

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD CHAIR IN BUILDING  
RELATIONAL TRUST WITH NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS  
IN SMALL RURAL WASHINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

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To the faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of THU H. AMENT find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT AND SCHOOL BOARD CHAIR IN BUILDING  
RELATIONAL TRUST WITH NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS  
IN SMALL RURAL WASHINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Abstract

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Trust and trusting relationships appear to be critical resources for schools helping superintendents and their school board members build teamwork within their district's vision, mission, and goals. This study examined and analyzed data of the superintendents, board chairs, and newly-inducted board members of the three school districts in small rural districts in Washington.

Overall, school board service can be both time consuming and stressful, especially as board members engage constituents and attend district events as they work to gain knowledge, build networks, and solicit support for the school system. McAdams (2006) advocates the importance of developing district systems that afford board members an ability to remain organized in the midst of multiple demands on their time as they seek to build relationships and foster the power of ideas that are directly related to the trust and efforts between superintendents and school board members. To explore how trust is understood, fostered and developed,

Superintendents, board chairs, and newly-elected board members were interviewed. Using qualitative narrative analysis, their interview responses were coded to explore emerging themes. The emerging themes (Communication, Board Governance, Building Relational Trust) were further analyzed using Tschannon-Moran (2004) Relational Trust Framework.

As a result of collaborative analysis with the superintendent, board chairs, and new board members, a number of conclusions and recommendations were generated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Purpose.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The Research Problem .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Theoretical Frame.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Rationale for the Study.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Research Questions.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Significance of the Study .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Definition of Terms.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>REVIEW AND LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>LMX Theory as it Relates to Trust .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Transitioning From Trust to Vulnerability.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The Role of Superintendent and District Stability.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Roles, Responsibilities and Behaviors of School Board Members .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>New Board Member Induction.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Relational Trust .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Interpersonal Trust.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Understanding the Complexities of Trust .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Mission, Vision, and Core Beliefs .....</b>	<b>26</b>



<b>School Board-Superintendent Relationship .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Superintendent Induction and Support Systems .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Challenges to School Board Powers .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Criticisms of School Boards in an Era of Reform.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>RESEARCH METHODS.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Qualitative Methodology .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Case Study Method .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>School District Sites, Superintendents, Board Chairs, and New Board Members .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Small Rural District A .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Superintendent A .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Board Chair A .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>New Board Member A.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Small Rural District B .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Superintendent B .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Board Chair B .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>New Board Member B .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Small Rural District C .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Superintendent C .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Board Chair C .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>New Board Member C.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Positionality .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Data Collection .....</b>	<b>47</b>

<b>Limitations.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Delimitations.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Ethical Considerations.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Interviewee Profiles .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Communication .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>The Induction Process .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Patterns of communication. ....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>The Importance of Open Dialogue .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Board Governance .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Board Chairs’ Perceived Roles .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>New Board Members’ Perceived Roles.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Motivation for Joining the Board.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Superintendent’s Perceived Roles .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Building Relational Trust.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Components of Relational Trust.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Superintendents’ Methods of Establishing Relational Trust.....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Board Chair Members’ Methods of Establishing Relational Trust... </b>	<b>68</b>
<b>New Board Members’ Methods of Establishing Relational Trust .....</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Facets of Trust.....</b>	<b>73</b>

<b>Five Key Insights.....</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Insight One: Building Relational Trust with Board Members.....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Insight Two: Becoming a New Board Member.....</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Insight Three: Backgrounds of School Board Members.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Insight Four: Importance of Teaming with New Board Members ...</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Insight Five: Trainings of New Board Members .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Summary and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Recommendations for Future Research .....</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>New Board Member Interview Questions .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Board Chair Interview Questions.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>APPENDIX C .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Superintendent Interview Questions.....</b>	<b>111</b>

LIST OF TABLES

*Table 1a. The facets of trust utilized by Superintendents and Board Members to establish relational trust. .... 73*

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1a. Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Communication Structure</i> .....	7
<i>Figure 3a. District Reading Passage Rate</i> .....	43
<i>Figure 3b. District Math Passage Rate</i> .....	43
<i>Figure 3c. District Ethnic Distribution</i> .....	44
<i>Figure 3d. Ethnic distribution in School District A</i> .....	45
<i>Figure 3e. Ethnic distribution in School District B</i> .....	45
<i>Figure 3f. Ethnic distribution in School District C</i> .....	46
<i>Figure 1b. Board induction based on relational trust</i> .....	74
<i>Figure 2a. Communication in the Induction Process for New Board Member A</i> .....	79
<i>Figure 2b. Communication in the Induction Process for New Board Member B</i> .....	80
<i>Figure 2c. Communication in the Induction Process for New Board Member C</i> .....	81
<i>Figure 4a. Themes Derived from Interview Responses</i> .....	113
<i>Figure 1b. Board induction based on relational trust</i> .....	114

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

The United States Constitution makes no mention of education. Therefore, in accordance with Article X of the Constitution “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.” Each of the fifty (50) states by virtue of its constitution and legislature is responsible for the establishment of its public school system. Through these means each state has established a governance system for its public schools.

For Washington State three provisions of the state Constitution speak to education: Article IX Section 1: “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.”

Article IX Section 2: “The legislature shall provide for a general and uniform system of public schools. The public school system shall include common schools, and such high schools, normal schools, and technical schools as may hereafter be established. But the entire revenue derived from the common school fund and the state tax for common schools shall be exclusively applied to the support of the common schools.”

Article III Section 22: “The superintendent of public instruction shall have supervision over all matters pertaining to the public schools, and shall perform such specific duties as may be prescribed by law. He shall receive an annual salary of twenty-five hundred dollars, which may be increased by law, but shall never exceed four thousand dollars per annum.”(This person holding this position is determined by a statewide election.)

In Washington State locally elected school boards (five members except Seattle with seven) are vested with the final responsibility for setting of policies and enforcing the rules prescribed by agencies with rule setting authority. One of the most important responsibilities of the school board is hiring the school district superintendent who is responsible for managing the school district.

The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) (2007) adopted a framework for effective governance written by the association. The Washington School Board Standards are intended for use by local school boards and individual directors as a common framework for school board governance. Two sets of standards were developed to encourage school boards and individual school directors to subscribe to the highest levels of professional and personal conduct and performance.

The standards identify the elements of good governance and effective board leadership as drawn from best practices and current research. They provide a shared mechanism for understanding what constitutes good governance. They also validate and affirm the importance of the school board's role in ensuring student success.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how three superintendents and their three board chairs built relational trust with three new board members through the induction process in each of their respective school districts. The study aims to explore this relational trust through the reciprocal relationship perceptions of the superintendents, the board chairs, and the new board members as they oriented the new board members to the roles, expectations, and practices of the school districts.

## **The Research Problem**

Increasingly, K-12 public school systems are at the mercy of how well superintendents and school board members work together to carry out the school district's mission, vision, core beliefs, and policies that are put in place for their respective communities. Hoffman, Sabo, Bliss, and Hoy (1994) suggested that the level of trusting interaction modeled by the superintendent and the board sets the stage for all the other professional interactions within the educational environment, from the principal, to the teacher, and to the student and parents as they interact with educators.

Moreover, to sustain the mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) federal requirements to increase student achievement, superintendents often need to show community and board members that they are making progress toward achieving gains in federal measurements. The current literature on educational reform suggests that a superintendent's highest priority is or should be that of exercising instructional leadership (Zepeda, 2007). The reality of the position is that instructional leadership does not mean that is the only job of the superintendent. It is also about building relational trust with their board members to achieve the vision, mission, and goals of the district (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

The superintendent of today must be both an instructional leader and a system manager; the school superintendent's tenure impacts the sustainability of systemic change over time (Elmore, 2007). Elmore claims:

In this dual role, the superintendent must work with the school board to commit to set non-negotiable long-term goals for achievement and instruction, monitor achievement and instructional goals regularly, and allocate resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction. (2007, p. 68)



Elmore (2007) also claims that educational leaders serve in a context that has grown increasingly complex. For example, the change in student demographics, pressures of high-stakes testing and accountability, and high turnover rates among educational leaders have created significant leadership challenges. To effectively execute the mission of public schools, superintendents must muster resources and glean contributions from various stakeholders with whom they have developed some degree of trust. Effectiveness in the current educational landscape requires leaders capable of generating trust.

Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) explained the ideas that trust in a school supports a healthy school climate, increases parent involvement, fosters community collaboration, and enhances learning. They asserted that attaining and maintaining a successful level of efficiency and effectiveness through cultivating trusting relationships models how leaders can create a strong foundation to support student learning and improvements in student achievement.

Fairholm and Fairholm, (2000) suggested that trust between the superintendent and board is critical in running an efficient and effective school district. American public school systems have been designed to be overseen by an operating board. The board members consist of elected constituents from a particular region or district. Boards of education are decision-making bodies that carry out the responsibility of approving school district policies, district staffing, and major decisions related to school finance, expenditures, strategic planning, instruction, and school bonds. Examination of trust, an essential element of organizational culture, provides insights into the harmony, as well as the discord and disagreement, in many organizations that can impact trust (Fairholm & Fairholm, 2000). A loss of trust can be devastating, not only to morale and productivity, but also predictive of organizational performance and viability (Fukuyama, 1995;

Morley, Shockley-Zalabak, & Cesaria, 1997). The power to hire the superintendent rests solely with the board. When a board hires a superintendent, it is entrusting that person to carry out the day-to-day operations of the district in accordance with policies set forth by the board. This relationship implies reciprocal trust between the superintendent and the board because the board assumes the superintendent will execute what needs to be done, and the superintendent assumes the board will support the district vision, mission, and core beliefs to achieve its goals.

As the relationship develops over time, that trust both grows and strengthens or it erodes and weakens. Hoffman et al. (1994) indicated that loss of trust between one or more board members and the superintendent is common when micromanagement is practiced by board members. When this happens, board members begin to question decisions made by the administration. Board members may even reject proposals from administration or supplant proposals with their own ideas in a manner that can become counter-productive towards achieving the mission, vision, and core beliefs of the school district.

Land (2002) studied and criticized the lack of genuine public involvement that led to school boards exercising power and influence in ways that promulgated the continuation of a sorting/sifting system which progressively increased the gap between “haves” and “have nots.” Cunningham (2003) described some of these challenges, following the advent of school reform efforts, which resulted in a changed context and environment created by the many changes occurring in school and community demographics and top-down reforms. School boards were more frequently criticized for their undue responsiveness to businesses, interest groups, and other unofficial players in educational policy. A greater lack of trust in the school board as a representative democratic institution has developed. Cunningham (2003) described that school

boards are accused of falling back on bureaucratic responses rather than sharing information with an openness and willingness to address fundamental issues and concerns.

Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud, and Usdan (1986), and Olson and Bradley (1992) noted that apathy toward school governance grew in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concurrent with the reality that the nation's schools were serving a more diverse student population. Social problems were becoming more pervasive and governance itself continued to become more complex, replete with multiple layers of decision makers (Danzberger, 1994). This research demonstrates the need for superintendents and school board members to be part of a united team with high levels of trust with one another to work together to achieve the district's goals, mission, and vision. One approach is the construct that defines the quality of the relationship between two individuals. In this study I am looking at relational trust through the theoretical frame of the Leader Member Exchange (LMX) theory.

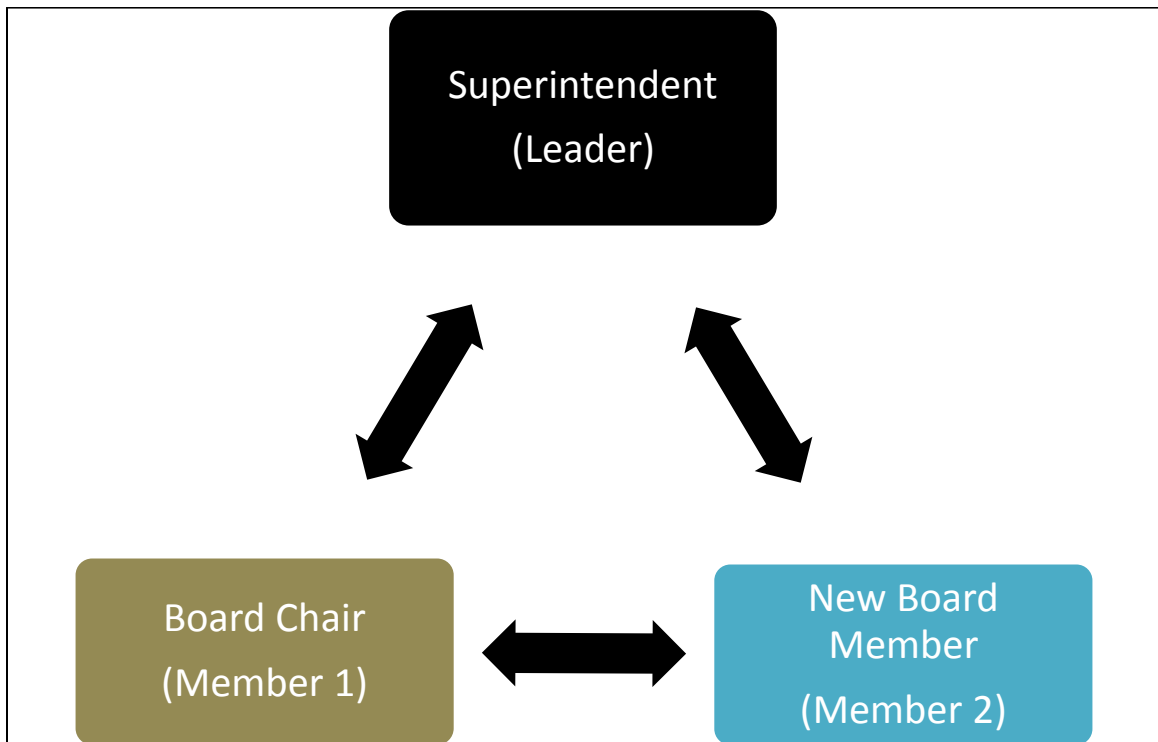
### **Theoretical Frame**

LMX theory is the conceptual framework used to analyze the relationship between the superintendent/district officials as the leader and members of his/her district. In examining and determining the quality of exchanges between the numerous dyadic relationships, this theory allows for a greater understanding of the patterns associated with how these organization leaders build trust with one another and with new board members.

The concept of leadership as an organizational feature is not new. Tanenbaum (as cited in Pounder, Ogawa, & Adams, 1995) empirically established that leadership varies across and within organizations over time. He also found that under some conditions, a positive relationship exists between the members of various levels of organization. Ogawa and Bossert (1995) asserted that most theories and research on organizational leadership are rooted in four basic

assumptions: (a) the function of leadership is to influence the overall performance of organizations; (b) leadership operates within organizational cultures; (c) leadership is related to organizational roles; and (d) leaders are individuals who possess certain attributes or act in certain ways.

Figure 1a depicts the communication structure among and between the three role groups in this study including the superintendent, board chair member, and new board member.



*Figure 1a. Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Communication Structure*

*Leader Member Exchange (LMX) communication structure among superintendents, board chair members, and new board members.*

### **Rationale for the Study**

Throughout the 20th century, when public education essentially prepared a fairly small percentage of students for college, those who served on school boards were often reflective of

the students advantaged by the system, while students and parents from less advantaged groups often had minimal legitimate, effectual voice in school governance. Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) noted that it was often only when citizens became so frustrated with the failure of a board to represent overwhelming community interests that those citizens found themselves sufficiently dissatisfied to actually get involved and advocate for desired changes. This phenomenon was described as the Dissatisfaction Theory. The relationships between the individuals on the board and the superintendent are critical for the construction of trust, an important factor in three areas of education: learning, change at a local level, and reform at a system level (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Elmore, 2005; Goddard, Salloum & Berebitsky, 2009; Hattori & Lapidus, 2004; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are as follows:

1. How does the superintendent establish relational trust with newly-elected board members?
2. How does the board chair establish relational trust with newly-elected board members?
3. What are the perceptions of newly-elected board members about the behaviors of the superintendent and board chairs in regard to establishing relational trust?
4. What differences or similarities occurred in the induction process of the three districts?

Interview protocols were developed and used to guide interviews with the superintendent, board chair, and new board member to describe their socialization into the role as a board member. For example, the superintendent might be asked to describe his or her role in bringing a new school board member on board. What does the induction process look like? Figure 1a depicts the reciprocal relationships that might influence this process. For example, the superintendent's

relationship with the board chair may influence the integration of the new board member into the team.

### **Significance of the Study**

The literature related to the study of trust has focused primarily on the formation of trust between managers and workers, and politicians and voters. LaPorte and Metlay (1996) elaborated by stating, “Surprisingly little attention has been paid to the relationship of trust between citizens and stakeholders on the one hand, and administrative agencies or firms on the other” (p. 342). The literature does not speak often to the unique position of school superintendents and their attempts to build trust. This seems surprising given the highly political and managerial nature of the job, coupled with the daunting environment present in contemporary education.

The premise upon which school boards are intended to operate—according to both the *National School Boards Association* and the state of Washington’s affiliate, the *Washington State School Directors Association*—is that school boards are responsible for policy direction, while superintendents and staff are responsible to put policies into actual practice. As Cunningham and Cordeiro (2003) pointed out, however, this important demarcation of responsibilities is often problematic. This case study explores the experiences and perspectives of nine current school board members in their important and challenging roles. These perspectives provided valuable information for present and future superintendents, along with a deeper understanding of what actions and activities may produce relational trust with new school board members.

## **Definition of Terms**

Superintendent—the individual responsible for all school district operations, carrying out all school district policies and procedures outlined by the district’s Board of Trustees’ documents and policies, serving as the liaison to all school constituent groups (e.g., local and state government representatives).

School Board Member Chair—a board member leader elected or appointed who oversees the school district, board meetings, and additional duties of the board chair.

New School Board Member Inductee—a first year board member who is elected or appointed to serve a school district.

Leader Member Exchange (LMX)—a theory of leadership that focuses on the two-way relationship between supervisors and subordinates.

Trust—an individual’s reliance on another person under conditions of dependence and risk.

Reliance is behavior that allows one’s fate to be determined by the focal person, the person about whom a decision to trust must be made (Currall, 1990).

