

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THEIR
BOARD-RELATED ACTIVITIES

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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Abstract

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The school board in the United States is the least understood and least often researched part of the educational system. This study explored the importance of school board professional development through a bounded case study which examined the perceptions of school board members who participated in the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) Lighthouse training from 2008-10. The study had a threefold purpose: (1) to examine school board members' perceptions of how a professional development program influenced their school board-related activities, (2) to identify their perceived professional development needs as school board members, and (3) to determine the perceptions board members held regarding the quality and content of professional development received. The following overarching research question guided the researcher: To what degree do school board members perceive a link between professional development and their ability to impact student achievement? Differences in perception based on district size, gender, diversity, and degree of district participation in Lighthouse training were also examined.

Five themes emerged from the study: (1) School board members are motivated by a strong desire to be an advocate for students and to provide community service. (2) School governance is time consuming and presents a host of political and interpersonal challenges for directors within the board, district, and community. (3) New board members learn the role mostly through on-the-job training and believe they would benefit from a more structured and systematic orientation. (4) School board members prefer whole-board training conducted on-site by an outside trainer. (5) School board members see great value in training and use professional development to improve student outcomes in their districts.

Responses were consistent in relation to district size and diversity, but varied greatly in relation to gender and level of Lighthouse participation. Study results (1) suggest that professional development for board members can have a positive impact on student achievement, (2) demonstrate the critical importance of training for boards, and (3) have strong implications for policy and practice at the local, state, and federal levels. Implications for further research include expanding the inquiry beyond eastern Washington and studying school boards in high achieving, non-Lighthouse districts.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my children:

Elizabeth, Meredith, Audrey and Charlie.

As Uncle Joe once told me,

“What you learn is yours to keep . . . so keep learning!”

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

The present day has seen the rise of the human resource movement, which has led many school systems to realize that the people who fill their ranks are important assets to the organization. In the human resources framework, companies invest in the development of the individual in a more comprehensive process of professional development. Consisting of both academic and on-the-job training, this process moves toward an end goal of increasing the efficacy of the organization through the empowerment of individual employees (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Since the era of No Child Left Behind, and the dawn of the accountability era in American education, an onus has been put on schools to show continuous improvement in student achievement as measured by standardized tests. Professional development of teachers, oriented towards the improvement of instruction and student achievement, has become the norm in American education. Structures within schools and districts for the delivery of professional development have become more defined and regimented over the last decade. These professional learning communities (PLC's) have been shown to have positive impacts on student learning and teacher efficacy (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Many districts set aside time for teachers to work in professional learning communities. Such training has also been extended to superintendents, administrators and many other professionals within school districts.

One important group that has received less attention in terms of professional development is the school board. Though the majority of state and local taxes are spent on schools, most Americans do not understand school function or governance (Maeroff, 2010). School boards play a critical role in the governance of public schools. The board selects the superintendent,

who acts as chief executive of the district. This decision means that board members set the tone for the district. In addition, each hiring and dismissal is made by the board. While many school boards rubber stamp decisions of human resources and administration, the power lies in their hands to alter or reject these decisions. Selections of curriculum and instructional materials must ultimately be approved by the board as well, giving this group a strong say in what is taught throughout the district.

In Washington State, most school boards consist of five elected officials who reside within the district boundaries; Seattle has seven members due to its greater size. The organization most directly involved with training for school boards in this state is the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA). Legislatively created, WSSDA membership is required for school board members. The organization provides new board member orientations, regional conferences, and an annual state conference for its members.

From 1998-2000 the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) conducted research which examined the possible effect of school boards on student achievement (Rice et al., 2001). By examining districts that were similar demographically with drastically different student achievement, a link was found between school boards leadership and district achievement. IASB followed this initial work with the Iowa Lighthouse Project, or Lighthouse II, from 2002-2007. In this work, Delagardelle (2008) demonstrated strong linkages between student success and the following board practices: clear expectations, commitment to improvement, accountability and use of data, collective will, and professional development of the school board.

From this work IASB created the Lighthouse Multi-State Project, an ongoing endeavor which includes training modules for school boards (LaMonte, Delagardelle & Vander Zyl, 2007). This training was adapted by WSSDA and provided to school boards in Washington

State from 2008-2010. During this Lighthouse training, WSSDA trainers facilitated board training focused on student achievement and district culture (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009; WSSDA, 2009b). The training featured professional development for the school board, provided by a WSSDA facilitator, within the district.

The central feature of both the IASB and WSSDA Lighthouse trainings is a discussion between the board and superintendent, often presented as a series of work sessions. These workshops lead the board, through use the district's own data, toward examining the linkages between 1) board member skill and governance policies, and 2) district culture and student engagement (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009). This training is geared towards helping school boards understand their role in increasing student achievement, and helps develop the skills necessary to more closely examine student achievement (Delagardelle, 2008). Fifteen school districts, including eight in eastern Washington, participated in the WSSDA Lighthouse training (P. Gore, personal communication, September 18, 2012).

School boards are a vestige of the sort of local governance upon which American democracy was built. Ubiquitous throughout the nation, these local boards hold sway over the governance, policy, hiring decisions and management of a local school district. These districts usually have multimillion-dollar budgets and often rank atop the list of largest employers in the local region (Maeroff, 2010). With this elected office comes great power and great responsibility as well. In the era of school accountability, school boards must deal with far more complex issues regarding student achievement, school improvement, and allocation of resources towards closing the achievement gap (Shannon, 1994). The responsibilities of supervision of the superintendent of schools and interaction with community members on pivotal issues also act to make school board membership more complex than most governance boards.

Problem Statement

Researchers have paid far less attention to school boards than to students, teachers, administrators, and other community forces that affect education. School boards are most often examined in terms of their role in governance of school boards. Often this research is conducted from the viewpoint of the board and its actions, or the support or lack thereof for a district initiative. Recent trends show an emphasis on examining the relationship between school boards and superintendents. Lost in the literature is a thorough examination of the experience of serving as a school board member. This study attempted to move beyond the limited demographic data that have been presented in school board studies by probing the perceptions of these individuals regarding their preparation and practice as school board members. In doing so, it is believed that this study will fill a gap in existing research by determining the perceptions of school board members regarding professional development and orientation received.

Purpose of the Study

This study had a threefold purpose. The first was to examine school board members' perceptions of how a professional development program influenced their school board-related activities. The second was to identify their perceived professional development needs as school board members. The third purpose was to determine the perceptions board members held regarding the quality and content of professional development received.

By examining the perceptions of the influence of professional development received, assumptions might be made regarding both the efficacy and relevance of training for members of the case study. Through examination of the perceived professional development needs of in-service school board members in this case, who have received extended board training, training may be better planned for both current and future school board members. Through this

examination it is hoped that this study may inform policy by adding to the relatively scant body of existing research on school board training (Delagardelle & Maxson, 2004; Land, 2002).

Research Questions

Research conducted through the Iowa Lighthouse Project demonstrates a link between effective school boards and increased student achievement (Delagardelle, 2008; LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009; LaMonte et al., 2007; Richardson, 2007; Rice et al., 2001). Considering this linkage between board function and student achievement, the overarching research question for this study is:

Do school board members perceive a link between professional development and their ability to impact student achievement?

Under this question several sub-questions were examined:

- 1) What are the relationships, if any, between board members' perceptions of professional development and school district size?
- 2) What are the relationships, if any, between school board member gender and their perceptions in these areas?
- 3) What are the relationships, if any, between board members' perceptions and diversity (either within the board, student population, or local community)?
- 4) What differences, if any, are reflected in terms of professional development needs or gaps in training exist between districts that participated in Lighthouse training with high, moderate, and low levels of fidelity?

Methods

This study featured individual participant interviews as a means of data collection to develop an understanding of school board member perceptions regarding professional

development. This method was effective in determining perceptual information including (1) participants' orientation, preparation, and continued professional development; (2) how training has affected performance, collaboration and effectiveness as individuals and as a board; (3) the challenges of school board membership; (4) desired training and ideal orientation for new members; and (5) views on the importance of training for school board members. These interviews were designed to last approximately one hour. In addition to the questions provided, follow ups and probes were used to gain deeper understanding and promote an open discussion of school board training. The interview protocol is constructed to avoid leading questions. The opportunity for follow ups and probing questions helped to further elicit deeper perceptual data from participants.

The researcher collected qualitative data through personal interviews, including field notes and transcriptions of the audio recordings. The data were analyzed to identify patterns and common themes regarding the perceptions of participants regarding professional development for school boards. Holistic coding was conducted to identify word frequency (McNaught & Lam, 2010). First and second cycle coding was later employed to determine the key concepts and major themes that may emerge from the research (Saldana, 2009).

The study relied upon a bounded case study approach, and focused on school board members from eastern Washington school districts. For the purposes of this study, eastern Washington will refer to the area of the state east of the Cascade Mountains. Following grounded theory, this study applied within-case analysis to follow an inductive process towards theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). The participants included board members whose districts took part in Lighthouse training through WSSDA prior to the June 30, 2010. Fourteen districts took part in this training from 2008-2010, eight of which are east of the Cascades. The study was limited to

eastern Washington school board members currently serving as of fall of 2013 who participated in the Lighthouse training.

Validity

Case study research relies upon the researcher to maintain perspective and to tell the full story of the case without excluding certain parts (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Towards this end, the author kept a daily reflective journal. This journal was kept digitally each day that research is conducted. These reflections were organized based on what type of work took place (reflection, pre-writing, pre-planning, post-interview, etc.). The journal recorded key learning and accomplishments, choices made in the project, actions needed to fill gaps in knowledge, challenges, etc., and reflection on current attitudes regarding the research.

The use of reflective journals has been suggested as a means to greatly increase transparency on the part of the researcher (Ortlipp, 2008). By recording the attitudes, opinions, and preconceptions of the researcher, the reflections that come from this type of self-assessment helped to identify and mitigate the types of biases that might lead to omissions and narrowing of the data. Following the model of researcher as research instrument, this type of reflection is also critical in activating and nurturing the prior knowledge of the researcher while nurturing an attitude of openness when telling the full story of the case (Piantanida & Garman, 1999).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a model for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry using four issues: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This model was broadly applied to increase the trustworthiness of this study. To establish credibility, persistent observation, triangulation and member-checking was used. Within data analysis, transferability was increased through the use of thick descriptions (Holloway, 1997), adding detail that increases applicability in other contexts. To increase the dependability of this

research, collaboration with other education professionals was used through an informal review of data, serving as a form of inquiry audit (Creswell, 2007). Confirmability was addressed through the use of a reflexivity journal, kept by the researcher throughout the course of the study (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Watt, 2007).

The goal of this study was to tell the story of the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding professional development as school board members. In the end, their story is the story; one too important to be compromised by an incomplete or slanted analysis. The use of consistent research methods throughout a study have been shown to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative studies (Krefting, 1991; Shenton, 2004).

Ethics

This study provides a safe, supportive environment in which in-service school board members can reflect upon their practice through the lens of orientation and continuing professional development. This research also provides these individuals with the opportunity to reflect upon personal perceptions and desires for design of future training. The research design, dependent upon one-on-one, face-to-face interviews, focuses on professional practice and the participant's perceptions thereof. By in large, the interview protocol and the topic of this study should not evoke controversial or inflammatory responses, nor the disclosure of sensitive material from the board members in the study.

Implicit in any research design which relies on participants' consent is the consideration and close scrutiny of participant confidentiality (Seidman, 2006). To protect the confidentiality of these elected officials who strive to maintain their political and social positions within their communities, it is critical that the author maintain the confidentiality of the participants and that of their communities through the use of pseudonyms. In addition the researcher has a

responsibility to include only the data and themes directly related to the study, and to limit or to exclude data which presents as hearsay, biased, or unrelated to the study.

It is important in qualitative interview research to treat participants in a straightforward manner and to avoid deception of any kind (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The school board directors who participate in the study were given a copy of the questions at the time of the interview. Each participant was given the option not to answer any question, as well as the choice to opt out of the study at any time prior to publication.

A key facet of ethical treatment of participants is the clear explanation of study's purpose (Merriam, 2009). Participants had the focus and goals of this project explained clearly before agreeing to participate, during the study, and were given the opportunity to receive an executive summary or full text of the final report.

Limitations

The greatest limitation to this study was the lack of existing research of this type in literature. Often studies incorporate a large body of similar research and apply it to a discrete case, following a deductive process to build upon existing literature. Since this study asked novel questions regarding a unique case in a largely unstudied area, the process was more inductive. Much of the work in building greater understanding and constructing generalizations regarding training for school board members will fall on future research, predominantly outside of the scope of this study.

This study examined the perceptions of a relatively small number of school board members in a discrete geographic area in Washington State. The research consisted of interviews conducted to a point of saturation. The term saturation refers to either exhausting the

case or reaching a point where no novel or discrepant data emerge from interviews. The number of participants required to reach saturation varies widely in the literature (Mason, 2010).

