you could give advice to superintendents working with school boards, what would you say?_____

Q17. What else would you like to share that is not already covered in this survey?_____

<u>Demographic Information</u>

Q18. How many total years have you been a school board member? _____

Q19. What is your gender?

_____ Male

_____ Female

Q20. What is your age? _____

Q21. What is your race/ethnicity?

_____ American Indian or Alaska Native

_____ Asian

_____ Black or African American

_____ Hispanic

_____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

_____ White

_____ Two or more Races

Q22. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained?

_____ High School Diploma

_____ Some college coursework

_____ Associates Degree

_____ Professional Certification

_____ Bachelor's Degree

_____ Master's Degree

_____ Doctoral Degree

Q23. What is your occupation?_____

Q24. What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

_____ Less than $34,999

_____ $34,999 to $104,999

_____ $105,000 or more

_____ Prefer not to answer

Q25. Are you or a close family member employed in the education field?

_____ I am employed in the education field.

_____ A close family member is employed in the education field.

_____ I am employed in the education field AND a close family member is

employed in the education field.

Contact Information

Q26. In what district are you currently a school board member?_____

Q27. Would you be wiling to be contacted to provide clarification regarding your answers in the future, if needed?

               _____ Yes

               _____ No

Q27a. (If yes is answered to Q27) Please provide your name and contact information (address, email and/or phone number)._____

APPENDIX B

QUALTRICS SURVEY VIEW

Motivations, Relationships, and Decision-Making of School Board Members

The purpose of this survey is to gather information regarding public school board members' motivations, relationships, and decision-making. You may leave the survey while it is in progress and come back to finish it within two weeks. The survey is accessible through a computer or on a mobile device.

There is minimal risk in completing this survey. The primary potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but everything possible will be done to protect your privacy. You do not need to identify yourself to complete this survey, however there is a voluntary section that does give you an opportunity to identify yourself, if desired. All records pertaining to your involvement in this study will be kept confidential and any data that includes your identity will be stored in secured files. Your identity will not be revealed in any description or publication of the research. Data will not be shared with your superintendent, any other superintendent, or any board members.

There are no costs to you for participating in this study and you will receive no compensation for your participation. You will receive no direct benefit for participation in this study, but may feel satisfaction at being able to discuss your work as a school board member. You may decline to answer any question and may withdraw your participation in this study at any time.

If you consent to completing the survey, please click to continue.

Becoming a School Board Member

Q1. How were you recruited or asked to run for election to become a school board member? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Asked by a community member
- ☐ Asked by a family member
- ☐ Asked by a governmental official (not part of the school district)
- ☐ Asked by a school board member
- ☐ Asked by the superintendent
- ☐ Asked by the teacher's union
- ☐ Served as a school volunteer
- ☐ Was self-motivated to run
- ☐ Other (Please explain):

Q2. Were there specific experiences or interactions that interested you in becoming a school board member? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Concerned about taxes, the budget, and expenses
- ☐ Disappointed with administrators (other than the superintendent)
- ☐ Disappointed with the school board
- ☐ Disappointed with the superintendent
- ☐ Disappointed with the teachers
- ☐ Interested in giving back to the community
- ☐ Pleased with administrators (other than the superintendent)
- ☐ Pleased with the school board
- ☐ Pleased with the superintendent
- ☐ Pleased with the teachers
- ☐ Wanted to be an elected official
- ☐ Wanted to work with like-minded people in my community
- ☐ Other (Please explain):

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Q3. Were there specific topics that interested you in becoming a school board member? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Assessments (such as standardized tests, etc.)
- ☐ Curricular issues (such as programs of study, course offerings, etc.)
- ☐ Extra curricular issues (such as clubs, sports teams, etc.)
- ☐ Financial issues
- ☐ Hiring issues
- ☐ Instructional issues (such as how teachers were teaching, etc.)
- ☐ Policy issues
- ☐ School safety
- ☐ Special education
- ☐ Technology issues
- ☐ Other (Please explain):

_____

Q4. Once you were elected to the board, how did you learn about how the school board operated? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ Community members
- ☐ District level administrators other than the superintendent (outside of an orientation process)
- ☐ District-organized orientation session(s)
- ☐ Literature from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association
- ☐ Literature from the school district

   Other school board members (outside of an orientation process)
- ☐ Pennsylvania School Boards Association orientation session(s)
- ☐ School level administrators, such as principals (outside of an orientation process)
- ☐ Superintendent (outside of an orientation process)
- ☐ Teachers (outside of an orientation process)
- ☐ Other (Please explain):

_____

Q5. Now that you are a school board member, do you have additional political aspirations?