Relational Trust—trust that focuses on the distinct roles in the school or district setting and the obligations and expectations associated with each role (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Interpersonal Trust—the conscious regulation of one’s dependence on another that varies with the task, the situation, and the referent person (Zand, 1972).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW AND LITERATURE

In education, a superintendent is also known as a chief school administrator in many states. The superintendent has executive oversight and administrative responsibilities within an educational organization. Many state departments of education in the United States refer to their superintendent as senior administrator. Generally, public school district superintendents are selected by the school board of a local school district. As chief executive officer of the public school, the superintendent has oversight of what is often one of the larger businesses within the community the district serves—its educational services.

Depending on the state in which they serve, a public school superintendent might also be referred to as “chief education officer,” or “chief executive officer.” For example the state of Illinois uses the title of Chief Academic Officer for the leader in Chicago Public Schools. Most superintendents are hired by the board of education, also known as the school board, a governing entity of the district composed of elected officials from the communities the school district serves. This governing body of decision makers is the venue for achieving the goals, mission, and vision of the district. Superintendents are members of the board of education of their school district. They usually cannot vote as members of the board. The relationship of trust between the superintendent and school board can be observed through the LMX theoretical framework.

During the last 20 years, organizational behavior, study, and practice have developed and expanded by integrating with other domains. For example, anthropology became an interesting prism by which to understand firms as communities by introducing concepts like “organizational culture,” “organizational rituals,” and “symbolic acts,” providing new ways to understand organizations as communities. Leadership is crucial in understanding roles of leadership at



various levels of an organization, particularly in the process of change management. Finally, ethics are important as pillars of any vision, and one of the most important driving forces in an organization in achieving its goals, mission, and vision. How do members and leaders within organizations gain trust and followers? LMX is a theoretical framework that looks at leader/member interactions as it pertains to this question.

### **LMX Theory as it Relates to Trust**

In 1975, Vertical Dyad Linkage was presented by Graen and his colleagues as an approach to understanding supervisor-subordinate working relationships. This dyadic approach focuses on the relationship between a leader and an organization member who is usually a follower. Most dyadic theories view leadership as a reciprocal influence process between the leader and the member. This approach has an implicit assumption that effective leadership cannot be understood without examining how a leader and follower influence each other over time. Two key issues to this theory are: how to develop a cooperative, trusting relationship with a follower; and, how to influence a follower to be more motivated and committed (Yukl, 1998).

Vertical Dyad Linkage evolved into what is known today as the LMX theory (Graen, & Uhl-Bien, 1995). LMX theory and research is one approach to studying organizational leadership. The theoretical basis of LMX is that dyadic relationships and work roles are developed and negotiated over time through a series of exchanges between a leader and a member of the organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Each member of the dyad, through his or her relationship, invests resources into the development of the relationship in which a leader offers increased job latitude or delegation in return for a member's strong commitment to work goals or high levels of performance (Dienesch & Liden, 1986). It is argued that early on in the

relationship-building process; factors such as role taking, role making, and routinization are behaviors that may affect how the relationship develops (Dienesch & Liden, 1986).

As a consequence of this relationship building, the members with high levels of responsibility, influence, and access to resources may characterize what develops: a high quality relationship. Members who enjoy a high quality relationship are said to be in the *in-group*. On the other hand, members with low levels of responsibility and influence are characterized as having a low quality relationship and are said to be in the *out-group* (Schriesheim, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999). The theoretical development of LMX is based on the idea that leader-member relationships emerge as the result of a series of exchanges or interactions during which leader and member roles develop. This role formation process involves three phases: role taking, role making, and the ongoing social exchange pattern.

During the first phase, role taking, the member enters the organization and the leader assesses the member's abilities and talents. Based on this assessment, the leader provides opportunities for the member to take a specific role. Mutual respect is essential during this stage. Leaders and members must both understand how the other party views and desires respect (Schriesheim et. al, 1999). The leader-member relationship will not develop and progress to the next stage if there is a lack of respect.

During the second phase, role making, the leader and the member engage in unstructured and informal negotiation as the member begins to establish his or her role. Leaders and members must develop trust during this phase in order for leaders and members to further cultivate their relationship and influence on each other's attitudes and behaviors (Schriesheim, et al, 1999). This role-making is critical in diverse dyads. If trust is violated, the relationship may be

destroyed. Trust is especially critical in diverse relationships because violations may reinforce prior stereotypical experiences and discriminatory practices (Fairhurst, 1993).

During the third phase, an ongoing social exchange pattern emerges, where leaders and members form mutual obligation and shared meanings with one another (Schriesheim, et. al, 1999). Any significant problems in the relationship have been addressed by the time the leader and member arrive at this phase (Fairhurst, 1993).

### **Transitioning From Trust to Vulnerability**

School leaders often focus on trust in building a school culture because student learning hinges on it. Once the leader and member have trust established, trust continues to build. “Trust is one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 17). In the majority of the literature about building trust in a school setting, these five adjectives—benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent—are used to describe how trust is developed within schools. The relationship between the school district members and leaders, such as principals and superintendents, provides ample opportunities for these five qualities to be assessed in relation to how a trust-built culture is developed in a school. The personal characteristics listed above relate to organizational trust between an organization’s leader and members. The outcomes of many decisions that superintendents are required to make are uncertain, and many organizational members may not be willing to take those risks. Superintendents must therefore build trust with new board members and maintain levels of trust with existing board members to make both routine and tough decisions.

This trust is integral to the idea of social influence. It is easier to influence or persuade someone who is trusting. The notion of trust is increasingly accepted to predict adoption of

behaviors by other individuals, institutions, and government agencies. However, once again, the perception of honesty, competence, and shared values is essential with these three different forms of trust. Trustworthiness is made up of the characteristics or behaviors that inspire positive expectations and trust propensity in a relationship—being reliable. Once trust is lost, by obvious violation of one of these three determinants, it is very hard to regain. Trustworthiness should be considered the only sure way for a leader to maintain the trust and cooperation of organizational members.

### **The Role of Superintendent and District Stability**

There is little research on the impact of district leadership on student achievement. Some studies relate the impact of the principal on student achievement, but few investigate the role of the superintendent and central office personnel and their respective impact on academic growth. However, much of the leading research on principal leadership has implications at the superintendent level as well (Fullan, 2005).

Marzano and Waters (2009) studied the impact of district leadership on student achievement. Their research included a meta-analysis of twenty-seven reports, which reflected data from 1,210 districts. The analysis revealed that district leadership and student achievement had a small but statistically significant correlation,  $r = .24, p < .05$ . They stated:

. . . given this correlation between district leadership and student achievement of .24, we would predict that the average student achievement in the district would increase by 9.5 percentile points . . . when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected. (Marzano & Walters, 2009, pp. 4-5)

The authors further stated that leadership style should promote autonomy in organizations and carry the expectation that school principals and other administrators in the district lead “within the boundaries defined by the district goals” (p. 9).

Marzano and Waters (2009) discovered what they called the bonus finding. This finding implied that “the longevity of the superintendent has a positive effect on the average academic achievement of students in the district and this positive effect may manifest itself as early as two years into a superintendent’s tenure” (p. 9).

Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) presented theoretical insights and strategic implications gained from five years of data collection and analysis in a study of long-term change in education. This study documented leadership changes and their impact on academic achievement at eight United States and Canadian secondary schools over a 30-year period. The researchers collected data from teachers and administrators who worked with them in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. They identified five major internal and external change forces responsible for major shifts in direction in the life of a school and its employees. Leadership succession was one of the forces they identified. This tells us that the way leadership is transitioned is critical for the success of the district’s mission, vision, and core beliefs.

Wenger (2000) identified a series of three stages of knowledge necessary for leadership during times of transition: inbound knowledge, insider knowledge, and outbound knowledge. Inbound knowledge is insight in leadership or insight that pertains to a specific school that is needed to evoke change. Insider knowledge is gained from, and exercised with, other members of the community after becoming known and trusted.

According to the Hargreaves and Goodson (2006), the sustainability of school improvement and reform initiatives is undermined by excessive emphasis on inbound knowledge

of leadership at the expense of equally important outbound concerns. In their 30-year study on change in education they found that leaders typically stayed in a school for less than five years. This accelerated frequency of succession can be tied to the early retirement of the baby boomer generation, precipitated by standardized reform and increasing pressures on school districts to bring about rapid improvement in underperforming schools. This turnover is creating instability in school leadership (Association of California School Administrators, 2001). This constant turnover causes leadership to rotate through schools, fostering among teachers an attitude of entrenched resistance to reform initiatives that stifles systemic change.

Superintendent tenure has long been believed to average two to three years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). A team of researchers looked into this so-called revolving door theory of the superintendency (Natkin, Cooper, Fusarelli, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). The purpose of the research was to determine if the superintendent position is fleeting. It examined whether or not superintendents should be advised to keep their bags packed, rent rather than buy new homes, quit the job rather than fight, and expect and prepare for failures. This study makes several contributions. First, it introduces the idea of considering superintendent turnover in the context of the broader superintendent labor market—in which decisions made both by school boards and superintendents are important—allowing for consideration of a broader set of factors than in most prior literature on the topic. Second, it draws on insights from a more detailed public administration literature on city manager turnover to help frame turnover among superintendents whose positions are similar to those of city managers along key dimensions. Third, it evaluates the contributions of factors previous superintendent turnover research has suggested as important, such as the role of the school board, along with factors that have previously gone unexamined, such as evaluations of superintendent performance. Fourth, it

separates retirements from other types of moves empirically to provide a more precise assessment of how various factors contribute differentially to those turnover decisions. Finally, it sheds light on patterns in superintendents' moves across districts, pointing toward a potentially fruitful area for further empirical inquiry.

Glass and Franceschini (2007) proposed that for change to be successful within all facets of education, stable and predictable leadership needs to be in place over a sustained period of time. They stated, "the three-year cycle of dismissal, search and selection, reorganization and dismissal again was the greatest single hindrance to improving the quality of our schools" (p. 29). This being said, the review showed the average superintendent tenure varied depending upon the size of districts studied. Larger, more urban districts tended to turn over superintendents every three to five years with an average sustainability of 4.71 years. The study by the Council of Great City Schools showed where the mean tenure for the 48 districts responding was 2.33 years. These were the largest of the urban school districts in the nation, many of which are in dire straits when it comes to improvements in student learning and closing the achievement gap. However, when looking at smaller, less urban districts, the superintendent tenure averaged 7.25 years. In reviewing superintendent tenure in a study covering 25 years and 1,103 superintendents in 206 districts with less than 1,000 to 50,000 students, the median tenure was 6.5 years with 274 superintendents still in office at the time the study was conducted.

Glass and Franceschini (2007) noted several negative consequences came from the perpetuation of the myth that superintendents only spend two to three years in a position. Their study indicated that the less time a superintendent expects to spend in a new district, the more reluctant the superintendent may be to undertake deep reform, instead focusing his or her efforts on objectives that can be easily accomplished within two or three years.

These national studies of superintendencies also found that school systems can be negatively impacted by the revolving door myth, in particular the mindset that improvement initiatives will go away as fast as the current superintendent leaves and a new one comes to the district. District personnel, teachers, parents, and even the board will not buy into the reform efforts, holding out for the next new superintendent. This belief can also have serious political implications, leading the public to see superintendents as hired guns, coming into a district to take care of a few problems, and then leave. This leads to distrust of the position of the superintendent in general and can cast a negative pall over education (Natkin et al., 2002).

### **Roles, Responsibilities and Behaviors of School Board Members**

To the average citizen, looking at the work of the school district and the work of the school board can be somewhat ambiguous and complex. It is possible to interpret the role as a list of duties. Board member induction may be the first opportunity a citizen has to learn about the scope of the role and the significance of the responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities are described differently by different sources. They are sorted here in the following categories: (a) vision, mission, and core beliefs (b) selecting and hiring the superintendent, (c) resource and fiscal management, (d) community advocacy, (e) policy management, and (f) evaluating the progress and programs of superintendent and district goals (Smoley, 1999).

The aspects of the school board's role with hiring and evaluating the superintendent are seldom overlooked and easily identified. Smoley (1999) used the terms "chooses, directs, and evaluates" (p. 4) to describe their role with the superintendents. The Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) (2007) described this responsibility of the school board as "designating the chief executive" (p. 2). Given the public nature of selecting a superintendent



for a school district and the school board's strong tie to community involvement, this level of responsibility is a decision that is easily identifiable.

The demand for responsible fiscal and non-fiscal management is very high because of the nation's economic downfall. Approval and adoption of an annual budget and managing other financial responsibilities is a critical role. The deployment of these resources is a responsibility that requires school board members to work together and prioritize their goals in collaboration with the superintendent (Smoley, 1999; WSSDA, 2007).

Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) described the board's fiscal role as the process of maintaining fiscal responsibility and autonomy. The authors also state that the school board has authority to appropriate the local funds necessary to support the board-approved budget, thus determining the application of local support and state and federal dollars.

School board members are predominately publicly-elected citizens. The only time a school board member takes a board seat without an election is if a seat becomes available prior to the official ending of that term. In this case, a citizen may be appointed by the school board to fill that seat until the term officially expires. In the state of Washington, the citizen must run for election if they choose to maintain their position on the board once their appointed term has expired.

Resnick and Bryant (2008) took the concept of the school board's role in representing community to a deeper level of discussion related to democracy. Specifically, they discuss how the board can be an active supporter of the continuation and development of public involvement in our school systems. These authors wrote:

Local school boards are the key mechanism in a mutually dependent relationship between education and democracy, a relationship that is played out through civic engagement. So,

beyond the board representing the community as elected officials they can also increase democratic participation by inviting citizens to participate in the decision-making process. Through that engagement citizens' support for education can be strengthened. (p. 2)

Smoley (1999) begins to frame this community advocacy role by using the metaphor of a "bridge" for the school board, presenting it as taking a more active role in reaching out to the community. This is a role where opportunities are sought out by school board members to involve community members versus one that waits for the community members to come to them.

Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) extended this role to the one of advocacy. These authors suggested board members serve as "advocates for all children, teachers, and other staff by adopting 'kids first' goals, policies, and budgets" (p. 14). WSSDA (2007) described the board's role in this area as advocacy for the local citizenry.

The school board's responsibility, as it relates to policy management, encompasses both the development and the management of district policy. Van Clay and Soldwedel (2009) recognized this role and noted the need for balance between the strategic elements of establishing policy and the tactical elements required to create a policy aligned with contract language, time constraints, and legal mandates.

According to Van Clay and Soldwedel (2009);  
when there is a perceived need for a policy addition or modification, either board members or tactical staff (usually the superintendent) can initiate a back-and-forth discussion to draft a new policy for board approval [. . .]. However, a board should still exercise its strategic role of setting and approving policy for the organization by maintaining editorial control of the draft. (p. 27)

They noted that only the school board, by a majority vote, can approve the policy. McAdams (2006) described policies as documents approved by the board that “outline goals, standards, or principles to guide or prescribe actions and constrain behavior by district employees, students, and others whose interest should be directed to the mission, vision, and core beliefs” (p. 6).

### **New Board Member Induction**

As new board members begin their journey of leadership and service to the school district, the superintendent and existing board members may play a role in how the new board member initially thinks about his/her role and the impact their leadership has on student achievement. A study conducted in 2000 by the Iowa Association of School Boards found that “school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts” (p. 4). The induction process could be viewed as the first opportunity to begin developing the new board members’ knowledge and disposition with regard to achievement for all students.

As the United States continues to move toward a culture of higher accountability and high-stakes assessment, there is a shift in understanding of board responsibilities. It was not long ago that school boards and superintendents were seen more as managers than leaders, when their primary duties were budgets, discipline, transportation issues, and dealing with collective bargaining groups. School boards were almost solely focused on financial, legal, and parent/student issues, leaving achievement concerns for the educators (Resnick, 1999).

With the ever-increasing focus on raising student achievement and the imperative to provide equal access to education for all students, this new level of accountability increases the importance of preparing a school board to be an effective team. Preparation may also minimize

disruptions by reducing board turnover, even though turnover and change are natural occurrences.

### **Relational Trust**

The concept of relational trust stems from research conducted over a 10-year period by the Center for School Improvement at the University of Chicago. The case studies focused specifically on relationships within the school and the influence these relationships had on math and literacy. Positive relationships start with the adults in both the school building and district. Bryk and Schneider (2002) determined that positive relationships among adults in a school setting greatly influenced the extent to which students succeeded.

Rossi and Stringfield (1997) denoted that attributes of interpersonal trust dealt with students feeling cared for by their teachers, teachers sharing a vision and a sense of purpose, and teachers and students maintaining open communication. As a result, students felt an overall sense of trust.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) outlined four components of relational trust. These include respect for the importance of the person's role, personal regard for others, competence to administer the role, and integrity. As a result, the highly effective leader will create a sense of relational trust by embracing these four components as part of an overall leadership style. Leadership style will be looked at through member-checking questioning in my study to get an idea of what leadership styles each superintendent brings to his/her respective district.

### **Interpersonal Trust**

Interpersonal trust is defined as one party's willingness to depend on the other party with a feeling of relative security, even though negative consequences are possible (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). "Trust tends to be somewhat like a combination of the weather

and motherhood; it is widely talked about, and it is widely assumed to be good for organizations. When it comes to specifying just what it means in an organizational context, the vagueness creeps in” (Porter, Lawler & Hackman, 1975, p. 497). Interpersonal trust is a person-specific concept that applies in a specific situation. Interpersonal trust is an intentional state: the person is willing, ready, or planning to trust, depending on the other person in the situation (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998).

In their 2009 publication *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky presented qualities of adaptive leadership within an organization; these qualities can be very dependent on the trust and mistrust of members within the system. Diagnosing the organizational system and the adaptive change takes careful thought and courage. Organizations have keen external sensors, internal norms, and a critical mass of people who engage. Five key characteristics that make some organizations more adaptive than others were identified: (1) elephants in the room are named, (2) independent judgment is expected, (3) leadership capacity is developed, and (4) reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.