It is also possible that the subjects in the study demonstrated a tendency to overstate importance of training for practice as a school board member. This might be due to the unfamiliar nature of discussing practice and training for many board members. Subjects may also have wanted to give a seemingly correct answer to impress the interviewer, or to affirm a perceived hypothesis. The questions were thusly designed in such a way to present school board training neutrally, without direction. Pilot studies can offer insights into possible pitfalls in interview-based research, including bias (Seidman, 2006). The pilot study conducted prior to doctoral research was used to inform the quality of questions, as well as to assure that the interview is conducted in such a way as to elicit unbiased responses from each participant.

Significance

The body of educational research on school boards is limited in scope and breadth. Scholarship related to school boards is often limited to the role of school boards in facilitating or supporting a particular instructional based initiative within a district or region. Scholarship that is more narrowly focused on school boards and board perceptions is often centered on the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. Programs and initiatives are key factors in how school boards exert a positive influence on learning, and the dyad of board and superintendent is integral to school district governance. However, these types of studies fail to address the experiences and perceptions of school board members, specifically as those experiences relate to their practice and efforts towards improvement as educational leaders.

This work relied upon the perceptions of school board members regarding their own orientation and ongoing professional development. Since the research focused on personal

opinions and perspectives, and took place via personal interview, the study gleaned greater depth of information than state board association surveys and other broad measures. By combining several interviews and applying rigorous academic methods to elucidate key concepts in the construction of new knowledge, this work also provided a snapshot of the zeitgeist of the training and orientation of board members in Washington State. The information from these individuals, as a case, led inductively towards the construction of a broad, applicable understanding of general trends in contemporary school board professional development.

In addition this study filled a major gap in research literature by constructing a new understanding of school board member practice. While many studies have examined the motivations of service for school board members (Alsbury, 2003; Mountford, 2004; Mountford & Bruner, 2001), few have considered the training needs of board members. School districts encourage teachers to direct their own professional development, often providing ample time for this as part of the school day. Recent studies show a shift towards self-directed learning and a goal of increasing capacity, especially in the era of school reform, in school improvement and teacher training efforts (Darling-Hammond, 1993; Lieberman, 1995). Providing the same depth of orientation and training for school board members has built capacity to understand education, to grow and mature into the role of board member, and increase efficacy of individual members and districts.

We must move beyond a narrow focus on student achievement—as defined by standardized testing—to examine the training and knowledge building needs of board members. The time has come to take steps towards assessing the effectiveness of member orientation differently. It is time to move beyond measuring the effectiveness of board training by monitoring the level of harmony of board interactions (either internally, or with the

superintendent or public at large). It has become increasingly popular to gauge the effectiveness of boards (as well as districts) by increasing levels of student success on standardized testing (Delagardelle, 2008). A critical first step, sitting down and discussing the wants and needs of currently serving board members regarding professional development, is vital to learning what school directors want and value, and to informing policy and constructing meaningful training and orientation opportunities in the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

School Boards in America

Service as a member of any board of directors requires a great deal of knowledge and right judgment, and brings with it a great deal of responsibility. Leadership in this form requires that the board work as a team, maintain decorum, and work towards a common good. When the board in question is a public school board, membership brings with it a moral obligation to provide the greatest possible opportunity for each and every student. From the founding of the nation, through the Civil Rights movement, to the era of school reform that persists today, the efforts to increase equality and opportunity in the nation's public schools demonstrate an inexorable link between the American dream and public education. And each challenge to increase the performance and equity in public education has fallen on the shoulders of school boards.

Usually nonpartisan and elected, serving a local geographic area based not on political but district boundaries, school boards play a unique and pivotal role in U.S. democracy (Maeroff, 2010). School boards “make the governance decisions that, taken together, create the American system of public education” (Danzberger et al., 1987, p. 54). The representative and often elected nature of school boards make them a “cornerstone of democracy” (Resnick & Bryant, 2010, p. 8). A series of reforms in American education over the past century have reshaped school boards, transforming from trusteeship to operating and political boards (Danzberger, 1994). The age of school accountability, bringing with it the demand for school reform, has manifested itself in a number of ways, including a pronounced increase in the complexity of school board membership (Anderson, 1992). Zavadsky (2009) remarks that school reform is not taken on at the classroom or building level, but is a district level endeavor. Seasoned board

members who once concerned themselves primarily with the financial and political aspects of district function today are tasked with the creation of data dashboards, through which board members examine student achievement as a means to inform policy (WSSDA, 2008). The convergence of high stakes and heightened complexity leave school districts, boards, and board members, at a critical point where decisions made in ignorance can bring long-term consequences. To remain effective in this era, school districts must ensure that the school board members receive initial orientation and periodic training to understand the intricacies of school board governance (Dillon, 2010).

To shed light on school boards, this study and the following literature review provides background on contemporary research on this oft ignored part of the education system. The first section includes background on school boards in the state and nationally, elucidating how school boards function, the makeup of school boards, and the challenges and rewards of service. The power of school boards to affect change, along with the pivotal relationship between the board and the superintendent, and the best practices of school board members helps to delineate the balance between effective governance and micromanagement. The importance of training in education, adult learning, and the importance of orientation and continued professional development of board members is also examined, along with the types of professional development available to and desired by school board members. These factors have a profound impact on the function, knowledge, and professional development of school board members such as those who took part in this study, and are germane to the research that will be conducted

School Director Demographics

School directors work together in a board structure to define the policies of the local school district. Recent published estimates put the number of Americans who serve as school

directors at over 90,000 (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011; National School Boards Association, 2014; Tallerico, 1993). Contemporary estimates place the number of school boards in the nation at nearly 14,000 (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011; Hess & Meeks, 2010). School boards are found in all fifty states, though the state of Hawaii is unique in that it has a single statewide school board (NSBA, 2014).

An examination of the demographic picture of school boards in the nation, taken from survey data in published reports, showed that school board members as a group are much more likely to be Caucasian, college educated, affluent, and more mature than the general population. Four in five school board members are white, just over half (56%) are male, and seven in ten are over fifty years in age (Hess & Meeks, 2011). About 75% of board members are between the ages of 40 and 59 (Maeroff, 2010). Most school board members are better educated than and earn more than the average American (Hess, 2002). Seventy-five percent of school board members have a bachelor's degree, more than two and a half times the national average (Hess & Meeks, 2011).

Three quarters of Washington school directors devote 11 hours or more per month to school board work (Adams, 2013). Nationally, the average school board member has a full time job, and in addition works about 25 hours per month on board matters, with most receiving no compensation for service (Hess, 2002). Ninety percent of school board members enjoy an income above the U.S. median (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Over 60% earn over \$75,000 per year (Maeroff, 2010). More than half earn over \$100,000 per year (Hess & Meeks, 2011).

A dichotomy exists between the altruistic vision of free and appropriate public education and the competitive nature of politics in public office. Board members must therefore balance the public interests of local education with the political concerns that come with public office.

Ninety-five percent of school board members nationally are elected officials (Hess & Meeks, 2011). The inherent value in an elected board is that its representative nature lends voice to the electorate, thereby promoting democracy, especially among the disadvantaged (Felton, 2004). Ravitch (2010) echoes this viewpoint, expressing that, "local school boards are the first line of defense for public education" (p. 25).

Most board members report having no other political ambitions (Anderson & Snyder, 1980). Half of all school board members consider themselves politically moderate, while twenty percent describe themselves as politically liberal, and the remaining thirty percent consider themselves conservative (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Hess & Meeks report that 75% of school board members surveyed spent less than \$1000 on their last campaign, and that it was not a closely contested race (2011).

School Boards in Washington State

School boards are the governing body of public schools, and are tasked with the governance and policy decisions that affect the management and operation of a local education agency. Each of the 295 school boards in Washington State consists of five directors, or school board members; only Seattle, the largest district statewide, exceeds this number, with seven. This means that almost 1500 Washingtonians serve as directors. The school directorship is a political office, with members reaching office by winning a local election. School board members are elected in a local election open to residents of the district. In the event of a vacancy, the remaining board members have the authority to select a replacement, who serves for the remainder of the vacant term.

In most cases a local school district is divided into director districts, usually geographically, with each director representing a portion of the district in which the official

maintains residence. In many cases one or more of the director districts is an at-large position, a seat that any member of the community may seek election to the board. School board members typically serve four year terms, except in the Spokane, Tacoma and Everett school districts, where the terms are six years in length (Office of the Governor, 2012). Most districts run elections on a staggered basis, meaning that all five seats are not up for election in a given election year.

WSSDA periodically surveys membership regarding their experiences, interests, and challenges. Board members listed, in order, 1) budgets, 2) student achievement, 3) interpreting achievement data, 4) state education reforms, and 5) superintendent evaluations as main priorities in their service (Adams, 2013). Directors were asked how well they understand the overall education system. Ninety percent of board members queried stated that they understand the education system well enough to be effective (Adams, 2013). School board members were asked to comment on their satisfaction with serving. Three quarters of directors in the state expressed that the experience of serving as a school director has been very positive (Adams, 2013).

The Significance of School Boards

School board governance is a complex yet poorly understood facet of American democracy. Elected officials, the individuals who make up these boards across the nation provide the leadership and oversight for comprehensive school districts which include transportation, food services, maintenance and facilities, state and federal program management, human resources, and a host of other services beyond the teaching and learning function most envision when considering a school system. This section examines this complex function by looking at the motivations to serve as a board member, as well as the responsibilities, power and

scope of school boards. Lastly this section considers the dynamics between the school board and the chief executive of the district, the school superintendent.

Motivation for School Board Service

School board members devote a considerable amount of time and energy to directing local schools. The vast majority of these individuals receive no salary for this service (Hess, 2002). Reasons for seeking board membership vary, though most identify public service and unselfish concern. Board members are generally motivated to become board members either to serve the community altruistically, or for interest in a single issue (Mountford & Brunner, 2001). Over 80% of school board members in Washington State reported joining school boards to give back to the community (Adams, 2013). This is identical to the number of board members nationally who identified community service as the motivation to seek office (Hess & Meeks, 2011). A minority of school board members seek office with a single issue concern, for membership in a political group, or for personal gain (Alby, in Mountford, 2004). Surveys conducted regarding school boards have suggested differences between large and small town school boards. Directors and boards in small school districts were often more apolitical than those in large districts (Hess, 2002). At the same time, other research indicates that most school board members, regardless of district size, generally reported having no other political aspirations beyond board membership (Anderson & Snyder, 1980).

Scholars have measured the effectiveness of school board members based on personal motivation for school board service. Mountford (2004) describes motivations for school board membership in terms of power, suggesting the existence of, “a relationship between the way board members define power and the type of motivation board members have for service” (p. 704). School board members who joined the board with a social justice agenda were often more

altruistic, collaborative, and productive (Mountford & Brunner, 2001). Effective school board members usually demonstrated a strong orientation towards social justice (Anderson, 1992). In the case of directors entering the board with the motivation to address a single issue, these individuals tended to be disruptive micromanagers who stifled discourse (Morehouse, 2001; Mountford & Brunner, 2001). Mountford (2004) suggests that these discrepancies can be explained by examining the approach to power of each group, with the altruistic viewing power as a shared avenue to affect change, and the disruptive members viewing power as a coercive force to be held over others.

Effective School Boards

School boards are responsible for the governance and policy formation of local school districts. According to Ward and Griffin (2005), the five traits of effective boards include a focus on student achievement, shifting resources to areas with the greatest needs, measure success against student achievement, demonstrating accountability, use of data to develop policy, and increase community engagement in schools. School boards in the state of Washington are encouraged by the state board association to adhere to five core principals, surrounding: governance, setting high standards for student learning, promoting the success of students and staff, district accountability for student success, and community engagement (WSSDA, 2009a).

These guidelines highlight the increased focus on student achievement. This also underscores the evolution that has taken place in school board governance, namely a strong shift from macroscopic policy formation towards the monitoring and promotion of academic success of students. Today boards in the state are encouraged to construct data dashboards to better understand the performance of each student population in multiple curricular areas (WSSDA, 2008).

This does not mean that the responsibilities associated with basic governance have in any way ebbed or been abated. Along with student achievement, finance is the other issue with which boards are most greatly concerned (Hess, 2002). Boards are still the final arbiter on the business functions of the board, described by Houston as the, “Killer B’s (buses, buildings, books, books, budgets, bonds . . .” (in Hess & Meeks, p. 26). While student achievement is a significant concern, many school board members report spending more than half their time on administration and responding to particular citizen needs or concerns (Olson & Bradley, 1992).

Within the broader function of policy governance, school boards are trusted with setting the future course of the district. This involves the development and cultivation of both a mission and long-term vision for the school district (Campbell & Greene, 1994). Successful districts are typified by boards that are aligned with and support the goals of the district (Marzano & Waters, 2009). As function of their role in governance, school boards are also expected to act in an oversight role, blocking illegitimate or ill-conceived actions and policies, making sure that all decisions are in the best interests of students (Northern Miller, Salsberry, & Devlin, 2009). Ultimately the role of a school board is to assure fairness, and accessibility, while providing accountability, acting in a transparent manner, giving all stakeholders voice in the educational process (Hess, 2010).