◯ No (Please describe):

[   ]

◯ Yes (Please describe):

[   ]

Relationships

Q6. How often do you converse with the following people in your role as a school board member?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Business leaders	◯	◯	◯	◯
Community members (not parents of school age children)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Members of your religious community	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other governmental officials	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other school board members in my district	◯	◯	◯	◯
Parents	◯	◯	◯	◯
Political party leaders in my region	◯	◯	◯	◯
School board members from other districts	◯	◯	◯	◯
School building level administrators (such as principals)	◯	◯	◯	◯
School district level administrators (other than the superintendent)	◯	◯	◯	◯
School support staff (such as secretaries, custodians)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Senior citizens in my school district	◯	◯	◯	◯
Students	◯	◯	◯	◯
Superintendent	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teachers	◯	◯	◯	◯
Other (Please explain): [ ]	◯	◯	◯	◯

Q7. Which methods do you use to communicate on your own with your constituents regarding board matters and how frequently do you use these methods?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Email	○	○	○	○
Face-to-face conversations	○	○	○	○
Facebook	○	○	○	○
Mailings	○	○	○	○
Meetings outside of school board meetings	○	○	○	○
Newsletters	○	○	○	○
School events	○	○	○	○
Telephone calls	○	○	○	○
Text messages	○	○	○	○
Twitter	○	○	○	○
Websites	○	○	○	○
Other (Please explain):	○	○	○	○

Q8. Where and how often do you independently gather information about issues in order to make decisions as a school board member?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently
Magazines	○	○	○	○
Newspapers	○	○	○	○
Pennsylvania School Boards Association	○	○	○	○
School board packets or meeting information provided by the school district	○	○	○	○
School district financial documents (such as the budget, audits, etc.)	○	○	○	○
School district policy manual	○	○	○	○
Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	○	○	○	○
Websites	○	○	○	○
Other (Please explain):	○	○	○	○

Q9. Decision-making may be thought to occur in stages. Consider a recent decision that you made in your service on the school board. How much time did you spend on the following decision-making stages?

	None of my time	Very little of my time	Some of my time	A lot of my time	Most of my time
Defining the issue	○	○	○	○	○
Gathering information	○	○	○	○	○
Deliberating with others	○	○	○	○	○
Considering alternative actions	○	○	○	○	○
Working for consensus with other board members	○	○	○	○	○
Making the final decision	○	○	○	○	○

Q10. Please describe a decision that you made as a member of the school board that makes you proud.

Q11. In what ways do other school board members influence your decision-making on the school board?

Q12. What decisions related to your service as a school board member "keep you up at night"?

Leadership

Q13. On a scale of 1-10, show how frequently you use each type of leadership style as a school board member? (The higher the number, the more frequently you use the type of leadership.)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Engaging Leadership (I help others to achieve as members of the organization.)												
Involving Leadership (I work with others to set direction and determine how to achieve organizational goals.)												
Goal Leadership (I focus on setting direction for the organization and leading others in achieving these goals.)												

Q14. What would you say is your toughest challenge as a school board member?

Q15. In your work as a school board member, what information or experiences would make your job easier?

Q16. If you could give advice to superintendents working with school boards, what would you say?

Q17. What else would you like to share that is not already covered in this survey?

Demographic Information

Q18. How many total years have you been a school board member?

Q19. What is your gender?

Q20. What is your age?

Q21. What is your race/ethnicity?

Q22. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained?

Q23. What is your occupation?

Q24. What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

○ Less than $34,999

○ $34,999 to $104,999

○ $105,000 or more

○ Prefer not to answer

Q25. Are you or a close family member employed in the education field?

○ I am employed in the education field.

○ A close family member is employed in the education field.

○ I am employed in the education field AND a close family member is employed in the education field.

Contact Information (This section is optional.)