Leadership often involves challenging people to live up to their words and to close the gap between their espoused values and their actual behavior. It may mean pointing out the elephant in the room while sitting at the table in a meeting. This is the unspoken issue that everyone sees but no one wants to mention. It often requires helping groups make difficult choices and give up something they value on behalf of something they care about, more than holding onto what is not working. Leadership often entails finding ways to enable people to face up to frustrating realities (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004, pp. 33-34).

## **Understanding the Complexities of Trust**

In their 2008 publication, *Living on the edge of chaos: Leading schools into the global age*, Snyder, Acker-Hocevar, and Snyder presented a theory of change around chaos and complexity theory. The idea of emergence is described when leaders are paying attention to emerging trends crucial to balancing the chaos in today's fast societal pace. One of the basic claims of complexity theory is that complex systems cannot be controlled, but they can adapt to their environment. Another claim is that living systems are never in equilibrium and are inherently unstable. The creative principle of complexity theory and its emergence is that the deep mysteries and properties of complex dynamic systems emerge from within the system and not from outside. Increased complexity is a fundamental property of complex dynamic systems; the survival of a system has to do with information gathered about the environment and members' responses to changes within it. The concept of emergence from within is crucial to understanding the whole natural system. There is a debate that both visionary and emergence perspectives are vital to the critical balance of the organization.

In this study, the LMX theory will be one of the conceptual frames used to analyze the relationships between the superintendent and board chair and the newly inducted board member. In examining and determining the quality of exchanges between the numerous dyadic relationships, this theory will allow for the construction of a greater understanding of the patterns of decision making and the issue of how the relationships are developed in each school district. At the center of each exchange is the concept of both the vision and emergence of situations that cannot necessarily be controlled or predicted, how each person might influence the structure of understanding between each leader-member relationship, and the fact that conflict or differences in opinions are not necessarily bad.

## **Mission, Vision, and Core Beliefs**

The purpose of the mission, vision, and core beliefs of the district is explained by Smoley (1999) by saying that the board has several responsibilities, one of which is that “it guides the accomplishment of the school district’s purposes, particularly focused on the education of the district’s children: It guides fundamental change in goals, programs, and structures” (p. 4). The role of the school board is described by Van Clay and Soldwedel (2009) as a “strategic role” (p. 13). In this respect, the school board is expected to maintain a big picture view of the work of the school district. “A school board at its best is a visionary, strategic change agent” (Van Clay & Soldwedel, 2009. p. 13). The purpose of the school board, according to Rogers (2003), is narrowed down to a few responsibilities surrounding the mission, vision, and goals of the school district.

The mission, vision, and core beliefs guide expectations and standards that the board identifies within their work and communicates to others so it becomes the guiding force for the work that takes place in other roles such as government officials serving on boards. In addition, Smoley (1999) explains that the school board is responsible for screening and supporting key projects to improve programs and operations. A district with a clearer and more focused mission is more likely to pursue programs and initiatives that will accomplish the established goals.

## **School Board-Superintendent Relationship**

Working together is especially important for those who serve public schools. The primary example of cooperation must come from the top—from school boards and superintendents (Houston & Bryant, 1997). Those who govern public schools must share a vision, clear expectations, and the ability and courage to lead. Since education is a dynamic

system, school boards and superintendents must work as a team to engage the public, and to nurture a climate conducive to change.

The roles expected of superintendents and school board members in American public education, while often intertwined, are different by design and with respect to policy development and implementation. Both the *National School Boards Association* and the Washington State affiliate, the *Washington State School Directors Association*, explain that elected school board members are vested with policy-making responsibilities, and superintendents and staff are charged with the implementation of policy decisions. Historically, this delineation has not always been clear in practice, and the lack of clarity has been both problematic and opportunistic—for both board members and superintendents.

As chronicled by numerous researchers (Bjork, 2001; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003; Danzberger & Usdan, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Houston & Bryant, 1997; Wong, 1995), the fuzziness which surrounds the demarcation of board and superintendent responsibilities can lead to real problems in school districts, with detrimental impacts for everyone affected by the system, students and adults alike. Alternatively, it can present opportunities for superintendents to work effectively with boards in the development of policies that can address important issues, including those dealing with social justice and equity.

Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) made clear that public education policy development and practice are political in nature. The politics of education policy include both internal and external pressures and interests, and entail the need to clarify both the actual purpose(s) toward which the policy is aimed and the real effects of its design, adoption, and subsequent implementation. Superintendents and boards need to work closely and collaboratively in many areas in order to assure high expectations of, and achievement from, all students served. Such a



relationship is especially fundamental with respect to the policy and direction-setting responsibilities within a school district.

In order for a superintendent and school board to have a positive impact as effective policy advocates at the local district level, *a priori* collaborative work with respect to goal setting and the establishment of non-negotiable goals for learning and instruction is vital (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Through both a clear definition of key district interests and goals and work that can illuminate such goals in the clearest way, a framework can be identified that can serve as a filter for key decisions—especially policy decisions (Gladwell, 2000).

Genuine involvement of all board members in a collaborative process to define and set a course to achieve clear outcomes is advocated by Eadie (2003; 2006). Development of the governing capacity of the school board is important, and allowing board members to participate on standing district committees can broaden their knowledge and provide them ownership in the direction of the district. Danzberger (1994) states that a board cannot and will not govern well if its members cannot, through healthy debate, develop consensus about the role of the board and the purpose of the district it leads. Attention must be given to the constituencies to which the board is accountable, how the board will relate to those constituencies, and to the need for board members to view themselves as moral and cultural leaders rather than political leaders.

Clear school board codes of conduct can be helpful toward the board maintaining focus on its responsibility to establish district policy and not venture into day-to-day district operations (Riede, 2004). Because proper board behavior is critical to a district's success, confining board actions to the needed areas of policy making, planning, and appraisal is important. Transforming local school boards into true education policy boards that focus on development, implementation,

and oversight of policies to improve the academic achievement of students is needed (Danzberger, 1994).

### **Superintendent Induction and Support Systems**

The emphasis in role of the superintendent has changed over time from management to instructional leadership (Elmore, 2007). Historically, superintendents were selected from the ranks of principals with little or no formal preparation for the job. The expectation of the superintendent was to work with the board, manage the district, keep the books balanced, and deal with personnel issues as they became evident (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The managerial role still exists and is essential to the success of a school system, but the importance of management has taken a back seat to the focus on instructional leadership. Because of this, research has been conducted to determine the need for better induction and professional support programs for instructional leaders (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006; Elmore, 2007; Fullan, 2005).

Grogan and Andrews (2002) documented the changing role of the superintendent and provided recommendations for improvement in superintendent preparation and professional development programs. Their research found that principal preparation programs tended to provide professional development that perpetuated the existing system. When looking at superintendent preparation programs, there were few to review. They stated that, "Few universities have programs tailored specifically for the position [of the superintendent], although most Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs in educational administration are considered to be preparation programs for superintendents" (p. 245). Their review found that preparation programs were instructor- and classroom-based and superintendents had very little training in the field. In examining the difficulty in making superintendent preparation programs more relevant to the position, the researchers found the varying responsibilities of the superintendent between states

and districts to be a key issue. Some significant variables included district size, state laws and regulations, board/superintendent roles, and fiscal requirements.

Grogan and Andrews (2002) made some recommendations for the redesign of superintendent preparation programs. Some of these recommendations focused on collaborative leadership skills, teaching essential knowledge organized around problems of practice and ISLLC standards, and promotion of ethics and moral leadership centered on issues of social justice and practiced through yearlong paid internships in diverse settings.

Kowalski, Fusarelli, and Petersen (2009) looked at the demographic profiles of novice superintendents and their employers. In this study, the researchers looked at all new superintendents in a four-state region. Their focus was on the novice superintendent, noting that the:

. . . critical nature of the induction year in professional education has long been recognized in relation to teaching. Unfortunately, research on novice superintendents and efforts to strengthen the induction year in this pivotal position has not received an equivalent level of attention. (p. 18)

They made a distinction between the first-year superintendent—one with superintendent experience, but with a new employer—and the first-time superintendent who has never held the position. First-time superintendents were asked to identify the three greatest strengths, weaknesses, and omissions in their preparation. Strengths included courses in school law and finance. Also referenced was training in the ability to network with others, the importance of the internship, personnel administration, and intellectual stimulation. Weaknesses included a heavy emphasis on theory with little practical instruction and the fact that many program instructors had never served in the position of superintendent. Suggested topics to add to their programs

were school board relations, politics of education, collective bargaining, and additional law and finance courses.

The Iowa Mentoring and Induction program was a pilot funded by a \$350,000 grant from the Iowa Department of Education. In conjunction with the School Administrators of Iowa and the fifteen Area Education Agencies, a mentoring and induction program was developed for principals and superintendents in the first year of their positions. Mentors were required to apply for the position, showing that they “had four years of exemplary administrative service that included a positive influence on student achievement, the use of data-driven decision making, a commitment to student success, and a willingness to provide personal time and attention to a protégé” (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). Once selected, the mentor and protégé were required to attend a series of training sessions that focused on twelve components. An interesting finding from this study was that principals and superintendents saw little benefit in the development of skills or specific advice on addressing difficult issues. They did see benefit in the positive relationship building between the mentor-protégé team. They also made positive reference to the help they received for socialization into the profession, and the ability to have reflective conversations and role clarification (p. 183). Alsbury and Hackmann’s (2006) findings included strong assertions that gender and race are two important variables that should be considered in mentoring programs and as mentor-protégé teams are selected. Finally, the mentoring programs should acknowledge the benefits to both mentors and protégés. They need to be flexible in scheduling, content, communication processes, and delivery models to accommodate the individual needs of both mentors and protégés.

Armstrong and Rada (1989) examined the relationships among school superintendents. They surveyed superintendents in Washington State to determine the strength of their network in

their professions. This study was completed before there were any formal mentor programs in Washington. The purpose of the study was to describe the structure of a superintendent network, and how superintendent attributes influenced the network of communication in their respective fields within the community.

### **Challenges to School Board Powers**

Howell (2005) highlighted three trends in public education that have accelerated the decline of local school board powers: mayors and states have taken control of public school district function in their jurisdiction; there has been a federal and state push for standards and accountability, such as the NCLB Act; and reforms through school choice have dominated education for over two decades. Viewed from a constitutional perspective, it is ultimately the duty of the state to oversee education, yet state legislators are less representative of local constituency needs and interests than are local school boards. This problem is only exacerbated with national educational reform, due to an inability to address individual differences in communities. The local school board is an advocate for a community, is accessible and accountable to local residents of the district, and is a community's educational watchdog National School Board Association (NSBA, 2003). Federal intrusion dilutes the power of locally elected board members to design policies that meet the specific needs of the populations they serve (Howell, 2005).

### **Criticisms of School Boards in an Era of Reform**

Citing three different studies of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), Danzberger (1994) summarizes agreements among critics of school boards. The criticisms include school board members too commonly:

- Fail to provide far-reaching, politically-risky leadership needed for reform.

- Have become another level of administration, often micromanaging districts.
- Are so splintered by members' attempts to represent special interests or meet their individual political needs that boards cannot govern effectively.
- Are not spending enough time educating themselves about issues or about education policy making.
- Have not provided the leadership required to mobilize other agencies and organizations to meet the health and social service needs of students and their families.
- Do not exercise adequate policy oversight, lack adequate accountability measures, and fail to communicate their schools' and school systems' progress to the public.
- Rely on rhetoric rather than action in decision making in their schools.
- Exhibit serious problems in their capacity to develop positive, productive, and lasting relationships with superintendents.
- Pay little or no attention to their performance and to their need for ongoing training.
- Tend either to make decisions in response to the "issue of the day" in changing communities, or govern to maintain the status quo in more stable communities.

Other researchers have criticized school boards and their members. Wong (1995) asserted that true school reform will remain elusive unless school boards stay away from micromanagement and focus more on setting policy. In his column in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Fox (2006) wrote about his personal experience as a school board member. In the column, he noted that he and fellow board members felt that taxpayers were entitled to representation, but that board members were not set up to act as pseudo-educators. His criticism was that school boards were run by people who saw themselves as educators, wanting to oversee curriculum and decide on teachers. He also argued that the job of the board is to hire competent

educators who should run the schools, while the board keeps an eye on the funds and assures that administrators and teachers don't get undue flak from voters and parents. Instead, it has too often been the case that a primary source of superintendent frustration stems from school boards micromanaging and/or interfering in what should be administrative responsibilities (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

In summary, because school districts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century must also respond to the non-instructional needs of students, a need exists for board members to open dialogue in their communities about the governance structure of education and the capacities of their institutions to provide interrelated health, developmental, and educational services necessary for children to succeed in contemporary society (Usdan, 1994). Since schools are often the core and most visible institutions in many communities, and because a key element of a community's prestige and desirability depends on the reputation of the local school system, leadership from local school boards for multifaceted collaborative efforts is vital. As boards attempt to deal with important issues, Elsberry (2005) suggests that discussions and deliberations about such issues should occur in ways that are transparent to the public, assuring a public voice in the outcome. Overall, school board service can be both time consuming and stressful, especially while board members engage constituents and attend district events as they work to gain knowledge, build networks, and solicit support for the school system. McAdams (2006) advocates the importance of developing district systems that afford board members an ability to remain organized in the midst of multiple demands on their time as they seek to build relationships and foster the power of ideas that are directly related to the trust and efforts between superintendents and school board members.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed; in other words, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. This understanding is an end in itself.

#### **Qualitative Methodology**

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that has numerous variations. Depending on the writer, such variations may be called traditions, genres, or strategies of inquiry (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Wolcott, 1992). One strategy of inquiry is the case study. Merriam (2009) stated that case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research because they are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community. However, the confusion surrounding case studies is that the process of conducting a case study is confounded with both the unit of study and the product of this type of research. Stake (1995) focused on trying to pinpoint the unit of study. Wolcott (1992) posited that case studies are a product of field-oriented research rather than a strategy or method. For the purpose of this research, I approached the case study as a bounded thematic system, which I studied and produced a product of responsive data collection research. The bounded system in this case is the superintendent, board chair, and new board member in three different school districts. I examined the leadership attributes in each district through the parameters of the LMX theory.

Therefore, in researching the relationships with the superintendent and their board members, I focused on leadership and processes through a description to shed meaning on what is observed, understood, and analyzed in these relationships.



## **Case Study Method**

The special attributes of a case study include acknowledgment of particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic features. The word “Particularistic” indicates that the case study will be focused on a particular situation. The situation studied in this research concern districts that have superintendents who are inducting a new school board member. The word “Descriptive” indicates that the end product will be a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study. This dissertation research emerged from the intensive study of relational trust between superintendents, the board chair and the new board member and resulted in a rich, thick description of the situation. Lastly, the word “Heuristic” indicates that the case study will illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study with insights into how processes evolved and developed (Stake, 1995).

This basic qualitative study uses a case study approach viewed through a leader-member exchange lens. Participant leaders selected for this study are all practicing superintendents employed in positions in Washington State where their school board chair and new board inductee were chosen as participants. All interviewed participants were asked a series of questions designed to illicit the interviewee’s perceptions regarding the induction processes and support while taking a new board position. I reviewed the data collected through an LMX theory lens to determine the type of interaction and exchange of communication that builds trust or decreases the trust levels among the triangulation of data.

Three superintendents fit the criteria of the study. I conducted face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews lasting from 30 minutes to one hour, if necessary, using an interview guide containing 14 questions that reflected the four research questions. A digital recorder was used to record the interviews.

## **School District Sites, Superintendents, Board Chairs, and New Board Members**

For the purpose of confidentiality, each school district and interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. The pseudonyms are: District A (Superintendent A, Board Chair A, New Board Member A), District B (Superintendent B, Board Chair B, New Board Member B), and District C (Superintendent C, Board Chair C, and New Board Member C).

### **Small Rural District A**

District A school district is located approximately 30 miles west of a major Washington city and served 1,635 students in four schools during the 2010-2011 school year. The ethnic distribution of the district was predominately Caucasian, representing 76.3% of the student population. The second largest demographic was Hispanic, representing 14.7% of the population with another 7% of the population identified as “Two or More Races.” Two percent of the population was identified as Black, Asian, or Native American. Fifty-five-point-seven percent of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch and 15.7% of the students received Special Education services. The district’s on-time graduation rate was 71.5%.

Over the past five years, District A student reading scores on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL/MSP have shown a decline from a passage rate of 84% during the 2006-2007 school year to a passage rate of 68.6% during the 2010-2011 school year. This created a five-year average of 75.4% which is lower than the state’s five-year average of 81.1% during the same time span.

Math scores for the past five years ranged from a passage rate of 45.3% on the WASL for the 2006-2007 school year to a passage rate of 58.6% for all students taking the Algebra 1 End of Course exam for the 2010-2011 school year. This created a five-year average of 40.7% which is also a bit lower than the state’s five-year average of 50.3%.

### **Superintendent A**

Superintendent A has been serving six years as the superintendent. He was a principal for 13 years prior to that. Years ago, he was on a committee with another superintendent, and that superintendent encouraged him to go and get involved in the WSU program. He followed that advice and went through the program, despite his uncertainties about being a superintendent. The opportunity to apply for a superintendent position arose, and he was selected for the job. He stated that he feels as if he “kind of morphed into it, actually.”

### **Board Chair A**

Board Chair A has lived in the community for 20 plus years and originally became involved in church. This led him to other organizations in the school such as Future Farmers of America (FFA), Scouts, and other various organizations. Both of his kids were in the school system and he joined because he wanted to be involved and play a part in their education.

### **New Board Member A**

New Board Member A started off volunteering in her children’s classrooms and was mostly involved in the early learning community because her kids were in the early learning community. She was the director for two years of the co-op preschool. Through her position, she got to know a lot of people at the district because of her desire for connections between early learning environments and the schools. She also became involved at the district level and wanted to become a school board member, seeing it as an opportunity. She is a former teacher who decided to stay home after having children, but could not stop thinking about education. So she finally said, “You know, I’ve got to do something with these ideas.”