Power and Scope of School Boards

Danzberger et al. (1987) note that school boards are, “among the last grassroots governing bodies that touch us all-children, youths, parents, educators, business leaders, and elected officials” (p. 53). The ubiquity of schools, and the locally organized structure of districts, makes school systems a key component of local communities, especially those in small

towns, such as the ones that participated in this project. School boards often reflect the culture of the community and are a source of civic pride (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995).

School boards play a pivotal role in American democracy, embodying a representative nature that helps to promote social justice in American communities (Fenton, 2004). School boards are a creation of the state government, and therefore derive their powers from the state (Briffault, in Howell, 2005). Within the framework of state and federal laws and statutes, the school board is empowered to carry out the governance of the local education agency. In Washington State, boards hold, “broad discretionary power to determine and adopt written policies not in conflict with other law,” which promotes education and management of school districts (Revised Code of Washington, 28A.320.015).

The responsibilities of the school board includes supervision of the chief executive, the superintendent, as well as final approval on all personnel, fiscal, real estate, facility, collective bargaining, taxation, and administrative decisions made by the district. According to Maeroff (2010), “School boards are job machines” (p. 47). In the majority of the small districts in which this study took place, the school board is one of the preeminent enterprises, public or private, and among the largest employers in the area. This means that school board membership, through the power to impact or alter hiring decisions, brings with it a great deal of influence and responsibility, especially in small, rural, and or disadvantaged areas where jobs are scarce.

Board and Superintendent Dynamics

School board members work closely with the secretary of the school board, commonly referred to as the superintendent. Maeroff notes that, “Above all else, a school board is responsible for hiring the superintendent.” (p. 65). The superintendent serves as chief executive of the school district, and is evaluated by the members of the school board. As the chief

executive and board of directors, this tandem has a great deal of power, with which it can leverage great influence (Northern Miller et al., 2009). A 2007 American Association of School Administrators study showed that school boards generally do not evaluate their own performance, with only one in four school districts do any sort of formal self-evaluation, though many board members view elections as a form of evaluation (Glass, 2007). Training from a state association such as WSSDA can serve as a form of self-evaluation for the board (Summers & Wells, 2000).

In a sense, the greatest source of power that a school board has at hand is that of supervision and evaluation of the superintendent (Adams 2013; Campbell & Greene, 1994; Eadie, 2013; Glass, 2007; Hess, 2002). As the chief executive of the district, the superintendent sets the tone for the district in all areas, so it follows that the oversight of this individual brings with it great import. Quality feedback given to the superintendent via these evaluations has been shown to help districts move towards higher levels of student achievement (Moffett, 2011). In addition to the evaluation itself, the board maintains the prerogative to support or block initiatives, and to demonstrate or withhold support of the superintendent in a public setting (Northern Miller et al., 2009). Despite this power, most effective school boards work to ensure that the superintendent has the opportunity to formulate and execute actions to implement policy (Anderson, 1992).

The board and superintendent hold regular public meetings to conduct the business of the board. These meetings are usually bound by an agenda, released publicly and prepared ahead of the meeting. According to Petersen and Short (2001), the written agenda is of critical importance, serving as the school board's, "most visible means of publicly presenting policy issues" (p. 538). Board meeting norms are governed by sunshine laws, such as the Open Public

Meetings Act in Washington State (Zorn, 2008). This law requires that public meetings, including those of a school board, be regularly scheduled, open to the public, follow a set protocol, that secret votes are null and void, confidential sessions are, for school boards, generally limited to discussion of real estate, contract negotiations, meetings with legal counsel, and matters involving a complaint against a public employee; and that any meeting of three or more board members to discuss school business falls under the jurisdiction of this law (Revised Code of Washington, 42.30).

School boards place a premium on ethical behavior and high integrity in a superintendent (Danforth, 2013). In addition, school boards value trustworthiness, job related skills and social acumen in their superintendents (Petersen & Short, 2001). Successful superintendents model direct, personal conversations with board members and other stakeholders (Forner, Palmer, & Reeves, 2012). In one study, female board members tended to place greater importance on communication and shared vision (Danforth, 2013). School boards have also identified a preference for district leaders who are strong in finance and management skills, displaying high moral character (Kennedy & Barker, 1987). Work by Danforth (2013) shows that a positive correlation exists between the age of director and value placed on a superintendent's demonstrated commitment to community and family values, with a negative correlation between the valuing the same traits in a district leader and number of years served on the board.

Reform efforts of the 21st century have required school boards and superintendents to focus more of their energies on student achievement. Both school board members and superintendents rank this as their most important goal (Moffett, 2011). Effective district level leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Boards in Washington State similarly rate this as the most pressing issue faced

by districts (Adams, 2013). Both directors and superintendents identify a desire to define student success more broadly than via reading and writing, and seek pertinent information on what factors drive student achievement gains (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Both parties also would prefer a holistic approach, as opposed to one stressing the maxim of state standardized testing, to measure student gains (Moffett, 2011). School boards and superintendents also voice the same preference for measures that increase the quality of education for students, such as increased teacher professional development, increased use of student assessment data, and improving the quality of school leadership, ahead of systemic changes such as charter schools and class size reduction (Hess & Meeks, 2011).

Superintendents are required by law in Washington State to work collaboratively and effectively with school district board of directors, and to develop board governance capacity (Revised Code of Washington, 28A.405.100). Much research has been conducted regarding the relationship between superintendents and school boards (Danforth, 2013; Land, 2002; Moffett, 2011; Mountford, 2004; Tallerico, 1991). School districts with longer tenured superintendents tend to be more successful than districts with a cycle of leadership transition (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Land, 2002; Lewis, 2009; Mountford, 2004; Waters & Marzano, 2006). For this reason it becomes critical that the superintendent foster a strong working relationship with the board, most evident in the construction and fostering of a shared vision between the board and superintendent (Petersen, 2002). Higher school board function is associated with much lower rates of non-retirement exit of the superintendent (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

School Board Effectiveness

Effective school boards come in all shapes and sizes. From metropolitan areas which serve tens of thousands of students, to small town boards that nearly outnumber the student body,

great school boards come in all shapes and sizes. While no magic elixir can guarantee successful board leadership, successful school boards do exhibit many common behaviors. This section presents three general areas in which successful boards excel: through clear understanding of board roles and duties, a focus on building effective relationships, and through a commitment to innovation and excellence that includes firm commitment to continuous improvement and board professional development.

Clear Understanding of Role and Responsibilities

School boards that are effective demonstrate a keen understanding of the roles and responsibilities of such a group. The role of a school board in America is policy governance. As mentioned above, policy governance involves providing a clear vision for the district and monitoring the progress towards this goal (Campbell & Greene, 1994). In addition the board is entrusted with the monitoring and oversight of the superintendent, as well as the progress of the district towards said goals (Northern Miller et al., 2009). Effective school boards place a premium on the role of governance (Eadie, 2005). These boards work to focus on governance first, and are adept at understanding the difference between governance and administration (Anderson, 1992). Directors that understand that the power of the board is limited to when the board is in session are more productive and more likely to focus on governance (Zorn, 2008). A board focus on governance and developing policy, instead of administration, helps the board avoid becoming ineffective, focused on only micromanagement (Land, 2002).

The greatest challenge for an individual board member, and for a board as a whole, is to resist the single issue board member (Mountford & Brunner, 2001). School boards that are effective show an ability to avoid the pressure of single issue constituencies in the process of

decision making. The ability to avoid the pressures of the single issue, and to focus on the needs of students, is a hallmark of effective boards (Anderson, 1992).

Another hallmark of effective boards is a willingness to follow the chain of command. As public servants, school board members feel a responsibility to act as a representative to the public at large (Dunn, 2009). The effective school board member must balance ameliorating the concerns of patrons in public by listening to a complaint with their responsibility to remain positive and supportive of the district in public (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Mayer, 2012). This support for the district is best expressed by a board member when the complaint is referred to an administrator for further action (Anderson, 1992).

Focus on Effective Relationships

An essential ability of effective school boards is the cultivation and maintenance of positive relationships. The effective school boards identified by researchers are cognizant of building strong relationships between one another, with the superintendent, with stakeholders within district, and the community at large. Hallmarks of the traits central to building these strong relationships include mutual respect, effective communication, and a strong commitment to social justice.

Effective school boards have been shown to demonstrate a mutual respect for one another (Canciamilla, 2000). The culture of the board, in terms of its cohesion, has a direct impact on the efficacy and success of the board (Peters & Waterman, 1982). To ensure that the board members continue to interact effectively, the boards focus on strict adherence to agendas and decorum, to promote respect for one another (Anderson, 1992). These boards spend time working together not only during regular board meetings and work sessions, but build group camaraderie through the use of periodic board retreats (Eadie, 2011). These high performing

boards focus intently on maintaining public unanimity and a strong working relationship with one another (Land, 2002).

Effective school boards closely monitor and maintain the relationship with the superintendent, both between the board as a whole, and as individuals. School boards that fail to understand their own role, policy formation, can infringe on the role of the superintendent, that of policy implementation (Walter, 1998). Successful boards recognize the role of conflict in leading to superintendent turnover (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Effective boards demonstrate trust in the superintendent, and have been shown to acknowledge the expertise of superintendents and other administrators in curriculum matters (Anderson, 1992). As a result, these boards emphasize the critical importance of this relationship, making great strides in maintaining strong communication with the superintendent (Moffett, 2011). These boards are mindful that the board-superintendent relationship is fragile, and one which requires close attention to prevent erosion (Eadie, 2005).

School boards that demonstrate high levels of effectiveness take seriously the role of public trustee, and use the position to promote the greater good. Effective school boards conduct district business in a way that shows a mindfulness to transparency and giving all stakeholders a voice (Hess, 2010). High impact school boards reach out often to stakeholders, both in the district, and externally (Eadie, 2005). In this way they stay informed, promote the positive work of the board, and increase community engagement (WSSDA, 2009a). Highly effective school boards also demonstrate a mindfulness of social justice. This is manifested through work towards eliminating prejudice and discrimination in schools and in the district, through work towards equity and by creating opportunities for disadvantaged students, and through the promotion of fairness in hiring practices (Anderson, 1992). Social justice boards were more

effective in terms of their promotion of student programs, in their interactions with one another, and in policy governance (Mountford & Brunner, 2001).

Commitment to Innovation and Excellence

Goals have a huge impact on the final outcome of any enterprise. Astonishingly many school boards settle for the routine acts of policy review, approving payroll, and the mundane. Effective school boards are set apart by a strong commitment to innovation and excellence (Anderson, 1992). These districts clearly establish their priorities, and set clear action steps that help to make these goals a reality. These high impact boards set their priorities as high expectations for student learning, a strong commitment to effective board performance, and establishing the school board as a model for leadership throughout the district.

Great school boards succeed because they believe that they are capable of succeeding, and make success a priority. These school boards exhibit a commitment to effective performance, something that is applied in terms of policy making, budgeting, and evaluation and training (Land, 2002). Another hallmark of effective boards is how that they make decisions. These boards have a strong sense of mission and clear goals (Canciamilla, 2000). In addition, these common goals are based on shared beliefs (LaRocque & Coleman, 1993). Decision making in highly effective boards is typified by teamwork, and is shared among each member of the board (Canciamilla, 2000). Critical resolutions are not made without carefully considering district data, demonstrating a strong commitment to data-driven decision making (WSSDA, 2009a).

High achieving and turnaround districts set high standards and high expectations for student learning. Effective school boards tend to focus on student achievement, measuring success by this meter (Ward & Griffin, 2005). Effective districts communicate and demonstrate

a strong focus on student achievement (Land, 2002). Effective districts and board members put the needs of students ahead of politics and personal agendas (Anderson, 1992). Achieving districts have directors who clearly communicate the activities that are essential to reform both internally and throughout the district (Usdan, 2010). High achieving districts in Washington State set high standards for student learning, and hold the district as a whole (including the board) accountable for student achievement (WSSDA, 2009a). These districts clearly communicate student achievement to stakeholders using data dashboards (WSSDA, 2008). A district's ability to turn around student achievement is directly related to the focus of directors on student achievement (Shober & Hartney, 2014).

A commitment to innovation and excellence is not possible without leadership. High impact school boards model this by leading the innovation and change that they wish to see in the district (Eadie, 2005). School boards can do this in a number of ways. When a school board portrays public unanimity in the face of disagreement or a divisive issue, it sends a clear leadership message. Likewise, the board that uses student data to carefully consider the impact of a policy decision models an expected behavior for administrators and teachers. And school boards that model a strong commitment to their own professional development, while providing the same opportunities for staff, makes a strong statement about the importance of continuous growth and improvement for all members of the district. Effective school boards develop their own capacities, and show a strong commitment to professional development (Eadie, 2009; Canciamilla, 2000).

Challenges to Effective School Board Function

School boards and the people who serve as directors face many challenges that may limit their effectiveness. Implicit in the demographics presented above is that time is a major

challenge for many board members, who generally spend as much as 25 hours per week on board work (Hess, 2002). It stands to reason that many of these individuals are also occupied with their own careers and work, often in professional positions, considering that these individuals are generally more affluent and better educated than the general population (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Many school board members have expressed a frustration at the lack of time available to perform and understand board duties (Resnick, 1999). School boards have expressed vexation due to the discrepancy between time spent on board work and the results obtained, the lack of time spent on education matters as a board, and an inability to affect instructional improvement through collective bargaining (Danzberger et al., 1987). School board member survey results have shown that exiting directors often retire or resign due to personal reasons, including time and money (Alsbury, 2003).