Q26. In what district are you currently a school board member?

Q27. Would you be willing to be contacted to provide clarification regarding your answers in the future, if needed?

○ Yes

○ No

Q27a. Please provide your name and contact information (address, email and/or phone number).

Table 13: Survey Question Relationships to Research Questions and Literature

RESEARCH QUESTIONS		
RQ1: What motivates a person in Western Pennsylvania to serve on a public school board?		
RQ2: How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members make decisions?		
RQ3: How do Western Pennsylvania public school board members communicate and relate to others on the board, in the community, and in the district?		
Survey Question	**Related Research Question**	**Related Literature**
Becoming a School Board Member		
Q1. How were you recruited or asked to run for election to become a school board member? (Check all that apply.)	RQ1	Cistone (1975); Cistone (2008); Martin (1962); Mountford (2004); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014); Verba et al. (1995); Ziegler et al. (1974)
Q2. Were there specific experiences or interactions that interested you in becoming a school board member? (Check all that apply.)	RQ1	Deckman (2007); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014); Reeves (1954); Tuttle (1958)

Table 13 (continued)

Q3. Were there specific topics that interested you in becoming a school board member? (Check all that apply.)	RQ1	Cistone (1975); Deckman (2007); Kerr (1964)
Q4. Once you were elected to the board, how did you learn about how the school board operated? (Check all that apply.)	RQ2 and RQ3	Cistone (1975); Kerr (1964)
Q5. Now that you are a school board member, do you have additional political aspirations?	RQ1	Deckman (2007); Ziegler et al. (1974); Schlesinger (1966)
Relationships		
Q6. How often do you converse with the following people in your role as a school board member?	RQ3	Kirst (1970); Kowalski (2008); Lutz & Iannaccone (1969)
Q7. Which methods do you use to communicate on your own with your constituents regarding board matters and how frequently do you use these methods?	RQ3	Kowalski (2008)
Q8. Where and how often do you independently gather information about issues in order to make decisions as a school board member?	RQ2	Cunningham (as cited in Goldhammer, 1964); Dahl (1989); Goldhammer (1964); Interprofessional Policy Analysis (1987); Kirst (1970); Lutz & Iannaccone (1969); Mintzberg et al. (1976)); Newton & Sackney (2005); Smoley (1999)
Q9. Decision-making may be thought to occur in stages. Consider a recent decision that you made in your service on the school board. How much time did you spend on the following decision-making stages?	RQ2	Cunningham (as cited in Goldhammer, 1964); Goldhammer (1964); Interprofessional Policy Analysis (1987); Kirst (1970); Smoley (1999)

Table 13 (continued)

Q10. Please describe a decision that you made as a member of the school board that makes you proud.	RQ2	Iannaccone & Lutz (1970); Kirst (1970); Lutz (1975a); Mountford (2008); National School Boards Association (1975)
Q11. In what ways do other school board members influence your decision-making on the school board?	RQ2 and RQ3	Lutz & Iannaccone (1969)
Q12. What decisions related to your service as a school board member "keep you up at night"?	RQ2	Kirst (1970); Kirst (2008); Lutz (1975a)
Leadership		
Q13. On a scale of 1-10, show how frequently you use each type of leadership style as a school board member? (The higher the number, the more frequently you use the type of leadership.)	RQ3	Dulewicz & Higgs (2005)
Q14. What would you say is your toughest challenge as a school board member?	RQ2	Kirst (2008)
Q15. In your work as a school board member, what information or experiences would make your job easier?	RQ3	Eadie (2003); Eadie & Houston (2009); Lutz (1980); Tuttle (1958)
Q16. If you could give advice to superintendents working with school boards, what would you say?	RQ3	Mountford (2008; Petersen & Fusarelli (2008)
Q17. What else would you like to share that is not already covered in this survey?		
Background Information		
Q18. How many total years have you been a school board member?		Kirst (2008); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014)

Table 13 (continued)

Q19. What is your gender?		Mountford (2004); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014)
Q20. What is your age range?		Counts (1927); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014)
Q21. What is your race/ethnicity?		Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014); Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995)
Q22. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained?		Counts (1927); Verba, et al. (1995); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014)
Q23. What is your occupation?		Cistone (1974); Counts (1927); Lutz (1980); Martin (1962); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014)
Q24. What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?		Cistone (1974, 2008); Counts (1927); Kane & Kiersz (2015); Lutz (1980); Martin (1962); Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014)
Q25. Are you or a close family member in the education field?		Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2014); Ziegler, Jennings, & Peak (1974)
Contact Information (This section is optional.)		
Q26. In what district are you currently a school board member?		
Q27. Would you be willing to be contacted to provide clarification regarding your answers in the future, if needed?		
Q27a. Please provide your name and contact information (address, email and/or phone number).		

PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION EMAIL

The Motivations, Relationships, and Decision-Making of Western Pennsylvania Public School Board Members
The University of Pittsburgh

Principal Investigator: Mary Catherine Reljac
Recruitment Information for the Pennsylvania School Boards Association

Dear Pennsylvania School Boards Association (attn. Lin Carpenter),

My name is Mary Catherine Reljac and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I am also the Assistant Superintendent in Franklin Regional School District, Pennsylvania. I am engaging in a dissertation research study to examine school board member motivations for service, decision-making processes, and relationship structures.

As a follow up to our phone conversation, I am requesting that you email school board members on my behalf regarding participation in this research study. Specifically, I request that you send information to school board members in the following counties: Allegheny (excluding Pittsburgh Public School District), Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer, Washington, and Westmoreland (excluding Franklin Regional School District). These counties represent Intermediate Units 1, 3, 4, 7, 27, and 28. Participants will be sent a letter explaining the research study and providing a link for a survey. Participants may elect to complete the survey online, via phone, or in a face-to-face format with me. If participants participate via phone or face-to-face, their responses will be recorded and transcribed with the data entered into the secure survey system Qualtrics, which is available to students at the University of Pittsburgh. The survey will be completed at a time and place of the participants' choosing and will last between 5-15 minutes. Participants will incur minimal risk through this study and may decline to answer any question during the survey.

Please forward the attached School Board Letter with its included survey link to the board members in the identified region. After two weeks and four weeks, I will again contact you asking you to resend the email with its letter and survey link as a reminder to participants. Participants will be contacted a total of 3 times from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association.

Your assistance will help me to fulfill my research objectives toward my doctoral degree and learn about school board member motivations for service, decision-making processes, and relationship structures. I completed a similar pilot survey for this study during the spring of 2014.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at MAR201@pitt.edu or by phone at [XXX-XXX-XXXX]. I appreciate your assistance and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Mary Catherine Reljac

SCHOOL BOARD LETTER

The Motivations, Relationships, and Decision-Making of Western Pennsylvania Public School Board Members
The University of Pittsburgh

Principal Investigator: Mary Catherine Reljac
Recruitment Letter for Participants

Dear School Board Member,

My name is Mary Catherine Reljac and I am a doctoral student at the University of Pittsburgh. I am also the Assistant Superintendent in Franklin Regional School District, Pennsylvania. I am completing my dissertation research with a study to examine public school board member motivations for service, relationships, and decision-making processes. You may have received an invitation to complete a pilot study for this dissertation in the spring of 2014. This, however, is a new study.

You are receiving an invitation to participate in this study because you are a public school board member in one of the following Western Pennsylvania counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer, Washington, and Westmoreland. These counties roughly comprise the workforce development region of Western Pennsylvania. If you choose to participate, you will complete an online survey. If you desire, you may also complete the survey via phone or in a face-to-face format with me. If you complete the survey via phone or in a face-to-face format, your answers will be recorded and transcribed. The survey will occur at a time and place of your choosing and will last between 5-15 minutes.

If you consent to participate, please complete the confidential electronic survey accessed by the included link. If you would prefer to complete the survey via phone or in a face-to-face format,

please contact me by phone at [XXX-XXX-XXXX] or by email at MAR201@pitt.edu and I will work with you to find a mutually agreeable date and time for us to complete the survey.

Your assistance will help me to fulfill my research objectives in my doctoral program and learn about school board member motivations for service, relationships, and decision-making processes. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email or by phone at [XXX-XXX-XXXX]. I appreciate your interest and look forward to hearing from you.

To access the survey, please click here: https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_0epDGXwS3BUJlo9

Sincerely,

Mary Catherine Reljac

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