### **Small Rural District B**

District B school district is located approximately 20 miles southeast of a major Washington city and served 901 students in three schools for the 2010-2011 school year. The ethnic distribution of the district was predominantly Caucasian, representing 84.3% of the population. The second largest demographic was Hispanic, representing 8.4% of the population with another 4.6% of the population identifying as “Two or More Races.” Less than 3% of the population were identified as Black, Asian, or Native American. Forty-five-point-nine percent of the district qualified for free and reduced lunch and 11.1% of the students received Special Education services. The district’s on-time graduation rate was 79.1%.

Over the past five years, District B student reading scores dipped from a passage rate of 90.8% on the 2006-2007 WASL to 79.3% on the 2007-2008 WASL. It returned to 90.3% for the 2010-2011 HSPE, creating a five-year average of 85.3%, which is higher than the state’s five year average of 81.1%.

Math scores for the past five years ranged from a passing rate of 53.8% on the WASL for the 2006-2007 school year to a passing rate of 49.4% for all students taking the Algebra 1 End of Course Exam for the 2010-2011 school year. This created a five-year average of 46.1%, which is lower than the state’s five-year average of 50.3%.

### **Superintendent B**

He is just concluding his eighth year as a superintendent. This is his second year in his current district. Prior to his current position, he was a principal and superintendent for six years in the Southside School District. His successful time there is what catapulted him to where he is now. He had some tough decisions to make, including decisions to address financial issues. District B was the only district in Washington State in worse financial condition than Southside

when he was hired as a principal. The district was on interest bearing warrants, budgeting receivables, and binding conditions when he started and the administration turned it around to a budget surplus in 18 months. When the former superintendent retired, the school board came to Superintendent B and appointed him superintendent. Superintendent B believes that his job was not something he was looking for, but that it fell into his lap. He says, “It’s the greatest job in the world.”

### **Board Chair B**

Board Chair B has been active in schools because his children were coming through the school system. He began to coach basketball and soccer. As his kids transitioned into high school, he became more interested in giving more to the school district. That’s when he was approached about running for the school board. He has enjoyed it very much and would not have changed anything about his current role as the board chair.

### **New Board Member B**

New Board Member B has been a school board member for six months, and even though her children are grown, she still wants to be involved with the school district. She had been thinking of becoming a school board member for several years and the timing seemed right. She has never worked on a school board or any other board governance committees. In the past she worked as a substitute in the school district.

### **Small Rural District C**

District C school district is located approximately 14 miles south of a major Washington city and served 1,255 students in four schools during the 2010-2011 school year. The ethnic distribution of these students was predominately Caucasian, representing 89.9% of the student population. The second largest demographic is Hispanic, representing 5.2% of the population

with the remaining 5% of the population spread fairly evenly across the remaining ethnic demographics of Black, Asian, Native American, and “Two or More Races.” Thirty-nine-point-nine percent of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch and 14.7% of the students received Special Education services. The district’s annual on-time graduation rate was 71.1%.

Over the past five years, District C student reading scores on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL/MSP have shown a slight improvement from a passing rate of 88.5% for the 2006-2007 school year to a passing rate of 90.6% for the 2010-2011 school year, creating a five-year average passing rate of 86.44%. This trend places them slightly above Washington State’s average passage rate of 81.1% during the same time span.

Math scores for the past five years grew from a passing rate of 43.8% on the WASL for the 2006-2007 school year to a passing rate of 51.5% for all students taking the Algebra 1 End of Course exam for the 2010-2011 school year. This created a five-year average of 45.2%, which is a bit lower than the state’s five-year average of 50.3%.

### **Superintendent C**

He has finished his fourth year as a superintendent in the district, coming from another state where he retired. He also completed his administrative education through WSU and found it to be a strong, impressive program. His supervisor was always pushing him to go forward. In 2005, he decided he would go back to school and get his doctorate. His kids were grown and out of college, so he started back at WSU to get his doctorate and had no intention of getting his superintendent credential, but his supervisor told him, ”Well, you are going to sign up for the superintendent cohort of course.” Superintendent C said, “That’s not what I really want to do [ . . . ] .” She responded, “All your credits apply to your cohort. It does not make sense not to do it, so you are signing up for the superintendent’s program.” He said, “Okay,” and signed up for the

two-year cohort. After he completed the superintendent program, he retired from another state and was offered a job as superintendent.

### **Board Chair C**

Board Chair C has been on the school board for three years. Her decision to become involved was influenced by the person who had just left the board chair position, a very good friend of hers. Her friend talked about being involved with the kids, and the need for another board member. According to her friend, no one else was going to apply, and she reported that Board Chair C had always been involved with children and had their best of interests in mind. Board Chair C has been on several different boards for athletics, booster groups, and band groups, and also volunteered at the elementary, middle, and high schools and has gone on several trips with students.

### **New Board Member C**

New Board Member C grew up in the community where she now serves and has lived there for about 30 years. She was the PTA president for about two years and began to volunteer in the classroom. She has been on the school board for a year or so. Her decision to serve was influenced by the realization that she wanted to have a greater impact as a volunteer in the community than she did as a “PTA fundraiser Mom.”

The figures below indicate academic student growth in reading, mathematics compared to Washington State average and the ethnic distribution for each district compared to Washington State average. This is followed by disaggregated data per district compared to Washington State.

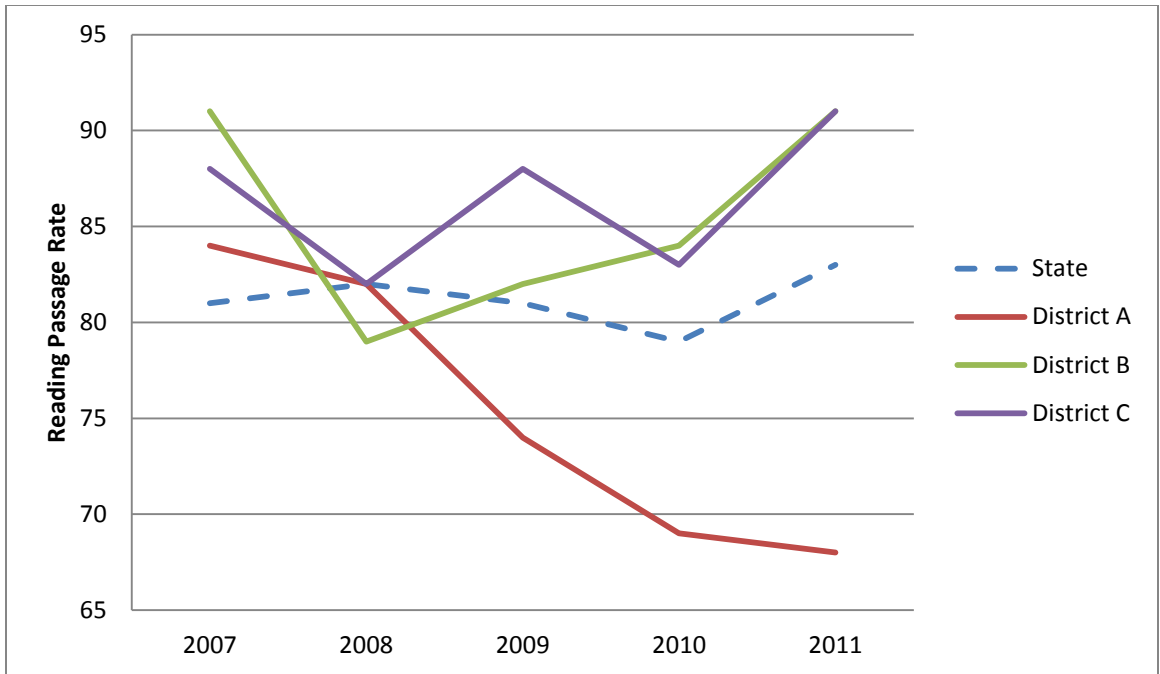


Figure 3a. District Reading Passage Rate

Comparison of each district's reading passage rate to the Washington State reading passage rate, 2007-2011.



Figure 3b. District Math Passage Rate



Comparison of each district's Math passage rate to the Washington State Math passage rate, 2007-2011.

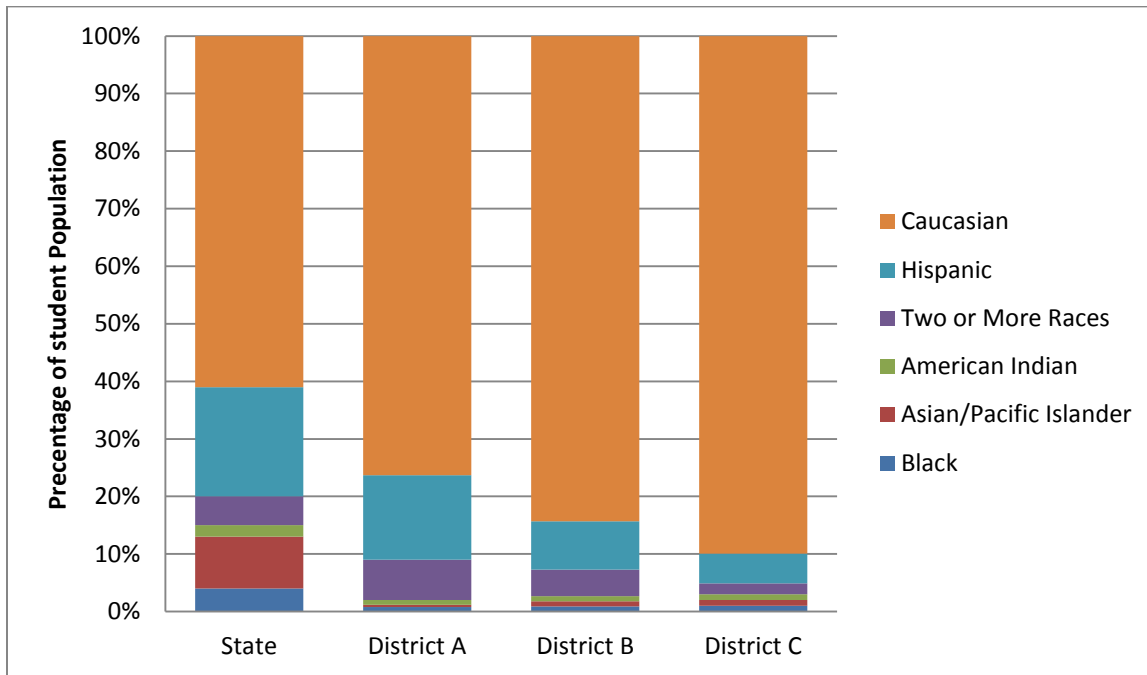


Figure 3c. District Ethnic Distribution

Ethnic distribution in each respective district compared to Washington State ethnic distribution.

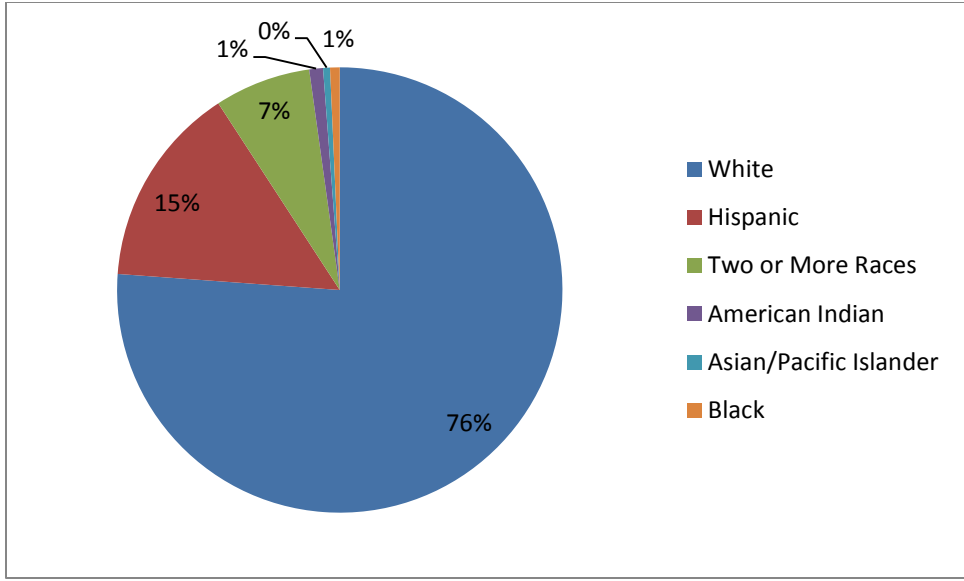


Figure 3d. Ethnic distribution in School District A.

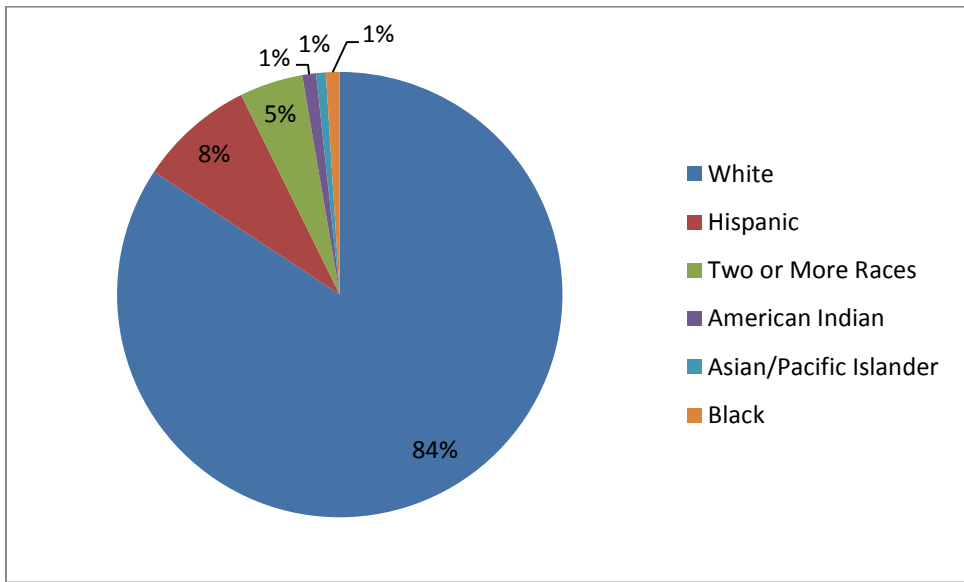


Figure 3e. Ethnic distribution in School District B.

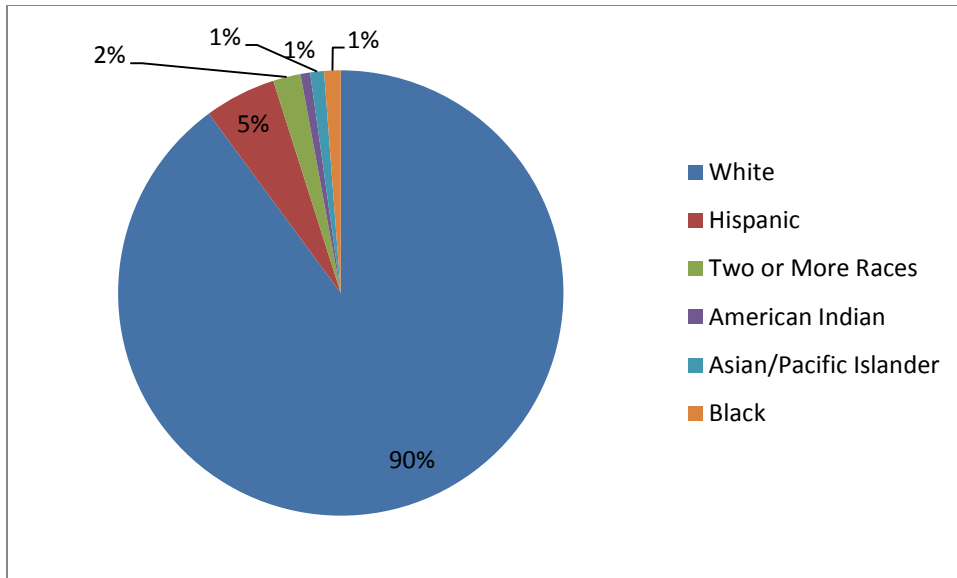


Figure 3f. Ethnic distribution in School District C.

### Positionality

As a researcher that is an outside administrator in relation to the superintendents and board members, I bring a particular position to this study. I received my superintendent certification two years ago, but have limited experience with the process of how trust is built from the superintendent's role with board members, especially new board members. I have been a high school principal for nine years in urban high schools and am now working as a principal in an alternative high school in an urban school district. Everywhere I have worked, trust has always been a priority in my leadership in moving the organization forward with whatever learning initiatives are put in place. As I took on new administrative roles, I was able to ensure that I was a trustworthy leader when it came to supporting students, staff, and community. It is a very difficult balance, but I enjoy and thrive on being strategic about making things work for the betterment of all the students, faculty, and staff where I have worked as an administrator.

It is my hope that this research will add to this discussion and provide input to university certification programs, regional educational organizations, and state associations that educate and mentor superintendents about board relations and the induction of new board members. As an aspiring superintendent, I must be aware of the potential difficulty of my own bias interfering with the study.

### **Data Collection**

I developed three interview protocols for: (a) new board member, (b) existing board member chair, and (c) superintendent. Specific interview questions were designed to help gather information from participants that could address the research questions of the study. These questions were chosen as a result of the review of literature surrounding LMX theory and relational trust.

I conducted nine interviews with participants using face-to-face, telephone, or email during the months of June and July 2012. The three semi-structured interview protocols allowed me to obtain a level of consistency across the three districts, while allowing for exploration of new concepts, ideas, and issues presented during interviews (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). During the interview process, each board chair and new board member were asked about their background and what they felt their role was as a board member. Interviews took place at the participant's workplace or an off-campus location if requested. I obtained prior consent from interviewees and recorded the interviews using digital audio to facilitate my recall of the conversations.

I transcribed the digital audio recordings and verified against field notes taken during the interviews to determine accuracy of information. Nine interviews generated a total of 110 pages of transcribed notes.

I also performed observations in addition to the interviews. The observations consisted of attending board meetings and listening to the communication of the superintendent and board members during open board sessions. I analyzed the board minutes from Districts A, B, and C to look at the relations of the board members and the superintendent during the new board members' first year in the seat. I took notes, following the guide provided by Taylor and Bogdan (1998), and included descriptions of people, events, and conversations.