Another challenge to school board members, both in terms of efficacy and morale, is the lack of concern that the public at large portrays in the educational process. School board members cited voter apathy as both lowering morale and lessening board effectiveness (Hess, 2010). An overall lack of interest in public education, typified by a general lack of understanding as well as a lack of participation among not only voters, but state policy makers, also presents difficulties for school boards (Danzberger, 1994). This lack of participation weakens school boards by lessening the diversity of thought and membership. In addition to reducing the scope of the board in resolving difficult matters, voter apathy also exposes boards to exploitation from constituencies (Hess, 2010). When only a fraction of the electorate participates and monitors the progress of the school district, the likelihood of special interest groups taking over the board increases, whether from the outside through parent or community concerns, or internally, via board election.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for school boards comes in maintaining a sense of public unanimity and consensus throughout the functions of governance. Board members describe the difficulty of unifying the individual members of the school board as a collective group (Danzberger, et al., 1987). This challenge, and the perils it brings, often manifests itself as a lack of cohesiveness, unity, and discretion in board decision making. As mentioned in the previous section on motivations for membership, school board members who bring a negative or single issue orientation to their service may also impede board unanimity (Mountford & Brunner, 2001).

Senge (1990) notes that, “ultimately a learning organization is judged by results” (p. 44). School boards in the modern age of accountability in education have a much greater responsibility to assure that the district makes progress in the area of student achievement. School board effectiveness is now measured largely in terms of success increasing student achievement (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Ward & Griffin, 2005). The mechanics of school improvement are complicated, more so for school board members, most of whom have no prior experience with schools or education reform (Hess & Meeks, 2011). Only 13% of school board members come from an educational background (Maeroff, 2010). This means that most board school board members do not possess a strong understanding of schools at the onset of service. A contrasting perspective is provided in a recent study, which suggests that non-educators are often more effective school board members, bringing a wider perspective than former educators (Shober & Hartney, 2014). School board members in Washington State are expected to track district student achievement using data dashboards (WSSDA, 2008). Directors in the state identify closing the achievement gap and education reform mandates among their five greatest challenges (Adams, 2013).

As great an obstacle as personality conflicts might become for the function of a public board, not understanding the roles and responsibilities of such service loom even larger. Lack of knowledge of fiscal matters, state and federal regulations, and human resource issues are deficits in understanding common to ineffective boards (Anderson, 1992). Many school board members have identified the greatest limitation to effective board governance to be a a fundamental lack of understanding of their role as board members, and a lack of training for the position. (Bair Hurley, 2006; Land, 2002; Recruitment Leadership and Training Institute, 1975; Shelton, 2010). In addition to the training needs expressed, which made up the better part of this study, school board members have expressed the need for a framework to assess the function of the board, and a means through which to communicate board effectiveness (Danzberger et al., 1987). In Washington State, many school boards use the framework for effective school board governance provided by WSSDA (2009a).

Professional Development for School Board Members

Training or professional development for school board members is often limited to conferences and workshops. The development of board member efficacy requires understanding of both how to best prepare the individual and how to engage the individual to encourage meaningful, ongoing growth towards improved practice. This section examines the unique needs of adult learners, as well as the benefits of professional learning communities. The benefits of professional development documented in research, as well as types of training available to new and experienced board members is considered. Lastly a synopsis of the handful of large-scale, transformative efforts at school board training are described, along with the types of training desired by contemporary school board members.

Trust, Efficacy, and Adult Learners

School directors usually enter service as outsiders to the public education system (Hess & Meeks, 2011). This means that often board service is the first substantive experience that many have had in public school since completing high school. School boards are tasked with solving difficult issues that often lack easy answers. The training and development of school board members is unique in that it involves the training of adults, who bring their own set of needs and preferences to the learning process. In addition, these adults are not educators by training, a group that the education system is often ill equipped to serve. School board training is also practical learning, based on achieving a task, which means that instead of mastery of a prescribed curriculum, the goal is to increase the overall efficacy of the individual and board regarding the performance of complex tasks. School board members as learners are also elected officials performing a public function. The decisions of the board are closely scrutinized, with consequences for poor performance the following election cycle (Glass, 2007). This means that trust is a pivotal in the training and orientation of school board members as well.

Understanding the school reform movement in America, and the burdens that it places on school leaders, requires leaders to confront deeply held ideas about the efficacy and mission of public schools. These sort of difficult leadership decisions are what Heifetz (1994) describes as adaptive work. While much of the work of a school board is technical, key policy decisions, such as those which underpin school improvement, involve such adaptive problems. Unlike technical problems, these issues require school boards to work through complex problems lacking a clear answer, by orienting stakeholders using clearly defined roles to work together to establish novel solutions that lead to student success (Heifetz, 1994). To accomplish this, while evaluating the effectiveness of its actions, the board must create the opportunity and safe space

for these individuals to question the goals and strategies at play, process described as double loop learning (Argyris, 1977).

The learning and development of school boards and board members is not only complicated by the intricate nature of complex challenges, this learning is also unique in that it is geared towards adult learners. The study of adult learning is called andragogy. Adult learners are unique in that they require learning to be self-directed, engaging, personally relevant, and pertinent to or solving a current problem or issue in an immediate fashion (Merriam, 2001). School board members have reported preference for trainings that are self-directed, on-the-job, and individualized (Tallerico, 1991).

Adult learners are also often sensitive to their perceived abilities as individuals to solve a problem; this perceived ability is described as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs can be used to describe and predict group behavior, and are often shared among groups (Bandura, 1993). The self-efficacy of a group, or collective efficacy, is predictive of the values and actions of groups in a broad variety of social situations (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Felton, 1997). One area in which this is observed in schools is through the strong link between teacher efficacy and student achievement (Goddard, Hoy & Woolfork Hoy, 2001; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). In application to board training, it is of the utmost importance to be mindful of andragogy in developing learning modules, making sure that lessons are both timely and relevant, with opportunities for the director to make connections to personal practice, and individualize the learning experience. It is also important to assure that along with knowledge and abilities the conceptualization of ability for the individual and for the group are recognized, with growth clearly demonstrated.

School board members are elected officials trusted with the policy governance of the district. The service provided, however partisan, is evaluated through a political lens (Glass, 2007). The meetings that they participate in are most often unrestricted, open for scrutiny both in the media and in the court of public opinion. Several board members have reported that service has come with it feelings of betrayed trust (Tallerico, 1991). For teams to function together at a high level, especially in schools, they must believe in one another, and trust in one another (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Trust is a critical factor in the function of effective schools. It is this trust that allows members of a team to believe in one another, and to embrace a common vision (Senge, 1990). It has been shown that trust among teachers is essential in building collective efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). While school board members have a different role in the education system than teachers, these lessons related to trust, especially in light of the disenfranchisement that some school leaders have faced, holds broad applicability to the orientation and development of board and directors.

Professional Learning Communities

The age of accountability in U.S. education begs the question of how to improve failing schools and increase the capacity of the educational system for growth, resulting in an increase of student success. Implicit in this undertaking is the need to increase the capacity of each member of the school system. School improvement strategies have also required teachers to expand their repertoires to include better understanding of state and federal programs as well as increased knowledge of learners and learning strategies (Darling-Hammond, 1993).

As the demands for school accountability and reform increased, so has the demand for adequate teacher training. For some time school boards have recognized the importance of staff development (Skehan & Doughty, 1984). At the same time administrators and boards have

looked for ways to focus this training, making it more useful for teachers and more squarely focused on student achievement; the experience of many educators being that training generally involved a set of unconnected workshops (Lieberman, 1995). From this environment the concept of the professional learning community (PLC) has emerged.

The professional learning community functions as an extension of the classroom, with teachers comparing practice in a collegial environment (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). PLC's are typified by disciplined learning which is inquiry based and is centered on both in practice and upon the goals of the organization (Fullan, 2003). This style of professional collaboration leads to the formation of a shared vision and greater commitment among teachers and all stakeholders (Senge, 1990). The structure provided by PLC's helps focus the school and individual teachers on improvement strategies more closely aligned to school improvement, while concentrating on critical thought that challenges practice to increase effective strategies (Servage, 2008). These efforts are centered on bringing teachers to more serious conceptualizations of teaching and learning, also known as an intellectual posture (Parkay, 1982).

PLC's have proven very successful in the training of teachers, and in the efforts of districts to address student achievement (Servage, 2008). The professional learning community currently serves as a model for training in public schools across the nation (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Effective board training mirrors PLC's in that it is individualized, job-embedded, and based on the model used for teacher training (Tallerico, 1991). The strengths of the PLC, including being job-embedded, relevant training, building and maintenance of a shared vision, and collaboration, is often utilized for the training of individuals throughout the school system, including school board members. The next section addresses the reasons for, and benefits gained from training for these individuals.

Benefits of School Board Training

School board membership is a complicated endeavor, filled with technical, political, and interpersonal challenges. Most school board members are leaders before entering service, though most have received no prior training (Anderson & Snyder, 1980). In addition, most bring little or no background or experience in education, or education reform (Hess & Meeks, 2011). The unique combination of leadership skills, technical knowledge, and understanding of educational policy and reform make the role of trustee especially challenging. The specific needs for school board training, as evidenced by research on boards, as well as the critical importance of training for boards and the benefits received through such professional development are discussed in this section.

School board studies have identified several areas in which school boards require specific training. Members report a fundamental need to better understand the roles and duties of office (Rice, 2010). The need for training that is both intentional and regimented has also been observed (Carr, 2012). School boards have expressed a need for better understanding of their duties, especially in the areas of communication, decision making, and planning (Anderson & Snyder, 1980). The majority of school board members surveyed desire training on school board service (Hess, 2002). Boards also have expressed a need to better understand the relationship with the superintendent, and for skills to maintain and enhance such interactions (Shelton, 2010).

Several studies have identified a clear need for school board members to obtain training (Carol et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987; Dillon, 2010; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Land, 2002; Tallerico, 1993; Schmidt, 1992). School boards must foster and build the capacity to govern to maintain effectiveness (Adamson, 2012). As the educational landscape evolves rapidly in the age of accountability, it is important that this training be ongoing and focused on

continuous improvement (Walser, 2009). What's more, the rapidly changing landscape demands that professional development provide board members both with content knowledge and procedural knowledge related to directorship (Lewis, 2009). Training should be focused on topics central to the goals and mission of the board and district, and relevant to directors as learners (Barth, 2011).

There are many benefits that originate from school board professional development. Many community members do not fully understand the role of the school board (Yackera, 1998). Board training helped directors to better explain their roles to and interact with the community (Jazzar, 2005). School boards that clearly understand their roles and responsibilities are at a much lower risk to micromanage other members of the district (Dillon, 2011). Boards that had a history of micromanagement and received training demonstrated a progression from micromanagement toward planning and policy governance (White, 2004). In a sense, training for boards can be thought of as a sort of checks and balances for the board, providing greater public accountability for the operation and development of the board (Rancic, 1998).

Boards that receive training tend to have better working relationships with one another and with the superintendent (Shelton, 2010). Collective board superintendent training improves interactions and cooperation among the board and superintendent (Summers & Wells, 2000). Such training can also improve director public communication (Mayer, 2012). These trainings and improved relationships tend to promote board and superintendent tenure, which is tied to greater district and student achievement (Goodman, Fulbright & Zimmerman, 1997; Shelton, 2010). Boards that regularly attend state and national conferences tend to build a larger network and work more collaboratively with directors from other districts (Carr, 2012). Most

importantly, high school board function has been shown to have a direct impact on student achievement (Rice et al., 2001).

By contrast boards that do not engage in training often struggle with various aspects of local school governance. In one study, boards that did not participate in state training in Texas showed a lack of cohesion and an inability to function as a team (Simpson-Laskoskie, 2003). Without proper training board members often fail to understand the role and responsibilities associated with the board, and experience confusion as a result (Rice, 2010). Boards that do not participate in training often make decisions that they do not truly understand, and that are often not in the best interest of the district (Walter, 1998). Board members who lack training often speak without authority, disrupting the chain of command and opening the door to micromanagement (Mayer, 2012).

A policy question regarding professional development for school board members is that of who is responsible for motivating school board members to receive training. Some argue that training is a highly personalized endeavor that should be focused on the needs of individual board members (Tallerico, 1991). Others argue that training should be more focused on the goals of the group, and that often trainings suffer for the premium placed on individual concerns (Carol et al., 1986). One weakness of available training is that board members often decline to attend (Walter, 1998). Some pundits believe that training for board members should be mandatory (Morehouse, 2001). To provide motivation for training, several states made school board training mandatory (Danzberger, 1994). Other states have created state certification programs, some of which are mandatory (CSBA, 2012; Dillon, 2010). Recently the number of states mandating board training, for either inductees or for continuing education, grew to twenty (Walser, 2009). States with compulsory training have shown higher educational ratings in recent

studies (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). In another study school board members from Pennsylvania stated a desire for mandatory school board training, expressing a belief that such training will improve board function as well as student achievement throughout the state (Yackera, 1998)

Maxwell (2007) describes leadership ability as the lid or limiting factor on the potential of an individual or organization. School boards act as the final arbiter in district matters, making them the leaders of the district. It stands to reason that a district can only be as effective as the people who lead it. Recent studies have shown that school board professional development has a positive effect on student achievement (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Professional development builds capacity for school boards, and therefore is a necessary for increasing the leadership ability of the board, and for raising the capacity of each aspect of the district, including student achievement.