### **Limitations**

The findings of the study are limited in three areas. First, the personal biases of the researcher must be acknowledged and addressed throughout the study. Secondly, the researcher's position as an outside administrator may inhibit the data collection process, as informants may not feel comfortable sharing information. Thirdly, the study is limited by the different perceptions that leaders and members respectively hold. Fourthly, all the superintendents were male and gender may impact the findings. Finally, the ability to be trusted by participants and to gain access to superintendents' inner thoughts about decisions and discussions with the school board may also limit the study.

### **Delimitations**

There are several delimitations in this case study. This research was limited to studying superintendents and school members in rural districts. This perspective may or not be applicable to larger urban settings.

### **Data Analysis**

I conducted data analysis simultaneously with data collection to focus and shape the study. I used the constant comparative method to simultaneously code and compare units of information (e.g. words, phrases, paragraphs, etc.) from all data sources to explore their

relationship to each other (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This process resulted in the emergence of significant themes to address the major research questions using frameworks within the study. Reliability and validity of findings was further improved through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member debriefing (Lincoln & Egon 1985).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The idea of trust being the first level variable to allow superintendents to carry out the mission, vision, and core beliefs of a district with their school board members was looked at from the LMX framework. Since the NCLB Act was instituted, we as a nation have been constantly trying all types of urban education reform with negative results. A precursor to all of these educational reform efforts is the first level relationship that superintendents have with school board members to implement new learning initiatives that cause a shift in restructuring the organization. This study will look at the superintendents' experiences during the process of inducting a new school board member to the governing body. It will also look to see if the superintendents' experiences with board members resulted in building trusting relationships with new board members and what this might look like in practice.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the findings from the analysis of data collected from the interviews, emails, phone calls, board meeting agendas, and board minutes. Using the constant comparative method of analysis, three overarching themes emerged from the data: (a) communication, (b) board governance, and (c) building relational trust. Findings revealed the relationship of the themes to my research questions:

1. How does the superintendent establish relational trust with newly-elected board members?
2. How does the board chair establish relational trust with newly-elected board members?
3. What are the perceptions of newly-elected board members around the behaviors of the superintendent and board chairs in establishing relational trust?
4. What differences or similarities occurred in the induction process of the three districts?

The profiles of the board chair and the newly elected board members varied but each of them had been active in his or her community and involved in various school-related activities for a number of years. Their backgrounds and experiences precede the themes that are presented. Chapter Three provided more general information on each district and participant and described the contextual setting of the study. I obtained this information in the interviews with participants.

#### **Interviewee Profiles**

The board chairs and new board members had a wide range of experiences. It is possible that the wide variety of experiences may have impacted the outcomes of this study, although this is not addressed in the study. The profiles presented here merely serve as background information for the reader.

**School district A.** Board Chair A lived in the community for over 20 years and was involved in a church. He was also involved in school organizations such as the Future Farmers of America and the Boy Scouts. Prior to being elected, he attended one school board meeting.

New Board Member A has lived in the community for four years. She was primarily involved as a volunteer in her children's classrooms during their early learning. She was also a director for two years in the local co-op preschool, which created connections between early learning environments and the school system. Prior to being elected, she had never attended a school board meeting.

**School district B.** Board chair B grew up in the community. He was involved in soccer club coaching and Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball. Prior to his appointment, he had attended no board meetings.

New Board Member B had been on the school board for six months. Even though her children are grown and out of the school district she is still an active member of the school board. Her involvement prior to becoming a board member included being a substitute educational assistant. She considers herself a permanent member of the community.

**School district C.** Board Chair C has lived in the community for 12 years and has been active in the district. Her involvement includes sitting on the board for athletics, various booster groups, band groups, and volunteering in the elementary, middle, and high schools. She also works with scouting groups involved in the district. Prior to holding her seat as a board member, she attended one board meeting.

Newly-elected Board Member C has lived in the community for more than 30 years, with the exception of four years while she attended college in her twenties. She volunteered in the



classroom after serving as the PTA president for two years. Prior to her position on the board, she attended three school board meetings.

The first theme of communication lays the groundwork for the emerging relationships and trust to be built with each new board member in the induction process. There were distinct differences in the structures and the communication patterns with the superintendents and the board chairs in each of the three districts. Two of the districts were more similar than the third district in the communication patterns.

### **Communication**

Communication is the first theme. The communication theme addresses two areas: (a) the induction process and (b) the importance of open dialogue between the board chair and the superintendent. The first area explores how new inductees view communication from the board chair and the superintendent and the second area looks at the existing communication patterns that affect governance and relational trust.

### **The Induction Process**

**School district A.** Communication emerged as a critical component in the development of relational trust. It was essential that effective communication be used in the induction process, when a board member was learning his or her role. Data revealed that the structure of communication throughout the induction process varied by school district. In School District A, Superintendent A communicated with Board Chair A who then communicated with New Board Member A, in addition to communicating directly with New Board Member A. New Board Member A preferred communicating directly with Superintendent A versus working through Board Chair A.

**School district B.** In School District B, the communication structure during the induction process was balanced more evenly between Superintendent B, New Board Chair B and New Board Member B. Superintendent B communicated with Board Chair B, who then communicated with New Board Member B. New Board Member B also communicated directly with Superintendent B.

**School district C.** In School District C, Superintendent C utilized a hierarchical communication structure, choosing to communicate directly with Board Chair C, who then communicated with New Board Member C. New Board Member C had limited direct communication with Superintendent C during the induction process. The unique communication structures within each school district emerged based on the individual personalities, skills and abilities of the Superintendent, Board Chair and New Board Member; however, the communication structures were universally used to build relational trust.

**Patterns of communication.**

Superintendents also used various communication methods to engage, educate and support new board members during the induction process. One such communication method was the use of informal and formal meetings. Informal meetings are opportunities for participants to meet and communicate face-to-face in a more private way, usually without a structured agenda or public notification; whereas a formal meeting has a defined agenda, purpose, time and location. Informal meetings can be more comfortable for new board members, allowing for more candid conversation and the potential for developing trust.

Each superintendent had a different process of induction. Induction is defined as the act, process, or result of deriving general principles from particular facts or examples. Superintendent A utilized informal meetings as a way to communicate with New Board Member

A during the induction process, in addition to formal meetings. Superintendent A posits that informal meetings with newly-elected board members built relational trust at a faster pace than formal meetings. This is the result of informal meetings allowing new members to be more honest, permitting new members to speak freely, and fostering less formal structures that reduce the confined arrangement of more formal board meetings. Superintendent B also had a balance of informal and formal meetings to communicate with New Board Member B during the induction process. Superintendent C did not utilize informal meetings in the same way and had coffee once with both the Board Chair C and the New Board Member C.

The perceived lack of communication by newly-elected board members had an impact on the induction process. Two superintendents provided little guidance and the process resembled “self-induction.” New Board Members A and C indicated that Superintendent A and Superintendent C did not use the board chair much in the induction process. These newly-elected board members also indicated that a lack of communication and a structured training process pushed them to pursue self-induction.

New Board Member A emphasized the lack of support that she received in the district. A lack of communication, unavailability, and lack of induction led Board Member A to conclude, “You let us know what you need.” As a result, she dealt directly with the superintendent on a need to know basis.

New Board Member C also supported the perception that lack of communication and formalized training resulted in the need for self-induction. “I was given the packet that had the strategic plan that had the vision and the mission statement, but not a lot of communication other than, ‘Read this.’ I just had to find it out on my own. There was not an orientation.”

New Board Member C concurred and shared:

I felt I had to do a lot of searching and figuring it out. There was not a lot of training or coaching through those first few months. Going to the WSSDA Conference really helped, but I had been on the board five months prior to the WSSDA Conference, and in those five months I felt like I did not have a lot of direction. I felt like I was left to just figure it out. So there was not a lot of communication.

New Board Member A had a similar experience, but sought much advice and help from her superintendent. Time to support new board members was central to their induction process. She said:

I'd say that the strategy that the two of them used was, "just ask us any questions you have, and we would be happy to spend time with you and answer your questions." This was very beneficial because I did get my questions answered. But the problem was that I didn't always know the questions to ask. It would have been helpful if they would have had just [sic] a piece of paper that says, "This is what a board member does, and this is what is expected."

It is important that the school board support strong communication practices to represent constituencies that hired them. It is equally important to include shared beliefs and values that represent the board and their constituencies in their communication practices. When newly-hired board members are elected into the position, it is important that information is provided first hand and the strategic plan is at the forefront of how they make their decisions.

### **The Importance of Open Dialogue**

The second subtheme under communication was the importance of open dialogue. It was mentioned in the responses by superintendents that some board members come to their positions with personal agendas. Normally, the term "agenda" is not a topic on the board agenda for a

monthly board meeting, but there can be an underlying, hidden purpose to an agenda a person holds which causes a sense of distrust and leads various board members to micromanage the district. Danzberger (1994), citing studies conducted by the Institute of Educational Leadership, noted that boards are often criticized for micromanagement and interference, findings which have been similarly chronicled by Wong (1995), and Goodman, and Zimmerman (2000). But the reasons for this micromanagement may be based on distrust.

Superintendent B shared a situation where open communication helped to resolve an issue that involved a conflict of interest, interference, and micromanagement issues:

We've had one conversation with a board member [where] the board chair and I were concerned [that] other board members had said, "This one board member is engaging in [bad] behavior." And so Board Chair B and I very politely asked if we could speak with that person after a board meeting confidentially [...]. [We] explained [that] we are here to support her in her role and that she is going to face some very difficult decisions. And so knowing that, with no surprises, she'll know what she's going to face in the board meetings. If she would like to come early and sit down, we can problem solve, and we can hash [it] out, and play devil's advocate, and answer any questions possible before she has to make that decision.

But the issue was [that] she was abstaining from voting because [she knew] the people involved in the [board's] decisions [...]. She was claiming conflict of interest. And we said, "This is a small community and you're related to a third of the town. Therefore every decision you make is going to affect a relative, a neighbor, a friend, the parent of one of your child's friends. So it doesn't matter if you vote yes or no, just don't

abstain. Doing that sends the wrong message. If we do that we'd all be abstaining." But it was taken well.

Superintendent C's response gives further emphasis to the importance of open dialogue and communication in order to address the political agendas of board members:

I try to be open. I have a very, very open door, and that's for anybody. I don't care who you are. Come on in and let me help you solve the problem. So, on that level, I think the communication is very important. I don't care who the board member is that says, "[I] have no agenda. I just want to be on the school board." They all have an agenda. When I came here and looked at the test scores and I looked at the OPSI Website, I created an agenda on where I thought we should go. They all have an agenda, whether I agree with it or not; so it's figuring out what their real agenda is and how I can blend that with where the district is going.

After interviewing all of the board members, it was very clear that their relationships are all unique. For each of the others interviewed, a prevailing theme of a simple desire to help and to give back to their community was noted. Indeed, several shared an *a priori* understanding that it is not the role of an individual school board member or of the school board as a group to micromanage the operations of the schools.

Board Chair C explained how important open dialogue was to develop a trusting relationship with Superintendent C:

He is a big trust person for me [...]. I love his input and talk [with] him a lot before we go into bringing new board members on or talk to him about where we can go with it or how this person is going to fit into the team. I trust him a lot with working with other people before [induction] and knowing where that person may fit.

Even though one board member's relationship with the superintendent is challenged, which compromises the dynamics of the board, the chair of the school board has built trust with the superintendent that result in a positive working relationship.

Board Chair A affirms a confident working relationship with the Superintendent where the entire board works well as a team:

So the relationship between our superintendent and our board right now is really, really good [. . .]. There's no issues [. . .]. There's no power play [. . .]. There's no issues between the board and the superintendent. We work well together. We communicate well together. So I don't see an issue there. In the past there have been . . . issues, but our current superintendent, I think is doing a great job.

Board Chair B explains the importance of open communication and his relationship with his superintendent:

He has an open door policy that anyone can come in and talk to him [. . .]. We have no objections to a board member coming in and talking to a superintendent and not going through the board chair [. . .]. To me it's the way it should work. Information is information. Good, bad, or ugly, you can't change it.

Overall, communication was an important element in the induction process of a new board member and the effort to develop relational trust between the superintendent, board chair and new board member. Each school district utilized varying communication structures and methods to engage, educate and develop relationships with newly-elected board members as well as to maintain existing school board chair and superintendent relationships. These structures and methods had a direct impact on a newly-elected school board member's induction and understanding of his/her role in school board governance. The next theme is board governance.

## **Board Governance**

Qualitative analysis revealed a second major theme within interview transcripts and source documents: board governance. Board governance comprised issues focused on the perceived roles of the board that included: the board chairs' perceptions, new board members' perceptions, the board members' motivation for becoming a board member, how motivation influenced their perception of their roles in the school board governance process, and the superintendents' perception of their roles in working with their board members.

### **Board Chairs' Perceived Roles**

First, Board chairs felt that their roles were to: (a) serve as a liaison, and (b) work as a team. Board Chair A described his role as a liaison in the following way:

I think I'm somewhat of a liaison between the board and the superintendent, especially new board members. Current board members call me up and ask questions, and if I don't have an answer, then I go to the superintendent. In the same way, if the superintendent has an issue or a question, sometimes he'll go through me to go to the board member.

Board Chair B concurred by stating, "I've been on the board long enough to know, it's important to have a 'go between' between the board and the superintendent."

Board Chair C shared the importance of being a team by stating:

Even though I am the board chair, I like to involve everybody in the group so that it is hopefully working as a team; and, I hope to be able to continue that with a new member coming on again.

Board Chair A shared about teamwork stating:



The relationship between our superintendent and our board right now is really, really good. There are no issues [. . .]. There's no power play [. . .]. There's no issues between the board and the superintendent. We work well together well as a team. We communicate well together.

### **New Board Members' Perceived Roles**

New board members had varying thoughts on what their role is as a board member: a new perspective with knowledge of education, insight for future planning, and active listening. New Board Member A's statement explains what she believes her role is as a new member:

On our board, I'm the only person on the board who didn't grow up here and go to these schools. I'm also one of the only people who went to college. I feel that an important role for me to fill is to help those other board members understand some of these new perspectives.

New Board Member B's statement explains her involvement as being pivotal as her concern is in creating a plan that will sustain the district for years to come. "I see my role as a School Board Member [is] to provide my insight and input in planning for the future of our school district," she said.

New Board Member C's statement discusses the importance of active listening to her constituencies.

I would say that I'm someone to listen to people in the community and staff. A lot of time, people feel like they need to be heard about their concerns and their complaints, or even their praises for the schools.

## **Motivation for Joining the Board**

Interviewees also expressed their disposition toward helping others in their respective roles as board members. New Board Member A said, “Both my kids went to the school district [. . .]. I joined because I wanted to be involved; I wanted to play a part in their education.”

New Board Member A explained:

I used to be a teacher and when I had my children, I decided to stay at home with them. And through the time I’ve had them at home, I seriously can’t stop thinking about education. I cannot stop thinking about solutions for education and things we should do and ideas

Board Chair B’s statement supports “stepping up” to help out:

In my district there wasn’t really anyone stepping up to run. Then I heard of a person that was going to run [. . .]. I knew that they had an agenda and I didn’t go with that, whether it was right or wrong. I had an open mind, so I thought I’d throw my hat in there and take a stab at it.

New Board Member B has had the desire for a long time to support her community. “I’ve been about becoming a school board member for several years [. . .]. I decided to go for it,” she said.

Several board members described their willingness to help and have an impact. Board Chair C said:

The person that just left the board chair position was a very good friend of mine [. . .]. She and I talked about it a lot [about] being involved with the kids, and them needing another [chair] because there was no one else going to apply, and I’ve always been involved with the kids and have the best [in mind] for the kids.

New Board Member C said, “I realized that I wanted to do more as a volunteer in the community than just [be] a PTA fundraiser Mom, so I thought being a school board member might have more of an impact.” These board members felt they needed to be there for children.

The characteristics of a well-functioning board are essential for inducting new board members. For those interviewed, a prevailing simple desire to help and give back to their community was noted. Several shared an understanding that it is not the role of an individual school board member, nor in the purview of school board members generally to micromanage the operations of the schools. And although micromanagement was noted in the literature as a challenge for many district boards, working as a cohesive team and building trust contributes to the overall success of any board. The ability to demonstrate understanding with a strong sense of teamwork is needed for boards to operate effectively (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The way that the new school board members see their roles is rooted in their motivation to be a board member and also in their interaction with the superintendent. These role perceptions impact district board governance.

### **Superintendent’s Perceived Roles**

Superintendents perceived their role as (a) maintaining trust and (b) facilitating work together as a team. In the interviews, Superintendent A shared:

Honesty is really one of the critical things for trust with me, and I try many things to maintain with trust with my school board. It resonates through all the different aspects of the district, so maintaining trust is huge. What is my role with the board? To be honest with them and to build trust with them.

Superintendents also perceived that their role was to facilitate the creation of a team and team work. Superintendent A said:

We kind of are the big team in the district [ . . . ]. Things have to be solid between us [ . . . ]. So my job is to make sure I can give them the pieces of the puzzle that are understandable to them. So that when we do get together and talk about issues, they can understand all of the aspects as well as they possibly can.

Superintendent B affirmed the importance of team questions prior to making district decisions as being part of a healthier organization.

I think that teams function best when . . . the board is not blindly approving everything 5 to 0 and with 20-minute board meetings. I think our board meetings are long; they're two to three hours. But we discuss things, and the board doesn't just simply say, "Okay, this is the recommendation, so this is what we're going to do." They actually debate, [and] ask for more information.

Superintendent C discussed the importance of the tireless cycle of using communication to build trust and how institutional memory supports moving forward, but there is always room for improvement.

There is a lot of trust building going on right now because [the members] are all so new to the board. I think they don't . . . understand the growth that the district has made over the last four years [ . . . ]. We are headed in the right direction and that we are in a much better place than we were. One of the things that I say to the board, I say to staff, I say to parents, I say to the community, "the kids of our community deserve the absolute best we can give them, and no matter how hard we try, I believe we can always do better [ . . . ]." But every time you get a new board member you have to start the educational process all over again. [You have to let them know that] this was where we were and this is where we are now.

Superintendents, when describing their role, expressed the importance of building trust among the team and keeping the school board engaged at the appropriate level to foster informed involvement while avoiding micromanagement (Bjork, 2001; Danzberger & Usdan, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Wong, 1995).

### **Building Relational Trust**

The third theme is building relational trust. Superintendents discuss their approaches to strengthening relationships; board chairs and new board members share their perceptions of what they see in this reciprocal trust building process as a result. Specifically, this theme highlights various components and facets of relational trust to show how these different role groups act and respond during this dynamic exchange and process.

Before presenting the findings, however, it is important to note that within inter-organizational relationships, some vital success factors have been identified by many researchers evident in these findings. Among one of the most common success factors, and possibly also one of the most critical, is trust (Blomqvist 2002; Ford et al. 1998; Parkhe 1998; Raimondo 2000; Sako 1994). Taking the time to build relational trust is imperative so that new board members can acclimate to the mission, vision and core beliefs of the culture in order that students can learn with high standards and clear expectations. Board members who understand the expectations can better work with district educators to ensure that they support student's progress for their districts and communities. Building relational trust is seen to increase predictability (Sako, 1994), adaptability (Lorenz 1988), and strategic flexibility (Young-Ybarra & Wiersema, 1999). As school boards evolve every year with the possibility of new board members being inducted, relational trust is the first step to bring the team together to work as one unit. Trust also opens opportunities for informal network collaboration (Bidault & Jarillo, 1997)

and collaborative innovation (Miles et al., 2000). Collaboration among board members develops a partnership that can become an important resource for effectual governance.

In the interviews, superintendents discussed important elements in the development of relational trust with new board members. Superintendent A shared his thoughts on building relational trust in a small district and explained the importance of trusting the people who run various parts of the district:

I had dual goals here. One goal is that the new board member understands the mechanics of how the district [works] and how different parts work together, but the other goal is to have more experiences working personally with a few people out there [. . .]. Maybe some superintendents would rather [have things] go through the superintendent at all times. I'm not convinced in the long run that that is the way to go ahead and build trust. So, my dual goals, once again, [are to] understand the mechanics of how the district works, but then also understand some of the people, the directors, [and] the principals that are running certain departments [. . .]. I want our board to have trust, not just in the mechanics, but I also want them to have trust in the people that are involved in leading the district and vice versa.

Superintendent B reflects on the importance of trust between him and the board in order to effectively deal with challenges that occur, and maintaining board/superintendent relationships despite not always agreeing. He reflected:

Board members have to trust the superintendent in order for the relationship to work. We've had some very challenging things. We've got one tonight. We have an employee who's asking for a leave of absence. And we usually grant every leave request. This is one I'm going to recommend they deny [. . .]. This is one that the board might go ahead

and grant anyway, contrary to what I recommend. So that doesn't ever look good and it doesn't happen often, but when it does, I need to realize that it's in their authority to grant that or not, not mine. So it's a developing relationship so we trust each other's thinking and decision making.

Effective superintendents know the magnitude of the effect of trust on the productivity of the board and persevere to establish trust. Board Member A stated:

I think the big thing is the trust issue. You would hear something from the superintendent, or former superintendent, and then the next day you'd hear in the community a [totally] different [thing] from what you were told. That creates a huge trust issue like, "Is he telling us what we want to hear instead of what should be said?"

In district C, the Board Member felt that the relationship with the superintendent was not functioning well and shared:

I don't feel like we have a high functioning relationship right now, between the board and the superintendent. And we have a lot of new board members on our school board, so we have lost some of that history. And sometimes change is good and doing things a new way is healthy and good, but quite honestly, listening to other boards present at WSSDA, I don't think our board is functioning like it could be.

Superintendent C was aware that the current situation was less than optimal and was optimistic that a collaborative relationship could be developed through trust, saying, "I would hope that [we can] build our trust and our relationship."

### **Components of Relational Trust**

There were components of relational trust such as honesty, benevolence, competence, reliability and openness apparent in the interviews with superintendents, board chairs, and new

inductees. These components describe approaches of the superintendents, board chairs, and new board members that result in more relational trust and demonstrate the reciprocity of the interactions between and among the superintendent, board chair, and the new board member.

### **Superintendents' Methods of Establishing Relational Trust**

**Honesty.** “Trust for me is something that I must maintain with your school board,” according to Superintendent, School District A. Superintendent, School District B concurred:

Trust is earned; you don't get it automatically by virtue of the position. You have to start with that personal relationship. But then, you have to have collective experiences together. We have to go through a budget crunch where we come out on the other side, or attempt a law suit where the board sits back and says, “Wow, I really trusted your actions in that, or your advice, or the way that you handled that.”

Superintendent, School District A added this supporting statement about honesty:

If there's a question in trust, things start falling apart very quickly. And it resonates through all the different aspects of the district, so maintaining trust is huge. And a big part of that is being honest with the board, and being up front with them. I think, going along with that too, part of my responsibility for [relating] with the board is to let them know what's coming up. What do I see on the horizon?

**Benevolence.** Superintendents were also willing to be benevolent and saw the importance of being upfront. Again, this was part of being honest. Superintendents respected board members and saw it as their responsibility to let board members know upcoming information about educational decisions from the district. Superintendent A wanted board members to “know what was coming up.” Superintendent B expressed the desire to help board members face conflict and was willing to “play devil's advocate and answer any questions



possible” before the public meeting. Superintendent B took 130 employees and their list of the 10 different things they had 1,300 different bullet points and came up with a poster categorizing all the statements. Superintendent B reflects on this by saying:

And it’s amazing [. . .]. They all boil down to 20 things. Each person was able to write their own belief statement because nobody can tell somebody what to believe, but based on all 1,300 belief statements, we can boil it down to “if you mean what you wrote, this is how you behave.”

He further says the difference between their words and their actions and behaviors and their beliefs and how they behave might be inconsistent. Each time a person’s actions were not consistent with what s/he wrote, Superintendent Be would go right back to the shared belief system and say, “Your behaviors are incongruent with your beliefs.”

### **Board Chair Members’ Methods of Establishing Relational Trust**

Board Chair Members most frequently used the facets of reliability and openness to establish relational trust. Board Chair A describes that things are going well because of the openness of Superintendent A by stating, “Our board member. . . she doesn’t hesitate to ask questions. It’s going really well. She’s doing a great job.”

**Reliability.** New Board Member B supports the importance of reliability and openness by saying, “I think the board chair is the go-to person. So our board chair would call me up and say, ‘Hey, do you have any questions? How are things going?’ I think the board chair has a leadership role and [the] responsibility to make sure the questions are being answered.”

Board Chair C expressed that Superintendent C has been a reliable support by stating, “Superintendent C for me has been a lean-on guy too. He is a big trust person for me. I trust

him a lot with working with other people before [induction] and knowing where that person may fit.”

**Openness.** The openness is also described by Board Chair A when he states:

[New board members would] come on in and sit down and talk. We [would] sit side by side and just go over [. . .] general doctrine, [and] what’s going to happen[.] [For example,] “If a parent calls you, this is what you should do.”

New School Board Member B expresses the importance of openness by saying, “If somebody has a question . . . and they don’t really know where to go directly, it’s nice to know our superintendent has an open door.” Superintendent C talks about how he feels the board is functioning currently and stated, “ I think we are functioning okay, and that there is a lot of trust building going on right now because they are all so new to the board.” The induction of multiple new board members has demonstrated to him the need for informing them on how far they have come as a district.

### **New Board Members’ Methods of Establishing Relational Trust**

New Board Members primarily had comments that emphasized the facets of openness and competence to establish relational trust.

**Openness.** According to New Board Member A, School District A:

The superintendent did a good job of making sure that I understood some of our norms. When we have a problem we address it with each other. We talk to each other before hand on a one-on-one basis and figure out what we’re going to do. Always make sure that everyone comes knowing what you’re planning on doing.

New Board Member B from School District B supports the importance of openness by stating, “If somebody has a question . . . our superintendent has an open door.”

**Competence.** The competence facet was also very important for New Board Member A. She stated, “Yeah, it was very much me driven. But they were very helpful and available for me. It was just sort of like ‘You let us know what you need.’” New Board Member C explains the how trainings were helpful and settling her feeling overwhelmed by saying:

It’s been very overwhelming. I didn’t really know what I was getting in for. I mean it was something that I was willing to do and wanted to do because several people who were employed by the district encouraged me to do it. I went into it a little blind, not really knowing, but I really found the WSSDA conference to be a huge help [. . .] . That new member boot camp was helpful. It helped me make myself not quite so confused [about] what my role is and what my role isn’t.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the findings of the qualitative case study were presented and organized around the major themes of the study. The participants were the superintendents, board chairs, and new board members of three respective districts.

The experiences and perspectives of the six school board members and three superintendents who participated in the study showed varying communication structures to engage, educate and support new board members. Data reflected the importance of effective communication as part of the LMX theoretical framework in supporting the induction process of a new school board member and development of relational trust.

Each of the participants in this study indicated that serving as a school board member entails considerable reward. There was pervasive agreement among the participants that they were glad to be involved in such work so that they can give back to their communities. Superintendents shared that key components of their roles are to build trust among the team in

addition to keeping the school board engaged at a level that fosters informed involvement while avoiding micromanagement. The majority of newly-elected board members expressed that there was a lack of training which required them to pursue a self-induction process to become acclimated to their roles as school board members.

Overall, superintendents agreed that establishing and nurturing trust was a key component of developing relational trust, as well as the establishment of a cohesive team with shared beliefs and a focus on organizational goals. Superintendents discussed what they did to address the issue of new board members coming on the board with specific agendas so it would not disturb teamwork and trust building. In addition, new board members and board chairs shared their thoughts on their relationships with their respective superintendents.

As a result of collaborative analysis with the superintendent, board chairs, and new board members, a number of conclusions and recommendations were generated. First, the superintendent plays a crucial role in the induction process of the new board member. Second, the board chair may or may not be used in the induction process, depending on the decisions made by the superintendent and/or new board member. Third, building trust was mentioned by all three superintendents because inducting a new board member affects the entire team. Last, the process of induction is complex and should be seen as an ongoing learning experience for the entire team. Each of these conclusions led to recommendations for the future. Discussion of the research findings, insights, and recommendations are provided in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate how three superintendents and their three board chairs built relational trust with three new board members through the induction process in each of their respective school districts. The study aimed to explore this relational trust through the reciprocal relationship perceptions of the superintendents, the board chairs, and the new board members as they oriented the new board members to their roles, board member expectations, and specific practices of the school districts.

An understanding of how superintendents, board chairs, and new board members perceived and experienced school board service is significant because of the increased interest and intervention in public education which has exerted pressure on board members and superintendents with higher expectations for local school boards and school districts to work together to increase student achievement. It is important to understand how those who hold school board positions understand and live out their role as board members amid the pressures and challenges faced by public education today while inducting new board members yearly. I discuss the findings in two parts; first, in relation to Tschannon-Moran's framework and second in light of the five key insights resulting from the findings of this study. Of particular import in the latter section are insights on how the different ways of communicating affected relational trust; hierarchical communication appeared the least effective. This chapter offers generalizations and insights garnered from the findings and discusses the practical implications and significance identified in this case study of three districts. Of particular note is the communication patterns that engender relational trust with new board members and the importance of ensuring that the new board member understands their role. The chapter also

offers recommendations for superintendent preparation programs as well as recommendations for further research that builds on the findings of this study.

### Facets of Trust

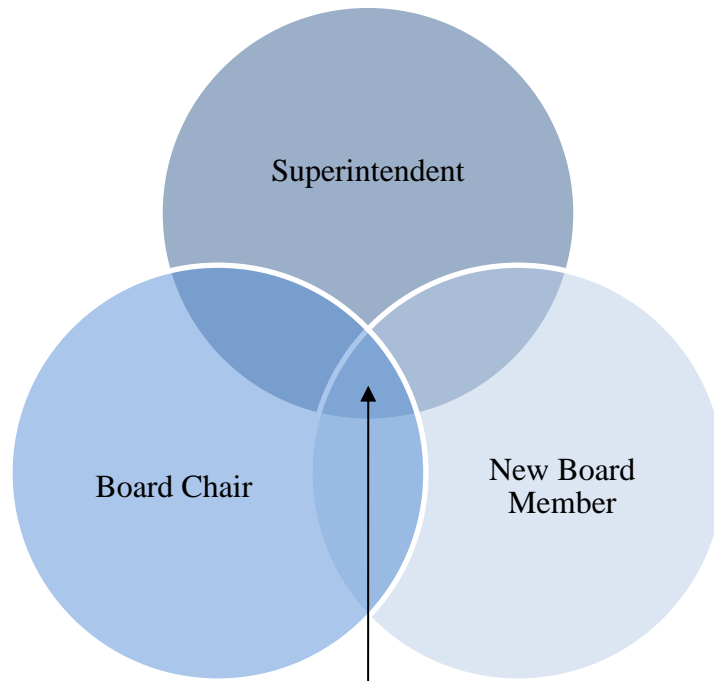
The first part of this chapter uses Tschannon-Moran’s framework of the six facets of trust to provide a categorical framework to discuss how superintendents are working with their new inductees. Superintendents predominately used the facets of honesty, benevolence and competence to establish relational trust. Board chairs focused on reliability and openness; new board members concentrated primarily on facets of openness and competence in learning their new roles (see Table 1a).

Facets of Trust	Superintendents			Board Chair Members			New Board Members		
	A	B	C	A	B	C	A	B	C
Honesty	✓	✓	✓						✓
Reliability				✓		✓		✓	
Benevolence	✓	✓				✓			
Openness			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Competence	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓

*Table 1a.* The facets of trust utilized by Superintendents and Board Members to establish relational trust.

Figure 1b that follows shows how the reciprocal relationship among the three role groups promotes facets of trust such as honesty, benevolence and the establishment of competence for the new board member. Presumably, the more the superintendent and the board chair manifest

the facets of trust, the more the new board member can begin to feel part of the team of people working towards a common end.



*Figure 1b. Board induction based on relational trust.*

*This depicts the reciprocal relationships that might influence the relational trust developed between the superintendent, board chair and new board member through the induction process with a new board member based on the facets of trust utilized by Superintendents and Board Members to establish relational trust.*

### **Five Key Insights**

This study follows a triangulation of the perceptions, perspectives, and experiences provided by three board chairs, three new school board members, and three superintendents, through the lens of the LMX Theoretical frame. The model is further delineated around the backgrounds and life experiences superintendents, board chairs, and new board members bring to school service and how they learn their roles, see issues, address challenges, achieve successes,

and meet frustrations as they engage their work together. Fourteen interview questions, included in Appendix A, along with follow-up profile questions, were asked of each of the participants in the study to identify more critical areas of relational trust in new board member induction through the superintendency.

### **Insight One: Building Relational Trust with Board Members**

The construction of trust has evolved as an important factor in three areas of education: learning, change at a local level, and reform at a systemic level (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Elmore, 2005; Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009; Hattori & Lapidus, 2004; and Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Trust as an organizational concept has been grounded in the theory of social capital (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Social capital refers to the ability to access resources—material and immaterial—and the capacity to control limited resources through relations in a social network (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Social capital can be described as the voluntary associations and norms of reciprocity (Fromme, 2005). Superintendent A talks about how he builds relational trust and the advantage he sees in being in a small district.

Maybe some superintendents would rather that things do go through the superintendent at all times or whatever. I'm not convinced in the long run that that is the way to go ahead and build trust. So, my dual goals, once again, [are] understand the mechanics of how the district works, but then also understand some of the people, the directors, [and] the principals that are running certain departments, because I want our board to have trust, not just in the mechanics, but I also want them to have trust in the people that are involved in leading the district and vice versa.



It is evident that the role of the board member centers around their ability to trust that the superintendent has a pulse on all constituencies within the organization and can demonstrate that the leaders of the district are competent.

### **Insight Two: Becoming a New Board Member**

Becoming a new board member has complexities. Board members are placed in a position to make important decisions, sometimes immediately upon taking office. These immediate decisions potentially impact district policy, fiscal status, or something as significant as hiring a new superintendent for the district. However, there is little research around the induction of new board members or the impact of transitions on the governance team. In the study of Illinois school board members, over 2,000 school board members in the state of Illinois responded to a survey question about induction practices (Illinois Association of School Boards [IASB], 2007). Only 16% of the participants responded that they had “discussed at length” the topic of orientation. This survey revealed that 84% of the respondents reported that they either touched on the topic briefly or had no discussion at all regarding how to prepare a new board member for service.