New School Director Orientation

School board and superintendent turnover generally lower the effectiveness of a school district (Alsbury, 2003; Grissom & Andersen, 2012). As mentioned previously, the trust and camaraderie, or lack thereof, greatly impact on the overall effectiveness of the school board. The disruption to the complex relationships that exist on the board affects the entire leadership team (Lewis, 2009). This means that each time a new director takes office the result is in essence the formation of a new board. In light of this, a thoughtful and systematic approach to new board member orientation is critical for successful board function. (Lewis, 2009).

To limit lack of effectiveness during this transition, to build team and purpose, and to fully engage new members, an ongoing and well-designed orientation program is critical to new school board member success. The majority of formal orientation for new school board members is provided by state school board associations (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). These

organizations, including WSSDA, provide initial trainings, often following the election cycle in November. Only half of school districts take part in this type of training, with the remainder using the superintendent or incumbent board members to provide the training (Glass, et al., 2000).

Many times the induction of new school board members is coordinated by the superintendent, either independently or in concert with incumbent directors. Nearly half of the superintendents queried nationally self-identified as the primary source of board member orientation (Glass et al., 2000). Often times this involves an informal review of board policy, any brewing controversies in the district, the basics of board meetings, and providing the new director with the board handbook and other materials (Wiles & Bondi, 1985). Superintendents often place less of a premium on new member orientation than other school board members do (Payne, 1994).

To maintain a high level of performance, boards must find ways to help new members to become effective immediately. Many times high achieving boards exemplify a strong commitment to professional development for new members, with training for new members that is both formal and deliberate (Carr, 2012). Often the first step in board training is for the superintendent or board to cover general issues, such as board meeting structure and agendas (Zorn, 2008). Whether superintendent or board driven, or in concert, the telltale signs of effective board orientation include the governing role of the board, goal setting for the board and individual members, coverage of committees and other specializations within the board, and outlining specific duties that fall on the board, such as evaluation, budget, and planning (Eadie, 2009). Initial training such as this is invaluable in helping new board members become productive sooner (Morehouse, 2001). Moreover new board members need to understand both

the role as well as the cultural context of the district they are about to govern, something effective training provides (Shepherd, 2012).

Successful programs also follow this initial training with ongoing training for the board to keep up with changes in board governance (Eadie, 2013). It is important that training received be firmly rooted in the context of school board member, also called situated learning (Shepherd, 2012). Some boards have also taken a closer look at the organization of board meetings themselves, allowing more time for discussion and interactive learning, to help new board members to feel more engaged and to help them contribute initially (Reeves, 2011).

The process of learning the roles and responsibilities of school board membership is often a daunting task. Board members reported an initial sense of being overwhelmed by the information and complexity of the position (Land, 2002; Anderson, 1992). School board members also express that they received insufficient initial training and orientation to the board (Dunn, 2009). Boards have long identified a lack of training that helps them understand board roles, decision making, and how to evaluate the appropriateness of board action (RLTI, 1975). School board leadership requires a wide range of technical knowledge, including policy governance, district finances, and personnel issues (Anderson, 1992). Likewise, new learning is often required for board members to understand the interpersonal skills, and the building of cohesiveness on the board, necessary for board success (Danzberger et al., 1987). In addition, the time demands placed on school board members, especially newly minted ones, often are overwhelming (Resnick, 1999). New board members often have reported difficulty in finding their voice on the board, as well as understanding the school board process (Bair Hurley, 2006). For these reasons, among many others, it is imperative that school boards take a purposeful

approach to the orientation to new members. Such training can benefit not only the inductee, but the board as a whole (Lewis, 2009).

Professional Development Types

School board members receive multiple types of training, disseminated through a variety of formats. School boards that received training both locally and from a state association were shown to be more effective than those that relied on one source of training (Wilson, 2004).

School board training can be site based, and take place as part of a board meeting, or less formal work session. Such work may also occur at a regional, state, or national school board workshop or conference. Training can involve a formal program, such as Lighthouse, or be loosely structured to fit the needs of individual members. The learning can be directed by the superintendent, the whole board, individual directors, or an outside party, which is usually affiliated with a state board association.

According to school board surveys, the majority of board members receive some form of training through their own school board, though whole board training is rare, especially in small schools (Hess & Meeks, 2010). This training might include new member orientation, outlined above, as well as whole board continuing education. Only one in four board members report that they have never engaged in whole board or board directed training (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

Group training provides boards with the opportunity to cover broad knowledge areas such as governance (Land, 2002). Suggested plans of study, usually driven by state or national board associations, often include topics such as basic board governance, ethics, board workshops, and consultants (McAdams, 2003; Research Training Leadership Institute, 1975). Nearly 65% of school board members report having recently attended workshop trainings (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

As mentioned above, the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is a critical one. Well trained board members displayed a tendency to be less disruptive and better equipped to maintain a positive working relationship with other directors and with the superintendent (McAdams, 2003; Summers & Wells, 2000). More often than not the superintendent is responsible for organizing training for the board (Eadie, 2011). At times the board and superintendent may struggle with role and power issues, as the superintendent is put in the position to plan and often deliver training for board members (Tallerico, 1991). One way to avoid some of these issues is for the superintendent or board president to bring in an independent, professional facilitator to run trainings (Eadie, 2011). In situations where the superintendent facilitates the learning, school board members have reported that the learning is too focused on the superintendent, with too little focus on the board, and not enough room for the individual training that directors desired (Tallerico, 1991).

According to Smoley (1999), “Success of a board development effort depends on the willingness of all members of the board to participate” (p. 113). Whole school board trainings can help directors and whole boards increase teamwork and learning capacity (Tallerico, 1991). Many times such joint board training pays dividends not only in building knowledge but capacity through strengthened relationships between board members, and also with the superintendent and board (Summers & Wells, 2000). Often school boards will formalize such training by attending one or more board retreats during the school year (Eadie, 2011). Two in five board members noted that this type of formal whole board training occurred only once per year (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

Types and frequency of training tends to vary based on size of district. Formal whole board training, such as retreats and workshops, are much more common in larger school districts.

40% of small district directors report never experiencing such trainings (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Second class districts in Washington State are less likely to attend state conventions or undertake state training initiatives than their larger counterparts, and are also less likely to sustain these efforts over time (P. Gore, personal communication, September 22, 2012). Board members from large districts are seven times more likely to attend a national conference than those from small districts (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Perceptions of the importance of professional development, as well as frequency of professional development, tend to vary based on school board member demographic factors (Miller, 1994). Whether due to resource constraints, complexity of issues based on scale, or other factors, large board members are often more likely to receive training.

School board associations are geared towards the advocacy and development of school board members. It stands to reason that these groups would shoulder the burden of providing training for school board members. State school board associations are the primary source of formal training for school board members. Four in five school board members report regular participation in some form of training from state associations (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Beyond site based workshops and special training modules, most of the training delivered by associations occurs at regional or state conventions. Nearly 65% of school board members reported having recently attended a state conference (Hess & Meeks, 2010). State associations also provide a wealth of training materials for districts and boards to use on their own, such as videos, webinars, and guidebooks (Rancic, 1998; WSSDA, 2009a).

Many state board associations have made steps to standardize the process of new member orientation and continuing professional development. Providing incentives to learn has shown potential in fostering interest in professional growth among school board members (Tallerico, 1993). Some states have also developed programs of study that culminate in board member

certification. Such certification programs have been demonstrated to increase the numbers of board members who receive professional development (Dillon, 2010). A handful of states require a course of study for board members. In states that mandate school board training, this service is usually provided by state board associations (Schmidt, 1992). Mandated training has received mixed support from school boards, for while it increases board knowledge and function, it also results in loss of board autonomy (Calvert, 2004).

Large-Scale Training Programs

State school board associations have looked for ways to increase the effectiveness of membership in policy governance and school improvement (WSSDA, 2009b). As these organizations worked to provide meaningful training experiences for membership, these initial efforts have developed into modules, even full curricula for school board training. The most interesting and fruitful of these programs strive to incorporate a research driven approach, first identifying high performing boards then developing training to build these attributes in other districts.

In the late 1980's the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) created a task force made up of over 500 board chairs from metropolitan areas as well as rural school districts, brought together to examine school district leadership (Carol et al., 1986). The purpose of this work was to identify the key challenges to leadership, as well as supports necessary to promote district success. The project sent study teams to each site, conducting interview research (Danzberger et al., 1987). The work done by IEL demonstrated that school boards need training on governance and leadership, as well as a better understanding on how to evaluate board effectiveness (IEL, 1986). The study commissioned by IEL was the most extensive research on effective school boards to date (Land, 2002). As a result, a framework for board improvement was generated

based on this work (Danzberger et al., 1987). Near the turn of the century IEL revisited the concept. The group identified several contemporary challenges to schools, then encouraged boards to reorganize board and district structure under a vision of increased student achievement, pushing all structures into alignment with that goal (IEL, 2001).

The next significant contribution towards the identification of effective school board governance came with the work of Goodman and colleagues (Land, 2002). This study examined 10 districts across five states, and found a correlation between effective governance and student achievement, measured through dropout rates (Goodman et al., 1997). This important work illustrated key facets of effective board governance, including: strong relationships with one another and the superintendent, a clear focus on student achievement, stressing policy governance over micromanagement, effective communication and relationships with community, the establishment of and adherence to policies and procedures, and long-term tenure among the board and superintendent (Goodman et al., 1997). This study reinforced the critical nature of relationships among school board leadership teams and the need for continued board training to maintain high levels of performance (Land, 2002).

The second meaningful large scale program which measured the effect of school board leadership on student achievement is the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) Lighthouse Study. The central question at the heart of IASB's study is, "do some boards create higher student achievement than others?" This study used extensive interview data to examine board and superintendent leadership in six Georgia school districts, comparing three districts with low achievement to three high achieving districts with similar demographics (Bartusek, 2000). The IASB Lighthouse researchers found that the districts with higher achievement had radically different knowledge and beliefs about student achievement than those in low achieving districts.

The study showed that the two types of districts studied were similar in most fashions. Bartusek (2000) identifies the seven critical conditions for district success which this study identified: “1) shared leadership; 2) continuous improvement and shared decision making; 3) ability to create and sustain initiatives; 4) supportive workplace for staff; 5) staff development; 6) support for school sites through data and information; and 7) community involvement” (p. 2). In addition, the study found that the boards in high achieving districts believed in the ability to improve student success, had a greater understanding of the critical factors listed above, and fostered a focus on student achievement, which trickled down to the building and classroom level (Rice et al., 2001).

The initial Lighthouse Inquiry, or Lighthouse I, was expanded into the Iowa Lighthouse Project, or Lighthouse II. From 2002-2007, this federally-funded inquiry was conducted in five pilot districts in Iowa to determine how school boards create the conditions for district academic success (LaMonte et al., 2007). The study showed a high correlation between adult beliefs regarding achievement and actual results (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009). Work on Lighthouse II helped boards to create time for group learning, increase awareness of improvement goals across the district, increase time spent in board meetings on policy and student achievement, focused work sessions on student achievement issues, increased collaboration and communication in board meetings, and increased agreement that the school board can positively impact student achievement (Delagardelle, 2008). In addition the program provided teachers with information on the most effective professional development programs for teachers (Richardson, 2007).

The Lighthouse II inquiry results supported the findings of Lighthouse I regarding the seven conditions for school renewal (Bartusek, 2000; LaMonte et al., 2007). In addition, five

main roles of the board emerged from Lighthouse II. The Iowa School Boards Foundation (2008) identifies the five key roles of school boards to achieve increased student success: “1) set clear expectations, 2) create conditions for success, 3) hold the system accountable to the expectations, 4) build collective will, 5) learn together as a board team” (p. 1).

A further expansion of the Lighthouse work occurred from 2007-2012. IASB created a training program which provided school boards with embedded, long term Lighthouse board training geared towards professional development and school/district improvement (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009). The Lighthouse Multi-State Project, or Lighthouse III, expanded the training aspect of Lighthouse II, providing boards and superintendents with training based on the best practices listed above (LaMonte et al., 2007). This training was later expanded in 2008 to districts in additional states, including fifteen districts which implemented the training to varying degrees in Washington (P. Gore, personal communication, September 22, 2012). Support for this training was provided by a \$92,000 federal Title I grant awarded jointly to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and WSSDA (WSSDA, 2009b). Lighthouse III helped many boards, including some that were examined in this study. However the training is not without controversy. Some board members have expressed concern over the extensive use of student achievement data, while others felt frustration at the amount of time the training takes (Owen, 2010).