The literature on school boards includes criticism that board members can be an “elite” group compared to the population at large, and therefore may not accurately represent a broader population with dissimilar backgrounds (Urban & Wagoner, 1996). Again, Sell (2005) notes that school boards can fail in their effectiveness because lay people may not fully understand educational issues well enough to form policies and manage schools. Who board members are as they join a school board, and the backgrounds they bring with them to board service, influences who they become during their time of service on the school board. The six school board

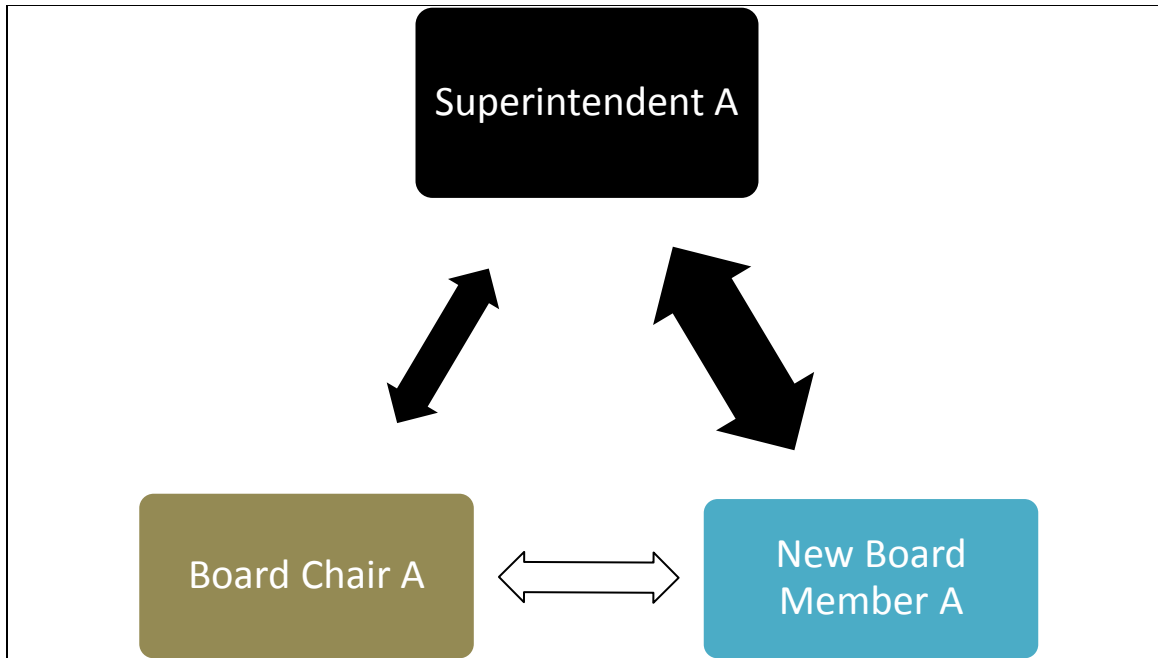
members interviewed for this study talked about how there was a learning curve when they were appointed to their seat on the board. In particular, New Board Member C reflects:

It's been very overwhelming. I didn't really know what I was getting in for. I mean, it was something that I was willing to do and wanted to do because several people who were employed by the district encouraged me to do it. So, I went into it a little blind, not really knowing, but I really found the WSSDA conference to be a huge help, which I already said, but that new member boot camp was helpful. It helped me make myself not quite so confused [about] what my role is and what my role isn't. Things that I did not realize . . . a lot of people think that board members have a lot to do with the everyday things like what teachers are teaching. What they don't realize [is] they are [concerned with] the big picture and not the day-to-day management.

New Board Member A described basic informational documents as being helpful in her role, simply explaining the duties and responsibilities and functions for board members. The WSSDA website is informative and provides information regarding regional training events that are offered around the state. WSSDA houses a wealth of information for current board members and newly-appointed board members. It is beneficial for superintendents to guide their board members to the website and support their members with the training resources in order to understand their duties and responsibilities as elected officials. Some superintendents may deliberately choose not to educate the members quickly and keep them slowly transitioning into their role which may result in them being "in the dark." Resources are available to support new board members, but it is one role of the superintendent to provide information in order to have a board that functions as a team.

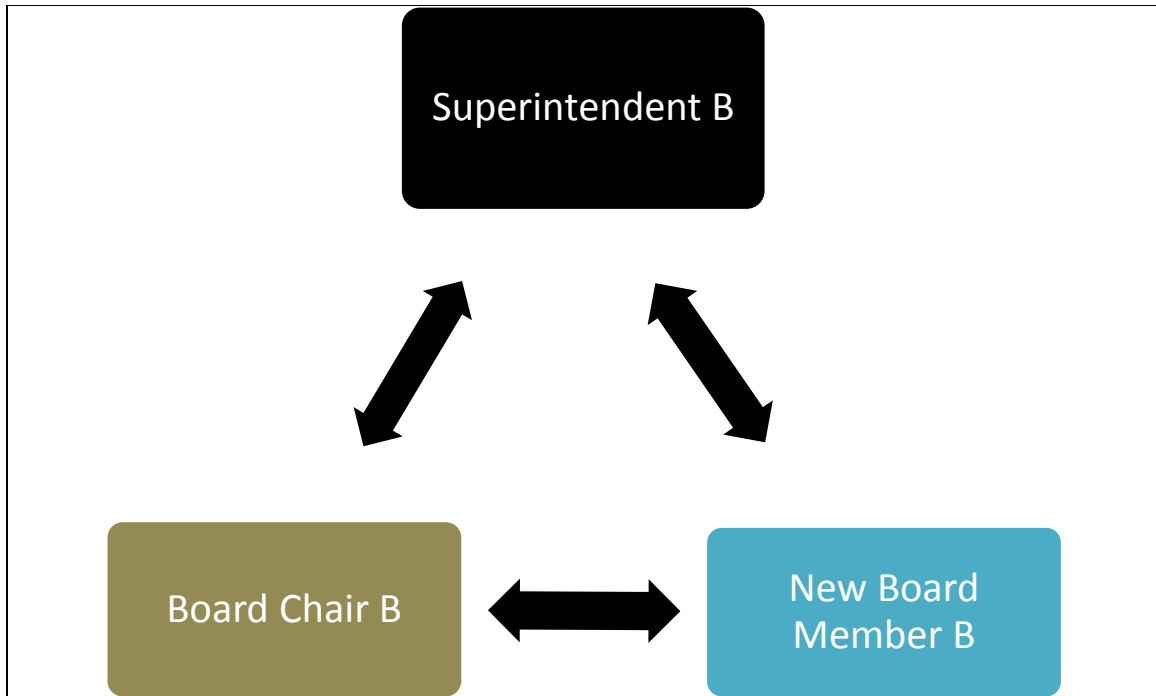
The LMX theoretical framework revealed different pathways of communication for each of the new board members through the induction process. All three school districts used distinctive approaches for communicating with each of the new board members. The following graphs depict the dominant flow of communication by the particular member within the LMX theoretical framework.

School District A (see Figure 2a) depicts the communication lines between Superintendent A, Board Chair A and New Board Member A through the induction process for the New Board Member A. New Board Member A chose not to communicate directly with Board Chair A because she felt that she could gain more knowledge by communicating directly with Superintendent A instead. This is reflected by the significantly larger arrow between Superintendent A and New Board Member A and the lightly shaded, narrower arrow between New Board Member A and Board Chair A. Superintendent A continued to communicate with Board Chair A during the induction process regarding New Board Member A. This communication structure with direct access to Superintendent A had a positive impact on the development of relational trust between New Board Member A and Superintendent A.



*Figure 2a. Communication in the Induction Process for New Board Member A*

School District B (see Figure 2b) depicts the communication lines between New Board Member B, Board Chair B, and Superintendent B through the induction process for New Board Member B. Superintendent B utilized a balanced communication structure with equal communication between Superintendent B, Board Chair B and New Board Member B, which had a positive impact on the development of relational trust between Superintendent B and New Board Member B.



*Figure 2b. Communication in the Induction Process for New Board Member B*

School District C (see Figure 2c) depicts the communication lines between Superintendent C, Board Chair C and New Board Member C during the induction process for New Board Member C. The Superintendent utilized a hierarchical approach for communication from Superintendent C to Board Chair C to New Board Member C. Communication to New Board Member C would take place after communication had taken place between Superintendent C and Board Chair C. New Board Member C had limited communication with Superintendent C, which negatively impacted the development of relational trust between the two.

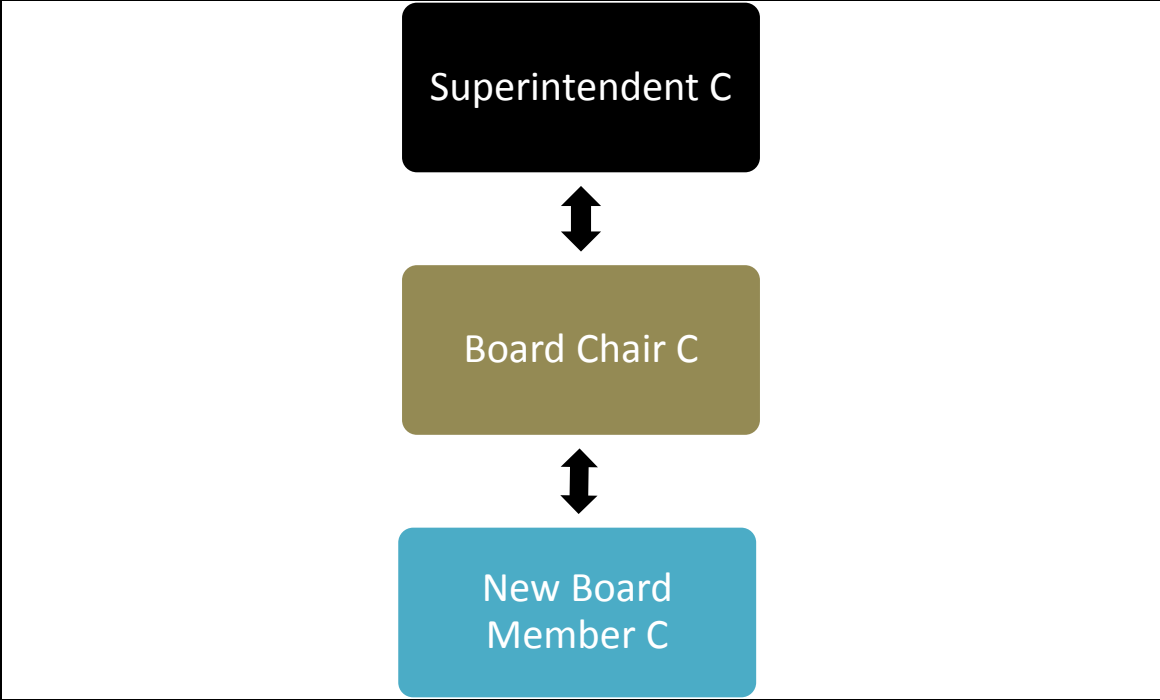


Figure 2c. Communication in the Induction Process for New Board Member C

**Insight Three: Backgrounds of School Board Members**

Only one of the six board members has a college degree, which exemplifies the trend of superintendents being the most educated in school board relations in rural districts. All board members interviewed had been in their community for most of their life except New Board Member A. She did not grow up in the current community like all of the other board members. New Board Member A states:

On our board, I'm the only person on the board who didn't grow up here and go to these schools. So I feel that that outside perspective is important and I'm also one of the only people who went to college. And I also have knowledge of education so those things I find are [. . .]. I feel that an important role for me to fill is to help those other board members understand some of these new perspectives.

All the Board Chairs have grown up in the community and have had children come through the school districts. Board Chair A is employed in a managerial position for a materials supply company and Board Chair B is retired. Board Chair C works for a State agency. In all three cases, being involved with their own kids' lives and activities such as athletics, scouts, FFA, and/or PTA, led them to connections and influential people who encouraged them or recommended them to apply, run, or be appointed to the board. Board Chair A's statement talks about his involvement in the community:

We've lived in the community for 20 plus years, involved in church and stuff and that kind of thing involved with other school things besides [the] school board, FFA, and different organizations [ . . . ].

Board Chair B's statement is about his level of community involvement, which made the way for his board involvement:

Well, I knew the people on the board. I mean, I've known the people on the board forever because it's a small community. I know everybody anyway. It's usually long-time community members that end up on the school board. But I got on in 2001 when there was a midterm vacancy. Somebody mentioned, "Well, I wonder who's gonna be on the school board?" And I got to thinking about it because it was in my district and there wasn't really anyone stepping up to run.

Board Chair C made a statement about her level of community involvement which was similar to Board Chair A and B:

I have been on several different boards for athletics . . . different booster groups . . . band groups, and I volunteered at the elementary, the middle school, and the high school and have gone on several trips with the kids . . . and have been involved with the scouting

groups that are currently in the schools. Honestly, what influenced my decision was the person that just left the board chair position was a very good friend of mine and she and I talked about it a lot and being involved with the kids, and them needing another, because there was no one else going to apply, and I've always been involved with the kids and have the best for the kids.

The criticism that board members are too far removed from the public they are elected to represent was not supported in this study of small rural school districts (Urban & Wagoner, 1996). In fact, in rural districts, they are usually rooted very deeply in their community and immersed in many facets of the community they live. These board members are usually citizens who are giving people that have an interest in serving their schools and communities. These factors are desirable traits in people who want to serve on the board for the policy direction work in small rural districts.

Five out of the six board members originally joined their school boards through interviews and appointments. Board Chair A was one who actually ran against another opponent, won his seat 13 years ago, and has sat on the board ever since. He explains the competition he experienced over the years in his statement:

The very first time I ran, I didn't win, so there was some competition there. I've had one election where I've had competition. The others were just . . . nobody else ran.

New Board Member A and C both have statements explaining their experience with the process of being appointed to the board through an interview. New Board Member A states:

At the time that she asked me, she was going to have to be re-elected in two months, so at the time that I came and took her position, I also, the very same day, had to go in and sign up that I was going to be running for election in November. And one of the reasons that I



decided to do this was that I realized this was an opportunity to accept a board position with no competition -and since it was the last day before people could sign up to say they were running. So I saw no one had signed up and thought “this is an easy way for me to get what I want, and I’m gonna do it.” So I was unopposed.

Superintendent C even spoke about his recruiting strategy to find board members so that he would have some people to sit on the board in his district. Superintendent C states:

We really have to beat the bushes to get the people to fill out the applications to even be appointed. It’s a very apathetic community. We are going through that right now, and I’m literally compassing that particular area and contacted the bus garage and asked for all the list of names of all their riders in area one and look[ing] at all the names so I can see who I can send letters of applications to.

Land (2002) noted it is only a small percentage of the public who demonstrate an interest in running for board office, and in the case of these small rural school districts, that research is consistent with the superintendents having to work very hard to recruit applicants to fill the seats. It is important that there are still good people who can be encouraged to serve even though modern complexities, insufficient funding, challenging education reform, and external pressures make times difficult. The local school board is still a very viable force in the public school system.

#### **Insight Four: Importance of Teaming with New Board Members**

It was noteworthy that several of the superintendent interviewees highlighted the significant role of working as a team in the process of learning to be a board member.

Superintendent A reflected on the importance of working as a team:

If there's a question in trust, things start falling apart very quickly. And it resonates through all the different aspects of the district, so maintaining trust is huge. And a big part of that is being honest with the board, and being up front with them. I think, going along with that too, part of my responsibility for [my] relationship with the board is to let them know what's coming up. What do I see on the horizon? If I can predict the future to the board, it's gonna help us work together as a team more as we go through these steps.

Superintendent B also indicated the importance of working with the board and new board members as a team:

I think that teams function best when, believe it or not, when the board is not blindly approving everything 5 to 0 and with 20 minute board meetings. I think our board meetings are long; they're two to three hours. But we discuss things, and the board doesn't just simply say, "Okay, this is the recommendation, so this is what we're gonna do." They actually debate, ask for more information. But another nice thing that the board does is that they know, they want to provide their input, but they know where the decisions lie, so the board is very clear when it's their decision and when it's an administrative decision. To give you an example, for years and years and years they have approved the wording for all the student handbooks annually. So in May, the principals submit their handbooks and the school board goes through it and says, "Well, I think we should change this sentence to this," on dress code, this type of stuff. So we had a great conversation about, well actually, the board approved policy and we implement that policy through the student handbooks, so we present the handbooks to you so that you can cross reference them with your policy to make sure that they are not contrary to the

policy, but if you would like a change in them, then we need to change policy and we'll change the handbook accordingly. They totally understood it. I think . . . but that was a 20 minute conversation, and I think we're working, our relationship is working at its best when we can say that. There are times in meetings that the board can tell me, "Well, superintendent B we expect this to occur." And I know I've been called out and [I] say, "Ok, you bet. You're my boss and I'm gonna do that." And then there are times that I can tell the board, "Well, technically, that's not in your scope of authority. That falls under administration, but we're coming to you to make sure that we have your blessing on this. And so, I think it's working well. I think if a board is afraid to correct a superintendent in public and the superintendent is afraid to correct the board in public, then it's just a circus show and all the real discussions and debate are going on behind closed doors and under the surface and that's where it's dangerous. Better to have it out in a longer meeting and discuss it in public.

Superintendent C also notes the importance of working with new board members and the board as a team:

I think we are functioning okay and that there is a lot of trust building going on right now because they are all so new to the board. I think they don't think [they] understand the growth that the district has made over the last four years. I don't think they understand the accomplishments that the district has made over the last four years. I have to keep laying that out there until it dawns on them that we are headed in the right direction and that we are in a much better place than we were. One of the things that I say to the board, I say to staff, I say to parents, I say to the community, surprises me but has not made me any friends is that, I say, "What we do is not good enough. It's never going to be good

enough. The kids of School District C deserve the absolute best we can give them, and no matter how hard we try, I believe we can always do better. Otherwise, we become complacent and that get[s] interrupted by board, or community, or parent[s], or teachers.” [It is often misunderstood] as, “You are telling us that we are not any good.” It’s not what I said at all. I said what we do is never going to be good enough. These kids deserve more and will always deserve more. So I was kind of rebuilding that, but every time you get a new board member I have to start the educational process all over again.

The idea that the most important relationship in the school district is between the superintendent and the board has been a subject of debate. It is crucial that the superintendent pays close attention, not just to relationships, but to having helpful, clear definitions of the role of the board and the board members (Blumberg & Blumberg, 1995; Houston & Bryant, 1997).

#### **Insight Five: Trainings of New Board Members**

In the case of these three small rural school districts, board members’ personal background, professional background, and training give them their own unique approaches. At the same time, the goal of all three places is the same. The vision, mission, and core beliefs must be carried out with a well-functioning board that has the ability to influence the school district. These superintendents, board chairs, and new board members discuss their experiences within their respective roles in the induction process of the new board member. They also make suggestions that would have been helpful during the induction process and in a board member’s first term.

A number of scholars (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2003; Wong, 1995; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Danzberger & Usdan, 1992; Bjork, 2001; Houston & Bryant, 1997) have addressed the unclear delineation of responsibilities that school

board members often have compared to those of the superintendent. They have also noted both the problems to which this can lead and the opportunities it might create for superintendents to work more effectively with boards. All the superintendents, board chairs, and new board members discussed their wish list for training events and practices they would use if they could revisit the induction process. In School District A, Superintendent A and New Board Member A worked more closely without much assistance from Board Chair A. It seems that since New Board Member A was college educated, she wanted to meet more often with Superintendent A, even though Board Chair A was offering help. New Board Member A made this statement about why she went to Superintendent A more than Board Chair A:

I think the board chair could be pretty helpful here. But I . . . don't expect the board chair to . . . be the one who is in charge of the induction process, simply because it's a voluntary position and the board chair already has a lot of things on his or her plate. I do think, however, . . . it would be better if the board chair were the one to step up and orient the new board member. But I think it's not always realistic and I feel more comfortable having the superintendent, who's paid, to do that. But I think it would be more helpful because I think the board chair knows better what is going on as a board member as where when you're getting your information from the superintendent, you're learning what kind of board member the superintendent would like to have on his team, which is, I think, very different.

All six board members were asked if they had attended any school board meetings prior to being elected or appointed to the board. Only one out of six board members had attended a board meeting prior to being elected or appointed to the board. The one board member went to a board meeting previously because their child was being recognized for an award. The learning

curve is very large and all three new board members commented on how great the WSSDA conference is for all of them. New Board Member B stated this about WSSDA training, “We had WSSDA come and do a boot camp just with our board members and I found this to be very informative.” New Board Member A states her thoughts on the WSSDA training provided for her when she was elected to the board:

I really appreciate going to the board boot camp that they had with WSSDA. I really appreciated that and I also think that it would be nice but it might be too much to ask someone to have some sort of summary or guideline about how finances work in schools, because it’s so different from how it works in the rest of the world.

New Board Member C gives her thoughts about the WSSDA training and her recommendations for future induction training events:

I felt I had to do a lot of searching and figuring it out. There was not a lot of training, or coaching through those first few months. Going to the WSSDA conference really helped but I had been on the board five months prior to the WSSDA conference, and in those five months I felt like I did not have a lot of direction. I felt like I was left to just figure it out so there was not a lot of communication. I think some type of orientation prior to the WSSDA conference would have been great to really find out what my role is. I mean I would’ve found it to be a huge help also to have someone to sit down with when I first got my board packet outside of this to read and get ready for the board meeting. I did not know what to expect outside of reading it, I did not even know what to expect, and I had only been to two or three board meetings prior in my life. So, what I was looking for in that board packet would have been nice. If someone could’ve walked me through the, “this is what to look for, and these are the types of questions you may get,” etc.

New Board Member C noted insufficient initial training, augmented only through attendance at sessions for new members at WSSDA conferences. She also recognized and accepted the challenges and responsibilities with which they were charged, though most new board members acknowledged that they did not completely understand the full possibilities and limitations of the board member's role at their inception of service. All board members expressed a desire and willingness to learn the role and its complexities and challenges, and the need for assistance to do so. It is essential that the superintendents and experienced board members with whom they work, pay close attention to the need for explicit school board training. To successfully address blurred and confused roles, micromanagement, and potential interference to which school board members can be susceptible, increased attention to board training and "boardsmanship" by superintendents and experienced board members should be integral to initial and ongoing training and education of both new and continuing board members (Danzberger & Usdan, 1992; Wong, 1995; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The intent of this study was to investigate how three superintendents and their three board chairs built relational trust with three new board members through the induction process in each of their respective school districts. The study aimed to explore this relational trust through the reciprocal relationship perceptions of the superintendents, the board chairs, and the new board members as they oriented the new board members to the roles, expectations, and practices of the school districts.

The discussion indicates that participants in this study found ways to build relational trust through the new board member induction process, and to make sense of the board role through the superintendents, board chairs, WSSDA, or self-induction. They all faced external influences

and challenges to learning the description and parameters of the school board member's role from the superintendent, board chair, and WSSDA. There were valuable experiences that the participants provided of positive examples of working collaboratively with the students' and their communities' best interests in mind. These findings support the capability of superintendents, board chairs, and new board members to build relational trust when they all hold similar perspectives and commitments.

The superintendents displayed the qualities of honesty, benevolence, and competency as facets of trust used to build relational trust as depicted in Table 1a. The board chairs expressed more frequently that reliability and openness were used to build relational trust as depicted in Table 1a. In this case study, however, the majority of the board members from the rural districts did not have an educational background. As a result the superintendents had to spend significant time teaching them the logistics of how to operate a school district. Additionally, all superintendents in this research were male and their perspectives may be limited as a result of their gender.

I caution the reader interpreting these findings to be aware that these superintendents do not reflect the perspectives of all superintendents. Their accounts do, however, allow us to think around the similar themes of relationships and communication. The conclusions lead me to suggest that if superintendents are going to build trust with board members, they need to consider a new induction process to communicate and ensure people who are in district office have positive relationships with others in their respective communities and organizations. I believe all organizations can benefit from trustworthiness. I also believe that the process of how an organization earns trustworthiness involves communicating how information and the understanding of it are interpreted through the interactions of superintendents and school boards.



School Districts A and B had patterns of communication that were very similar to bidirectional communication, maximizing the communication between superintendent, board chair and the new board member. School District C, however, did not exhibit as much bidirectional communication according to the new board member. This person felt that the communication needed lots of work.

School District B coordinated with WSSDA for the most cohesive induction process in the study. All districts used the WSSDA trainings, but not all of them used the training to the extent of School District B. School District B provided WSSDA trainings on site for the newly appointed board members prior to election season.

In all three school districts, the majority of the newly elected board members had lived in the community for longer than 5-6 years and or grew up in the community. However, the superintendents from each district were new to their respective areas.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The reflections and information provided by the small rural school district superintendents, board chairs, and new board members may not be representative of school board members across the nation, yet their accounts provide an indication of the various ways school board members approach school board service, their experiences related to the service, and their perceptions about it.

This study found that board members who strive to understand their role and the delineation of responsibility between the board and the superintendent, work as a team amid challenges and external influences, and are inducted into their role with a better understanding of how to serve with less confusion about their role.

Continued study of small rural school district board member induction practices and superintendents building relational trust can be looked at in large urban school districts and in school boards as a whole, as well as in determining the effects of their work on student achievement, instructional practice and effectiveness, and public support. This is a complex era of ongoing education reform for public schools. The theoretical frame and the conceptual framework in this study might be a useful mechanism for other superintendents, board chairs, and new board members to analyze their experiences in and perspectives about the school board role and the induction of new board members.

Future studies on female superintendents would be critical as the tenure of female superintendents is less than male superintendents in Washington State. Understanding the perspective of woman leaders with school boards would be important for future consideration.

Additionally, future studies could include looking at larger urban districts or narrowing the study more by doing an individual case study on one district, with each board member on the school board part of the case. School District C could have been a case study in itself because it had three new board members change seats within the last year. This study collected information from small rural school district superintendents, board chairs, and new board members only. Another future study direction could compare reflections and experiences between superintendents and board members from small rural districts and large urban districts.

### **Recommendations for Superintendent Preparation Programs**

The reflections provided by the small rural school district superintendents, board chairs, and new board members provide an indication of the various ways school board members approach school board service, their experiences related to the service, and their perceptions about it during the process of inducting a new board member into a district and the results on

building relational trust. Some recommendations to consider are: Bi directional communication for the superintendent, board chair and new board member positively impacts facets of relational trust; Open honest dialogue among the superintendent, board chair and new board member positively impacts facets of relational trust; Proper planning and implementing new board member trainings is central for new board members to develop an understanding of their roles as timely as possible; Increased amount of informal meetings with new board members developed relationships quicker than just meeting around formal board meetings; and the facets most important to newly elected board members in this study were honesty, competence, and openness.

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## APPENDIX A

### New Board Member Interview Questions

1. How long have you been on the school board and what influenced your decision to become a school board member?
2. Have you ever worked previously on a school board? Do you have any other K-12 experience other than your own experience growing up in the educational system?
3. Explain how you see your role as a new board member.
4. How do the superintendent and the board chair communicate to the new board member about his or her role and expectations?
5. How does the superintendent and board chair communicate the vision, mission, school arrangements and organization, and district priorities?
6. How do the superintendent and board chair communicate the cultural norms that comprise the shared beliefs and values for how to work together within the district?
7. In your experience as a new board member, explain the things that were or would have been helpful in your induction process as a new board member.
8. What do you think the role of the board chair is in the induction process for you as a new board member?
9. What do you think the role of the superintendent is in the induction process for you as a new board member?
10. What were some strategies that you initiated for yourself that you found useful while becoming a new board member?
11. Reflect on your thoughts as a new board member in the induction process. What are your thoughts about the experience so far in your first year?



12. If you had influence on the new board member induction process, what would it be and why?
13. Describe what you think the relationship is between the superintendent and the board members. What are your beliefs about the components of a team and how does one know when a team is functioning best?
14. Is there information that you would like to add that you think would be useful for the purpose of this study related to the induction of new school board members?

## APPENDIX B

### Board Chair Interview Questions

1. How long have you been on the school board and what influenced your decision to become a school board member?
2. Have you ever worked previously on a school board? Do you have any other K-12 experience other than your own experience growing up in the educational system?
3. Explain how you see your role as a board chair.
4. How do the superintendent and the board chair communicate to the new board member about his or her role and expectations?
5. How do the superintendent and board chair communicate the vision, mission, school arrangements and organization, and district priorities?
6. How do the superintendent and board chair communicate the cultural norms that comprise the shared beliefs and values for how to work together within the district?
7. In your experience as a board chair, explain the things that have been helpful in your induction process of the new board member.
8. What do you think the role of the board chair is in the induction process for the new board member?
9. What do you think the role of the superintendent is in the induction process for you as the board chair?
10. Did you initiate any strategies for yourself that you found useful while inducting the new board member?
11. Reflect on your thoughts on being the board chair during the induction process. What are your thoughts about the experience so far during the year?

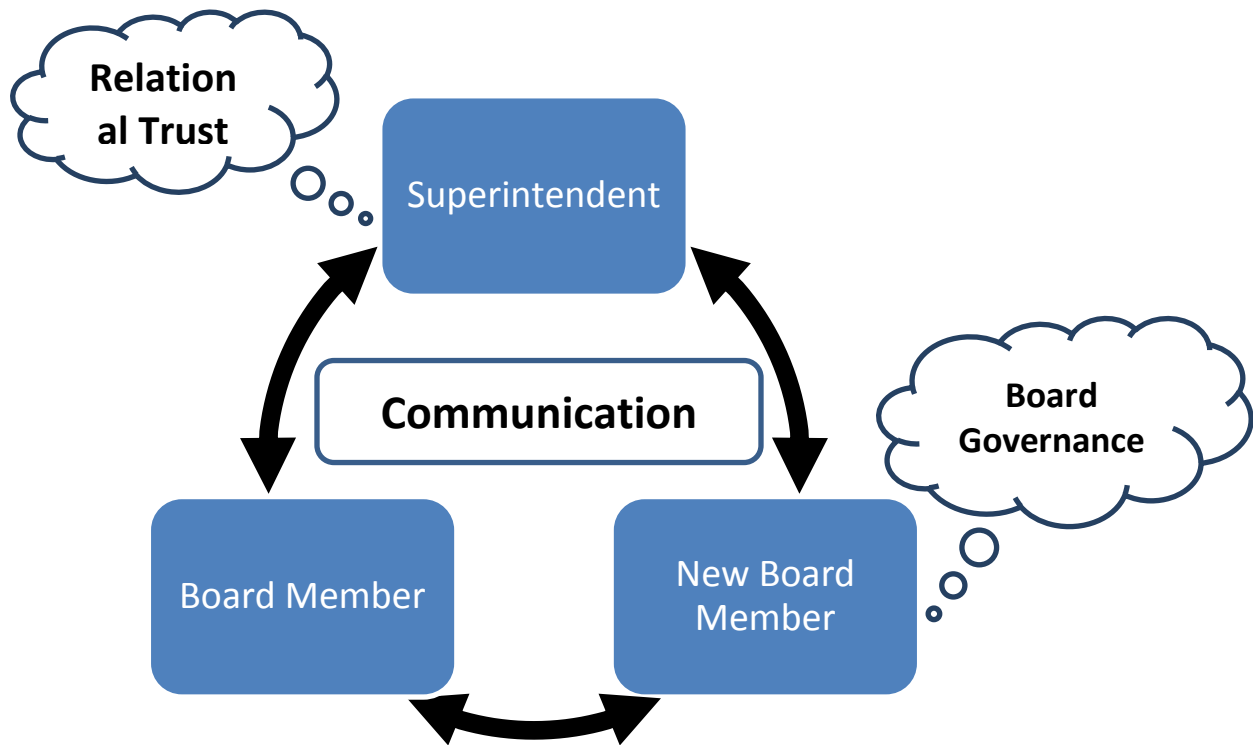
12. If you had influence on the new board member induction process, what would it be and why?
13. Describe what you think the relationship is between the superintendent and the board members. Also, what are your beliefs about the components of a team and how does one know when a team is functioning best?
14. Is there information that you would like to add that you think would be useful for the purpose of this study related to the induction of a new school board member?

## APPENDIX C

### Superintendent Interview Questions

1. How long have you been the superintendent and what influenced your decision to become a superintendent?
2. Have you ever worked previously as a superintendent elsewhere?
3. Explain how you see your role as the superintendent.
4. How do the superintendent and the board chair communicate to the new board member about his or her role and expectations?
5. How do the superintendent and board chair communicate the vision, mission, school arrangements and organization, and district priorities?
6. How do the superintendent and board chair communicate the cultural norms that comprise the shared beliefs and values for how to work together within the district?
7. In your experience as the superintendent, explain the things that have been helpful in the induction process of the new board member.
8. What do you think the role of the board chair is in the induction process for the new board member?
9. What do you think the role of the board chair is in the induction process for you as the superintendent?
10. Did you initiate any strategies for yourself that you found useful while inducting the new board member?
11. Reflect on your thoughts of being the superintendent during the induction process. What are your thoughts about the experience so far during the year?

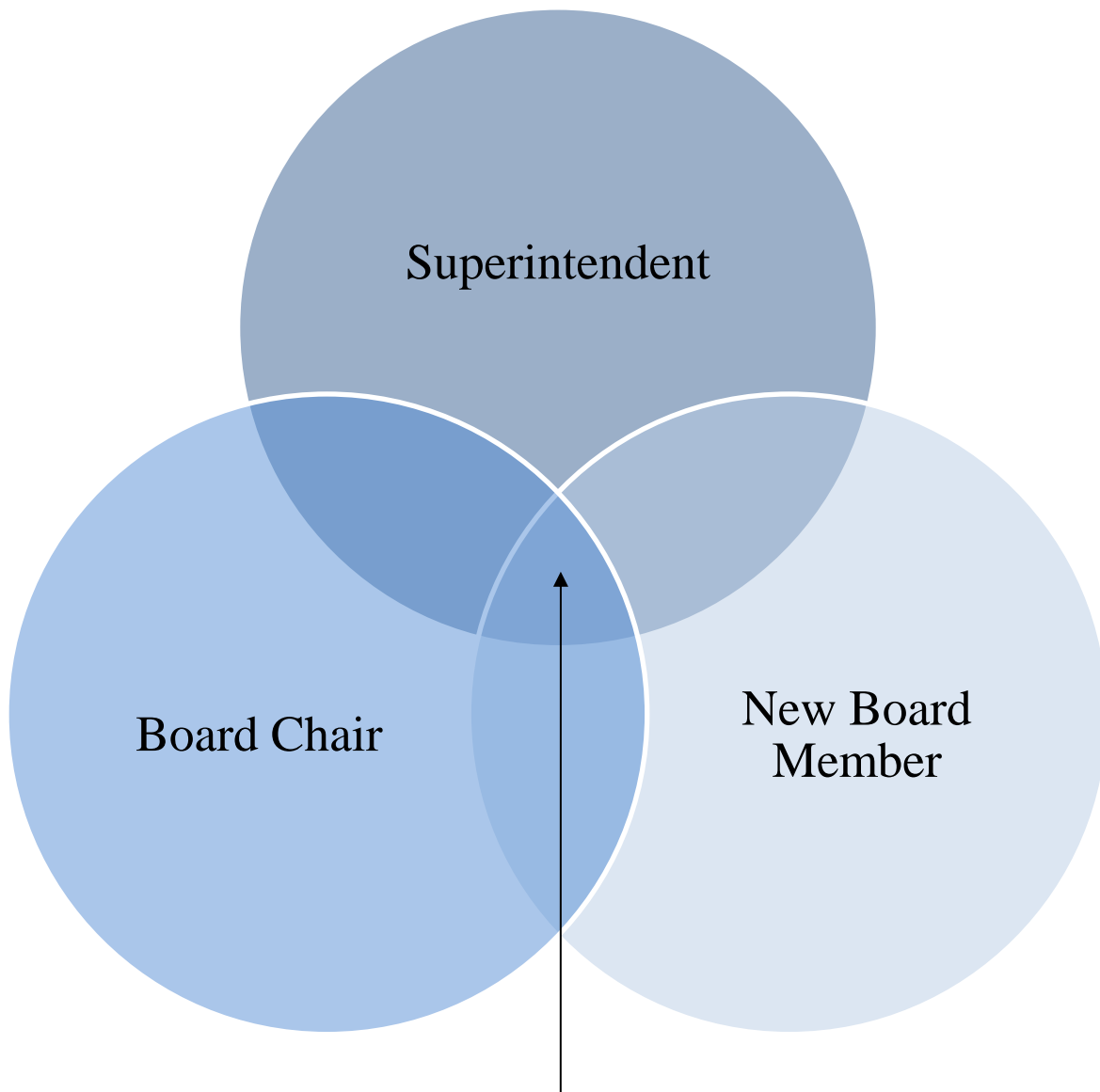
12. If you had influence on the new board member induction process, what would it be and why?
13. Describe what you think the relationship is between the superintendent and the board members. Also, what are your beliefs about the components of a team and how does one know when a team is functioning best?
14. Is there information that you would like to add that you think would be useful for the purpose of this study around induction of a new school board member?



*Figure 4a. Themes Derived from Interview Responses*

Themes that were derived from coding of transcription data of the interview responses with Superintendents, Board Chairs, and New Board Members in School District A, B, and C.

Communication is the first theme which was reflected in the process of how structures were set up for inducting a new board member between the Superintendents, Board Chairs, and New Board Members and each respective school district. Board Governance is the second theme which reflects the emphasis of responses that came from all the new board members who wanted to know how to fill their new role on the board. Relational Trust is the third theme which was discussed between all the interviews but really emphasized by the lens of the superintendent leaders and the board chairs.



*Figure 1b.* Board induction based on relational trust.

This depicts the reciprocal relationships that might influence the relational trust developed between the superintendent, board chair and new board member through the induction process with a new board member.