Other state board associations have looked at research based training programs, most notably the California School Boards Association (CSBA). CSBA created a committee of experts on school boards who then looked over two years at the link between school boards and fostering of a long-term vision within the district (Land, 2002). Vision is a critical facet of school board leadership, one which engages the entire community in student achievement

(Campbell & Greene, 1994). The work of CSBA used the strategy of helping school boards learn to model effective behavior. By setting high standards, following their own policies, and treating others with respect, the school board can create a climate for success (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

As an outgrowth of this work the CSBA has created a series of training modules for school board members, known collectively as the Masters in Governance (MIG) training. This sequence of eight hour trainings includes five modules that cover governance, planning, policy, school law, using achievement data, school finance, collective bargaining, human resources, and community relations (CSBA, 2012). Training in the MIG program has been shown to increase board member understanding of roles as a director and increased focus on student achievement (Canal, 2013). The MIG modules have also been shown to promote participation among board members, and to improve governance abilities (Nava, 2013). MIG training has been shown to be an effective but time consuming means of increasing director effectiveness (Richter, 2013).

Training Desired by School Board Members

One important question regarding professional development for school boards is what sort of training these individuals would like to receive. Unfortunately this is one of the thinnest conceptualizations that exist in the area of school board research. In one survey, respondents reported desiring training regarding relationships with the superintendent, policy development, and board responsibility regarding policy governance (Koeninger, 1988). According to analysis of more recent survey data, directors nationally stated a desire to learn more about student achievement, planning and budgeting, and community engagement (Hess, 2002). Likewise, participants in another study noted a finance, decision making, long-term planning and

development of policy as areas most necessary for further training (Rossmiller & O'Brien, 2013).

School directors have expressed a desire for ongoing professional development that is self-directed (Tallerico, 1991). Payne (1994) reported that school board members placed greater value on training for boards than superintendents do. School board members express a strong desire for continued professional development. In another study school board members stated a strong need for continued training to grow and remain effective, as well as expressing an interest in this sort of training being mandatory (Carnes, 2008). One of the major thrusts of this study was to determine the types of professional development preferred by participants. Also of interest is what role, if any, the superintendent plays in the delivery and direction of such training.

Conclusion

A uniquely American and quintessential component of American democracy, school boards remain the least studied part of education system. Peirce (in Danzberger et al., 1987) describes the school board as the, “dark island of American governance, the institution that everyone knows about but few understand” (p. 53). Through the examination of the basic structure and function of school boards, roles and responsibilities, and mindsets of school board members, the impact of professional development on this population can be better understood. A clear need exists for additional research regarding the training and development of school board members (Miller, 1994). By establishing a dialogue with school board members regarding training, this study shed light on the institution of school boards, leading to a better understanding of school board development and its role in promoting student achievement.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODS

The first purpose of this study was to examine school board members' perceptions of how a professional development program influenced their school board-related activities. The second purpose of this study was to identify the perceived professional development needs of school board members. In addition this study examined the perceptions of the quality and content of professional development received by these individuals. Through this research the goal was to build assumptions regarding both the efficacy and relevance of training for members of the case study. The efficacy of training has rarely been assessed through the eyes of school board members, and these individuals do not generally self-direct their learning (Bair Hurley, 2006; Eadie, 2009; Richardson, 2007; Shepherd, 2012; Tallerico, 1991). Hence the development of an understanding of the perceived professional development needs of in-service school board members. This study examined the perceptions of directors who have received extended board training. This information has great value in informing policy, shaping future training and orientation, and ultimately in improving governance and district efficacy.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology employed to answer the following question:

- Do school board members perceive a link between professional development and their ability to impact student achievement?

The study also examines a series of sub-questions related to the professional development of school board members. These include:

- What are the relationships, if any, between board members' perceptions of professional development and school district size?
- What are the relationships, if any, between school board member gender and their perceptions in these areas?

- What are the relationships, if any, between board members' perceptions and diversity (either within the board, student population, or local community)?
- What differences, if any, are reflected in terms of professional development needs or gaps in training exist between districts that participated in Lighthouse training with high, moderate, and low levels of fidelity?

Qualitative Methodology

At the inception of any research study, investigators must make a determination as to which methodology—qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, or action research—will be employed. Such a determination incorporates careful consideration of the goals of the study. Each method of inquiry brings its own ground rules, strengths, and limitations. In the end, the types of questions asked in the research guide the researcher and help to shape the study design (Creswell, 2007), at the heart of which lies the type of methodology.

The purposes of this study demand a personal approach to both the collection of data and the subjects who provide it. Such research is best addressed through the use of qualitative research. Creswell (2007) notes that “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). In determining the attitudes and perceptions of school board members regarding professional development, it is exactly this type of social problem which this research attempted to address. It is only through qualitative analysis that such a problem can be examined by a researcher who is not a part of the process or system. This makes qualitative research the most appropriate methodology for this study.

The examination of the unique experiences of individuals, use of stories, interviews, and personal narratives that emerged from this type of inquiry lends themselves well to qualitative research. The unique experiences and perceptions of each participant are then analyzed using an iterative process to construct a generalizable set of conclusions (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). The research is rooted not in the analysis of numbers so much as in the power of words, and the discipline of listening (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this way qualitative research mirrors the tradition of quantitative inquiry from which it emerged, in that the final outcome of both traditions results in a generalization (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The strength of qualitative research in relation to this study lies in its foundations in the tradition of narrative. Where quantitative studies analyze the correlation between discrete pieces of information, qualitative studies synthesize the personal stories of individuals, finding the intersections in each unique account to construct meaning (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This approach provides a greater freedom to the researcher as each interview is chronicled. Instead of treating each entry as a data point, the interviewer can continually consider the overlap between each dialogue to examine the essence of the material at hand. Through careful analysis the anecdotes gathered can be compared with one another from a variety of perspectives, and through a variety of lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Often in qualitative research the researcher is viewed as the means by which the research is conducted. This concept is referred to as the researcher as research instrument model (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Piantanida & Garman, 1999; Patton, 2002). In this model the researcher does not strive to maintain the sterile dissociation with the subjects, as is often necessary to maintain experimental controls in quantitative studies. Instead the investigator is an active player, not

only in terms of collecting the data, but in bringing her/his own understanding and conceptualizations to constructing meaning from the research.

The product of qualitative research differs sharply from that of more quantitative methods. The process is often much more inductive, bringing general theories from the specific experiences of individuals (Saldana, 2009). The product of qualitative research is also distinct in that they rely not upon basic facts or syllogisms, but thick descriptions (Holloway, 1997). Most unique about qualitative research is that it embraces the often messy, hard to describe interactions between people in social settings, and does so with the freedom to approach the problem from a number of perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). As this study considered the beliefs, desires, and zeitgeist of school board members regarding their own professional development, qualitative methods seem the ideal choice for this research.

Case Study Research

One might consider qualitative research the answer to the question of how to study a social phenomenon. Following this logic the case study was, for this project, the answer to the question of who will be studied. In this type of research, the type of data collected involves individual accounts, which are referred to as cases (Stake, 1995).

A bounded case study (henceforth referred to as a case study) involves the study of a group of people who are in some fashion associated either by time or space (Merriam, 1988). This means that the group selected shares experiences or knowledge across either a given timeframe, profession, or shared set of experiences. Gerring (2004) describes a case study as an "intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units" (p. 341). The case study focuses wholly upon the ethos of the case, setting aside outside considerations for later analysis. Information central to the case itself, which Stake (1978) refers to as the emic, is

the critical facet of case study research. This focus contrasts with previous research traditions, in which the hypothesis or theory drives the research.

Case need not be a person or enterprise (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007). While in the instance of this study it is a group of school board members, it can be whatever bounded system is of interest. Descriptive case study uses real life to describe both the phenomenon and its context (Baxter & Jack 2008). Case studies also ask deeper questions, geared towards deeper descriptions and deeper understanding (Creswell et al., 2007).

Case studies can be analyzed in one of two fashions. The first is an across-case analysis, in which the results of the investigation of one case are then compared with another case (Ayres et al. 2003). The second form of analysis is within-case analysis, which treats a single case as a stand-alone entity (Paterson, 2010). For the purposes of this study, and to best understand the perceptions of school board members regarding professional development, this research utilized a within-case analysis.

Case study research takes a constructivist approach towards the construction of new knowledge (Baxter & Jack 2008). The focus is on collecting idiographic, or specific types of knowledge about the context and phenomena (Gerring, 2004). Case study research is rooted in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and leads inductively towards the development of theory (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). The rich descriptions provided through interviews obtained in this study helped provide the background to better understand the unique experiences of each participant. The experiences were then analyzed to help approach the development of a grounded theory.

Grounded Theory

Qualitative research stands apart from the majority of quantitative analysis and the basic ideals of the scientific method in its comfort and acceptance of *a priori* induction. Taken a step further, the formation of a theory *a posteriori*, or experientially, through careful analysis of the data, is not only possible but widely accepted in qualitative research, where it is known as grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). First described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory closely ties the development of a theory to the process used to construct it. In this way the methodology of the study holds deep implications for the development and validity of the theory generated. A system of comparative analysis within the study group is used to identify similarities and differences, and used “not to provide a perfect description . . . but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 30).

Following in the tradition of grounded theory, this study applied within-case analysis of the interview data collected. The goal was to follow a carefully outlined series of steps that include coding, reflective journaling, and triangulation, with the goal of inductive reasoning, towards the development of a theory from the case study (Eisenhardt, 1989). The shared experiences, concerns, opinions, and goals of the members of the case study participants were incorporated by this study towards the development of a tentative grounded theory of professional development for school board members and possible effects on student achievement.

The Iowa Lighthouse Project

Between 1998-2000 the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) conducted research titled *The Lighthouse Inquiry* examining the possible effect of school boards on student

achievement (Rice et al., 2001). The research examined districts that were similar in demographic factors yet differed dramatically in terms of student achievement. This led researchers to look at this discrepancy through the lens of school board leadership. The research was framed by a simple question: “Do some boards create higher student achievement than others?” (Bartusek, 2000). The resulting study, known as the Iowa Lighthouse Inquiry, suggested that school boards do have an impact on student achievement, and identified several key traits that effective boards possess.

Following this research, a second phase of research was conducted from 2002-07 by the IASB. Known as the Iowa Lighthouse Project, or Lighthouse II, this training took the key findings from the initial Lighthouse work and applied them to determine what knowledge school boards required to increase student achievement. The research conducted by Delagardelle (2008) demonstrated strong linkages between student success and the following board practices: clear expectations, commitment to improvement, accountability and use of data, collective will, and professional development of the school board.

From this work IASB created the Lighthouse Multi-State Project, an ongoing endeavor which includes training modules for school boards (LaMonte, et al., 2007). These trainings help school boards to compare their own practices with the best practices mentioned in the Lighthouse Project (Richardson, 2007). From 2008-2010, WSSDA provided the opportunity for school boards to participate in trainings based in large part on Lighthouse II (P. Gore, personal communication, September 18, 2012). This work was funded in part by a federal Title I grant managed cooperatively by WSSDA and OSPI (WSSDA, 2009b).

This training, which concluded at the end of the 2010 school year, gave boards an opportunity to train in their own district with WSSDA trainers (WSSDA, 2009b). The training

focuses on two primary areas: district culture and adult beliefs regarding student learning (LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009). This training was designed to push school boards beyond the traditional role of governance toward a focus on student achievement and the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction (L. Trantow, personal communication, August 27, 2012).

Overall the Lighthouse training has been shown to improve the collaboration between board members and between the board and superintendent in other states, as well as to have an impact on student learning (Resnick & Bryant, 2010). Aspects of the training include: a focus on professional standards for school boards, board self-evaluation, and the delivery of the professional development by a mentor working with the school board in the board's home district.

Research Study Participants

Qualitative case study research involves the collection of individual stories and the synthesis of these into a cohesive narrative. Central to this process is the identification of the individuals who best represent the case. Careful consideration must be given to the definition of the case and selection of the persons who will participate. The researcher must also be mindful of the number of participants selected to assure trustworthiness in the study. This section addresses those concerns, as well as introducing the districts and participants included in this study.

Selection of Research Participants

This study deployed a bounded case study approach, with the case defined as directors in the eight eastern Washington school districts which participated in Lighthouse training through WSSDA from 2008-2010. Board members who served throughout the training and were still active as of fall of 2013 were considered from this pool.

The definition of the case as stated above is based on the following rationale. Board members who were active during the 2008-10 timeframe, and participated in the training, fit the criteria of having had greater exposure to professional development than a typical school board member (due to Lighthouse). Further, those who continued service through fall of 2013 not only had the opportunity to apply and reflect upon Lighthouse training, but, it is assumed, a broader perspective to analyze prior and subsequent professional development. This assumption is made based on the supposition that these directors should view their own experience looking through the lens of heightened experience.

Participants in this study were drawn from the eight eastern Washington districts (all pseudonyms) whose boards participated in the Lighthouse training through WSSDA from 2008-10. These include (with student enrollment numbers): Shermer (4500), Aldera (400), Mumford (900), Pottersville (4800), Greendale (3800), Hill Valley (2700), Pleasantville (6500), and Ampipe (1000). Three of these districts, Aldera, Mumford, and Ampipe, are second-class districts, a term used in Washington State to describe districts with less than 2000 enrolled students in grades K-12. It follows that a first-class district exceeds 2000 students enrolled. The five remaining districts in the study, Shermer, Pottersville, Greendale, Hill Valley, and Pleasantville, are correspondingly first class districts. The eight districts present an obvious dichotomy between small and moderately sized school districts. Further contrariety exists between districts in the study, such as differences in the demographics of the student bodies and communities in each district, suburban and rural settings, constitution and tenure of the board, and several other factors. These were explored in greater detail in the findings and discussion sections of this study.

Rationale for Participant Selection

School board members were selected for the study based on their affiliation with a Lighthouse district and service over the periods from the start of Lighthouse through fall of 2013. Participation was secured from at least one director from each of the eight districts in eastern Washington. The goal was to secure participation of at least twelve school directors for the interviews that constituted the study. An additional participant or two from some of the districts were selected, based upon availability, response to initial queries, and interest in engaging in the study, to help assure a reasonable number of participants to establish trustworthiness in the study.

Prior to the selection of participants, the researcher attempted to contact the superintendent of schools in each of the Lighthouse districts in eastern Washington. This courtesy was extended so that district leadership might better understand this project, and be able to answer any questions that might come up. The response to this was mixed. A handful of superintendents provided direct access to board members most closely associated with training and board development. The majority of superintendents provided a contact, often a district secretary, through which the board might be contacted. These individuals within the district office proved to be the most valuable source of data, both in terms of contact information as well as selection of participants. District secretaries often had a stronger sense of which board members had served within the timeline of this study. In a few instances, neither the superintendent nor the district office returned initial or follow-up contacts. In these instances, school directors were directly solicited to participate. Contacts proved more difficult, requiring additional resources to gain contact information, such as school employees outside district leadership, community resources, and internet searches.

Rationale for Number of Participants

Establishing the validity of the study requires what Lincoln and Guba describe as persistent observation (1985). Implicit in such persistent observation is conducting enough interviews that the collection of additional data does not yield additional information. This concept is described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as saturation. Hard and fast values do not exist for number of participants necessary to establish saturation in a qualitative study. Ranges are given by many authors for reaching saturation, one from as few as five to twenty five participants (Creswell, 2007) depending on the type of study. Atran, Medin & Ross (2005) note that in some studies, "as few as 10 informants were needed to reliably establish a consensus" (p. 753).

Some authors emphasize the need for a small number of participants as this leads to a more in-depth focus and deeper descriptions (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). Others have suggested that the goal of the study should determine the number of participants (Charmaz, 2006). Studies have shown that qualitative doctoral dissertations vary in number of participants, though the number of participants often follows a pre-meditated fashion (Mason, 2010), while other studies have used statistical analysis of qualitative results to show that saturation begins to emerge with six participants and generally was met within the first twelve interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

Patton describes the deliberate, or non-probability, method selection of interview participants as purposive sampling (2002). Participants in this study were selected in a non-random fashion based on 1) service in a Lighthouse Project district, 2) to assure the greatest diversity possible in the cohort (based on age, gender, race, experience on the board and other factors, and 3) based on their availability and willingness to participate. These selection factors

correspond with three cases of purposive sampling described by Patton as 1) criterion, 2) maximum variation, and 3) convenience, respectively (2002).

School Districts and School Director Participants

Table 1 presents demographic information on the 12 participants in this study.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Data

Name	Gender	District and Town	Years Served on Board	Elected or Appointed to Board	School Age Children at Start of Term	School Age Children at Present	Race or Ethnic Identity
Joshua	Male	Shermer	6	Elected	Yes	Yes	White
Jonah	Male	Shermer	6	Elected	Yes	Yes	White
Miriam	Female	Mumford	6	Elected	Yes	No	Hispanic
Sarah	Female	Aldera	5	Appointed	No	No	White
Abraham	Male	Pottersville	8	Appointed	Yes	Yes	Native American
Samson	Male	Greendale	6	Elected	Yes	Yes	White
Matthew	Male	Greendale	5	Appointed	Yes	Yes	White
Joseph	Male	Greendale	10	Appointed	Yes	Yes	White
Esther	Female	Hill Valley	9	Elected	Yes	Yes	White
Peter	Male	Pleasantville	7	Elected	Yes	No	White
Daniel	Male	Pleasantville	10	Appointed	No	Yes	Hispanic
Paul	Male	Ampipe	12	Elected	Yes	No	White

Situated in a picturesque high mountain valley, Aldera is an amalgam of two small towns and situated in a large alpine region. Aldera School District came into existence as the result of the merger of two smaller districts. About 600 students attend Aldera schools. Nine out of ten of the students in the district are Caucasian. Though some mining and forestry can be found in the area, the economy in Aldera is reliant primarily on retail, lodging, and guide services associated with tourism based on a citywide theme and proximity to recreation.

Sarah has served on the school board since her appointment five years ago. Sarah is a Caucasian, and her children were raised prior to her joining the board. She works in office management and enjoys giving back to the community as a board member. She initially became involved in the board after being recruited by an incumbent board member. After attending meetings for a few months, Sarah was appointed and began her service.

A small city in the heart of farming country, Ampipe is ringed by large agribusinesses on the outskirts of town. These businesses, along with the farms that they support, make up the economy of the community. Nearly 1000 students attend school in the Ampipe School District; four in five are Hispanic. While a handful of retail businesses are open downtown, many residents make a short trip to a nearby urban area for most services.

Paul is a Caucasian who has lived and worked in Ampipe since leaving the military. He has served on the school board for the past dozen years. His children attended Ampipe schools and are now in college. He works in law enforcement, and is very involved in his community. He was encouraged by members of his local church to seek school board office, and was elected to his first term.

Like many of the communities in the study, Greendale is a moderate sized community surrounded by farms and agribusiness. About 3800 students attend school in the district, over

85% of which are Hispanic. Unlike some of the other communities studied, Greendale has seen unprecedented growth over the past decade. The district recently opened its fourth elementary, which is now nearing capacity. The children served by the school district account for nearly two-thirds of the population of Greendale, making it a very youth-driven community, with high needs educationally. Three members of the Greendale School Board, each Caucasian, participated in this study.

A health care professional, Samson has been a member of the Greendale School board for six years. He has had school-aged children in Greendale since his election to the board. The family picture hanging in the reception area of his practice, featuring his wife and young children, portray his commitment to the youth in his community. Samson was encouraged to join the board by an outgoing member, who told him how easy membership would be. Samson began by serving on board committees regarding construction of a new school and other capital projects, and then decided to run. He is motivated to help out and be involved in the community.

A finance professional, Matthew brings a strong understanding of the bottom line, both financially and in terms of student achievement, to his service on the board. He has been a director for five years, and is currently the chairman. He had school-aged children at the time of his election, and does today. Matthew is motivated by student achievement and wants to make a contribution to his community. He was encouraged to run for office by an outgoing school board member. Matthew's experience is similar to Samson in that he was told how easy board service would be prior to joining.

Joseph works in construction management and is a business owner. He has been on the school board for ten years. During this time Joseph has seen the board transform from a social and community organization to a potent force for encouraging student growth. Joseph was

recruited to join the board by an incumbent director, and was initially appointed. A product of Greendale schools, Joseph was born and raised in the community. His connection to the community as a life-long resident motivates his community service, and fuels his desire to improve the schools in Greendale.

Hill Valley is a small town at the center of a large farming region. A desert plateau, the area is filled with crops that are irrigated from a nearby watershed. Hill Valley is one town in a large agricultural area that stretches across the middle of the state. The majority of the residents work in farming or industries that support agriculture. About 85% of the 2700 students in Hill Valley are Hispanic. Each member of the Hill Valley school board, including Esther, is Caucasian.

Esther has served on the Hill Valley school board for nine years. She became interested in service after being approached by an incumbent director, who encouraged her to seek office. Esther was appointed to the board initially to fill a vacancy. She is currently the board chair. Her concerns included a lack of current board members with children in school, and a lack of females on the board. Esther cites a concern for her school-aged children, and their education, for seeking the position. She still has school-aged children in the district. Esther is very active in the state school board association, and has provided training to other districts through her involvement in WSSDA.

Mumford is a very small town and larger agricultural area just outside of Pleasantville. About 900 students attend school in Mumford each day. Over 97% of students in Mumford are Hispanic, as is school director Miriam. Many students in the area move to the larger district for high school. Creating opportunities for students like her daughters, and preventing this loss of students, motivated Miriam to seek board membership. This came after encouragement from the

superintendent as well as a friend on the board to run for office. Though both daughters have since graduated, and the friend is no longer on the board, Miriam, a state management employee, continues her service, six years to date. She is currently the board chair.

Pleasantville is the largest city in the agricultural area in the center of the state. Situated equidistant between two larger metropolises, Pleasantville boasts the small town charm and feel of a small city, with the light industry that comes with supporting modern agribusiness. A shopping mall, a number of restaurants, and other amenities make Pleasantville a destination in the area. About 6500 students attend school in Pleasantville each day. Over 90% of the students in Pleasantville are Hispanic.

Peter has been a school director in Pleasantville for seven years. Prior to this he served as a board member for a now defunct private school in the area. He had school aged children when he began service. These children have graduated from Pleasantville. Peter is Caucasian, and works in federal labor relations. Without any outside encouragement, Peter sought office on the board and was elected. His motivation for membership is to serve the community and to work with children.

Daniel grew up in Pleasantville and attended schools in the district. Like the majority of students in the district, Daniel is Hispanic. Following college, where he studied political science, Daniel returned home, while working as a higher education administrator, became interested in the school board. Having several family members involved in education helped foster this interest. This curiosity, not outside encouragement, led Daniel to apply for a vacancy on the board to which he was appointed. Daniel expressed having difficulties as school board member who was also a young person, just out of college. Since joining the board Daniel started a family

and has school-aged children. Last fall Daniel resigned from the board after 10 years of service to become a teacher in the Pleasantville School District.

With forested mountains on each side, and near and a large Indian reservation, Pottersville sits in a scenic river valley. The largest town in the county and region, Pottersville retains a small town feel. Once a bustling town in the heart of the logging industry, the downturn in timber has lowered the population accordingly. 4800 students attend school in the district. About 10% of the students in Pottersville are Native American, as is the research participant Abraham.

Abraham has served in a variety of technical and administrative positions, including a leadership role with the area tribe. He is also an accomplished author and historian. A lifelong interest in education led Abraham to serve on several local and regional school boards. His concern for his own children, in school throughout his tenure, and encouragement from the superintendent of schools, led Abraham to join the Pottersville board as an appointee. Advocacy for increased Native American achievement and community participation also spurred Abraham to serve. Following his appointment, he ran for re-election and won. He recently completed his latest term and retired from the board after eight years of service.

Lying at the edge of a large metropolitan area, Shermer is a geographical mixture of rural, suburban and industrial components, including several unincorporated areas. 4500 students attend the schools in Shermer each day. Two school directors from Shermer, Joshua and Jonah, participated in the study. Each is Caucasian, as are nearly four in five students in Shermer.

Joshua works in a technical field related to retail support. He has been a school board member for six years, and was elected to the position initially. Joshua has school aged children,

and has since he began serving. He was encouraged to enter board service by a group of concerned citizens in the district. After engaging in the process by attending Shermer school board meetings, Joshua grew concerned by the agenda of some board members, running against and defeating the director in his district.

Jonah works as an educator in a neighboring district. He has been a director in Shermer for 6 years, and was also elected initially. Jonah has had school aged children throughout his term. Following a temporary teaching assignment in Shermer, Jonah took a leave of absence for family reasons. It was at this time that he was approached by the union president in Shermer, and encouraged to seek an open directorship. Jonah has seen his opinions shift from a pro-union to a more district-sided view during the years that he has served as a board member, and expressed that this has caused friction at times in the neighboring district he works in.

Data Collection

A qualitative research design was applied in this project, using a case study methodology. A critical step in a case study is defining the unit to be studied (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, case studies are used for developing a deeper understanding of the topic or providing insights, whose participant cadre is restricted to those closely associated by time or space, geared towards developing a greater understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007).

This research study consisted of personal interviews with current school board members from the cohort who meet the eligibility criteria and who agree-to participate in the study. For the study, the attached interview instrument was used (Appendix A). This format allowed for the use of multiple lenses, a constructivist approach, and close collaboration between subject and interviewer (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Interviews were conducted with each participant in a location and at a time mutually agreed upon by the participant and researcher. A strong emphasis was placed upon creating a safe place for the participant to share the experiences and perceptions that come with serving as a school board member. Following the period of time in which the interviews took place, select participants were contacted by the researcher for follow-up questions and to review the preliminary results. This review provided triangulation of sources, as the same subjects will participate at different points in time (Patton, 2002)

These questions explored board members' perceptions regarding professional development. For example, questions which ask the subjects to list training received and to reflect on how that training impacted practice, provided information on how the subjects' practice has been shaped by training. Additional questions were designed to identify subjects' perceived professional development needs as school board members. Questions that probed board members' needs and interests in training, as well as those that sought justification for initial and continuing training were also presented. Those were designed both to gauge interests for future training and to elicit a detectable response from subjects as they justify the necessity of this type of professional development for school board members.

Trustworthiness

The validity of a given study is of critical importance in any research area. Qualitative case studies often eschew the term validity in favor of a different measure of worth, a term known as trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009). Several methods of evaluating qualitative studies have been posited. Creswell (2007) provides eight criteria for the verification of such research. Other authors offer differing approaches to assure validity (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton,

2002), and a host of others offer evaluative criteria for such research. This study relied heavily upon the evaluative criteria offered by Lincoln & Guba (1985), referred to as trustworthiness.

The establishment of trustworthiness is achieved through attention to four key areas that are outlined by the authors: 1) credibility, or faith in the veracity of the findings; 2) transferability, or suitability in describing other cases or situations; 3) dependability, what might be thought of as repeatability in scientific research; and 4) confirmability, a belief that the results were shaped by the participants, not by researcher biases or self-interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In this study credibility was established using two strategies. In the first, deviant case analysis, the analysis is fine-tuned until the majority of cases can be described using the analytical tool (Creswell, 2007). In the second, member checking, the preliminary results are shared with members of the case to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

The second criteria for trustworthiness is transferability. In the criteria outlined in *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer that transferability is established through thick descriptions, in which great detail is used to describe data from the case (Holloway, 1997). Such thick descriptions were used in this study, especially in the descriptions of data in the findings section.

In the case of dependability, the reliability of the researcher as research instrument must be carefully analyzed (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Piantanida & Garman, 1999; Patton, 2002). The researcher's knowledge of self, known as reflexivity (Pillow, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), must be carefully monitored through the use of a reflective journal (Ortlipp, 2008). Should the researcher lose confidence in one's own objectivity or positionality, auditing, or the use of an outside researcher to review parts of the data, is suggested as an alternative (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Many issues exist with auditing, including the possible loss of an interpersonal construction of knowledge between researcher and participant, or a possibility of even greater confusion (Creswell, 2007). Auditing was used only as absolutely necessary, and considered a last resort in this study.

An additional consideration in interview research and objectivity is reciprocity. Qualitative researchers must consider their own motivations for studying the area of focus, and for the relationships that exist and are formed with participants. To increase trustworthiness in this type of research, interviewers must carefully examine the relationship with the interviewee, and what benefits are extended or assumed through participation (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001). By the same measure, the researcher must move from knowledge construction that is researcher-centered towards one that is more relational, an interactive epistemology (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). In addition, the researcher must consider the story that is told through the research, which stories are emphasized or left out, and that the motivations and causes are for the stories that are selected (Harrison et al., 2001).

The final evaluative criteria in the Lincoln and Guba model is confirmability. One initiative for assuring confirmability is to keep an audit trail. An audit trail consists of keeping transparent records of each step of the data gathering and analysis process (Halpern, in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Research that is responsible to the participant, to the academy, and certainly to one's own best interests, endeavors to clearly delineate the steps and protocols throughout the study, and this study was no exception. Another initiative towards establishing confirmability is through triangulation, or the use of multiple data sources in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although this study almost exclusively relied upon interviews, the different viewpoints provided by the participants yielded a certain level of triangulation of sources (Creswell, 2007). Lincoln

and Guba (1985) also identify reflexivity as a means towards establishing confirmability. As mentioned above, this study put to use reflexivity through the means of the researcher's reflective journal.

Limitations

A qualitative inquiry based on a bounded case study can face a series of methodological limitations. The bounded case as defined above limits to roughly forty the number of possible participants. This does not factor in attrition during the inception of the WSSDA Lighthouse training, subsequent to the fall of 2013 cutoff for continued directorship. In fact this limited number of potential participants placed a limit on the study. In addition, the degree to which each of these participants engaged fully in the research questions, and provided complete and forthright responses, also placed a ceiling on the amount and richness of information that can be obtained.

In a study such as this the researcher also presents a series of limitations on the study. The sum total of the data analysis was conducted by one person. The researcher's biases, preconceptions and latent notions regarding the construction of the theory certainly had some impact upon the results of the study. Malterud (2001) points out that "preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484). The necessity to carefully analyze these sorts of biases is often addressed through the use of a reflective journal.

The use of a reflective journal by the researcher, which includes a regular inventory of the perceived biases and preconceptions of the researcher, was employed systematically throughout the study to address this weakness (Ortlipp, 2008). Careful consideration must be made as to how these biases might lead to inaccurate or unfair selection of data (Simons, 2009).

As Watt (2007) states, “learning to reflect on your behavior and thoughts, as well as on the phenomenon under study, creates a means for continuously becoming a better researcher” (p. 82).

Case study interviewing techniques, and the analysis of the materials obtained, in this instance, placed the researcher in the odd position of being both an insider and outsider to the subject of the investigation. As a career educator and experienced administrator the researcher has substantial preconceived ideas about the role and function of school boards. Nonetheless, the researcher has never served on a school board, and prior this study, has never had the occasion to speak with a school board member regarding her/his practice. Leveraging personal experiences in such a way as to build trustworthiness in the study became a major challenge (Watt, 2007).

The process of continuous analysis of the data, through the lens of one’s own experience and learning, was critical to meet the challenges posed by this limitation. As stated above, the use of the reflective journal becomes critical in light of the researcher as research instrument (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Piantanida & Garman, 1999; Patton, 2002). The researcher’s knowledge of her/his own part in constructing the knowledge in the study is known as reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Pillow (2003) describes reflexivity as a form of self-knowledge on the part of the researcher, and goes on to state that “reflexivity is increased attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process” (p. 176). While reflection and reflectivity are not one in the same, the two are inexorably linked (Chiseri-Strater, in Pillow, 2003). The maturation process necessary to achieve reflexivity is most readily obtained through deep reflection throughout the study.

This study is not without many inherent limitations in terms of methodology. The limit placed on the study by sample size was a calculated risk offset by the benefit of including school board members who, by nature of eligibility, bring a background of enhanced professional

development along with a perspective that comes from recent service and application of said training. The challenges of the researcher as research instrument model were the same as the process of praxis in any learning endeavor. The benefits and knowledge gained by this study, along with the rewards that came with gaining the knowledge to conduct this research, coupled with the policy implications that emerged from potential findings, made this a worthwhile learning endeavor.

Data Analysis

Regarding qualitative data analysis, Strauss (1987) remarks that, “the most difficult skill to learn is ‘how to make everything come together’ – how to integrate one’s separate, if cumulative, analyses. Put crudely theorizing involves connecting up the various elements involved in our research” (p. 170). The data for this study consisted of interviews, conducted face-to-face whenever possible, each taking from 45 to 60 minutes, and completed in a single sitting. Each interview was recorded digitally, with written notes collected as supplement. Merriam (2009) states that there is only one right way to conduct qualitative research: through simultaneous collection of and review of data (2009). Towards this end each audio recording was reviewed following interviews and compared with written notes. A transcription service was employed. A second simultaneous review of the written notes, audio recording, and transcript were later conducted.

Towards the identification of codes, and prior to coding, the data were analyzed via word cloud. This method can be used for both preliminary data analysis as well as for further validation of findings (McNaught & Lam, 2010). Using the internet word cloud engine Wordle (www.wordle.net), the text from each interview was combined into a master transcript. This transcript was converted into a collage of key terms, or word cloud. This word cloud listed the

words from the interviews, and through larger and smaller fonts, depicted the word frequency in a semi-quantitative fashion. Using the digital copies of the transcripts, edits were made to redact identifiers (such as Subject 1 and Interviewer), filler words such as “um” and “like,” words such as “and” that appear frequently without adding meaning to the word cloud, or any typographical errors due to garbled speech. The word cloud was then used to help to identify some of the key words and phrases that existed in the data.

The descriptions and narratives in this case study were documented then analyzed by the researcher. The process of analysis included deconstructing the interview data into key words or phrases. These keywords, along with supporting statements, were then arranged into categories known as codes (Saldana, 2009). Each code represented examples from the interview data that typified reoccurrences of the emergence of similar phenomenon from multiple subjects.

Following the word cloud, two rounds of coding were conducted. In the first round, referred to as initial coding, the interview transcripts are analyzed line-by-line, providing the researcher an opportunity to absorb the data and to explore possible directions and emerging themes (Saldana, 2009).

Of consequence in a qualitative case study is that data analysis occurs in a way that is iterative, without becoming mechanical (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Following the construction and analysis of the word cloud, first cycle coding in the form of initial or open coding was conducted. Open coding is perhaps the most basic form of coding, in that it provides an opportunity to absorb the data and to explore possible directions and emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006). Coding of each individual transcript was done on each transcript in a line-by-line fashion. In addition, the transcript data for each response was recombined into a master transcript, which will then be coded along the same lines. By examining the data at the group

and individual level, both with the word cloud and with the transcripts, overall themes as well as dissonance within the data were more easily identified.

The second cycle coding strategy known as holistic coding was made use of to rebuild the data into broader concepts. Holistic coding reverses the process of initial coding, calling upon a search for broader themes that emerge from the data. Unlike open coding, the focus is not on splitting, but clumping of the data (Dey, in Saldana, 2009). This analysis led to the grouping of similar codes. These groupings of codes will provide the basic foundation for the theories that emerge from the study.

Once the data were deconstructed into its smallest units, codes, the researcher began to rebuild the data into categories (Halpern, in Lincoln in Guba, 1985). In this process each of the codes is compared, with synthesis and assembly into corresponding categories. The categories that emerged from coding data were then arranged into key elements known as themes (Ayres et al., 2003). This iterative process of induction transforms the personal histories and sentiments of the individual participants towards the conceptual, the goal of which is the development of theory (Saldana 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative case study research incorporates the personal stories and experiences of each participant into a larger narrative. Implicit in this style of inquiry is a responsibility to treat the participants in an ethical manner. The central premise of the treatment of research participants in qualitative research, as in any study involving human beings, is to do no harm (Simons, 2009). These prime directives for the protection of human research participants are further outlined in *The Belmont Report*, and include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission, 1979). This investigation treated those involved with respect and protected their

well-being through a responsible design and strict confidentiality. By sharing the general findings with policy makers, and through offering participants access to the final study via request, the benefits of the study were spread beyond the researcher.

In qualitative case study research, a critical step towards ethical research is reached by assuring that the study is performed under the assumption of informed consent (Creswell, 2007). The construction and substantiation of participant sanction is the principal responsibility of a qualitative investigator working with human participants. The researcher shoulders the responsibility to assure that participants are aware of the benefits, consequences, and discretionary nature of their participation. These were explained to each participant both verbally and in writing, using the Participant Consent Form as a touchstone (Appendix C). These factors include the confidentiality of their responses, possible benefits and consequences of participation, their right to refuse to answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time, the right of a participant to review and annotate interview transcripts, and most importantly, agreement to participate.

Consideration of the ethical integrity of the study was extended to the interview protocol and experience as well. Participants selected the location and time for participation, and every effort was made to establish a safe space for sharing. These included restaurants, cafes, places of employment, and in one instance, the participant's home.

Early criticism of qualitative interview research has been an implicit level of deception (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). An important consideration is that interviews, and the questions contained within, are conducted in a straightforward manner, without any deception (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each question was read to the participant, who also had a written copy of the

questions for reference. The element of surprise did not play any factor in the interview protocol.

The interview protocol was designed in such a way to minimize the sharing of personal or embarrassing information, as each question is focused on professional development. Potentially damaging or salacious information such as political machinations within the board and/or community, conflicts between participants and other stakeholders (i.e. superintendents, teachers, community members, or other board members) clearly lay outside the scope of this study, and were not collected or processed as part of the data. The goal of the study was not to construct an exposé or to divulge the secrets of board function. By focusing on the authentic experiences and opinions of school board members, within the context of their own professional development, the type of information collected was not so provocative that one might reasonably assume that the results of the study might affect the participants directly.

Regardless of the qualities of the data and the results of the study, it is imperative that the confidentiality of each participant be maintained. The process of member checking, or review of the data with participants following interviews, brings with it the potential for loss of confidentiality (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). To minimize the potential for this type of breach, the personal information from each interview was kept in confidence, and only shared with the particular participant. The use of pseudonyms for each person and location in the study also helped in protecting the identities of the participants.

This study followed the basic tenets of human research, following the directives of *The Belmont Report*. The concept of informed consent was utilized to make participants aware of the potential effects of their involvement in the study. The study was constructed in a way so as not to disclose embarrassing or potentially inflammatory personal or political information, and was

conducted with strict adherence to confidential procedures. All interviews were conducted face-to-face (save one participant who was unable to meet in person) building the levels of trust between both parties following naturalistic theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The use of these measures, and the effort to make participants explicitly aware of them before, during, and following participation, helped to build trust in the school board members included in the study. This trust led to greater levels of participation, richer descriptions, and consequently increased the validity of the study.

Conclusion

School boards and the citizens who serve as directors face a difficult combination of factors in school governance. The era of accountability in education has brought with it myriad unintended consequences, unfunded mandates, and unrealistic timelines for organizational change. The recent economic downturn has brought with it an environment of austerity that casts skepticism on any improvements that bring with them change. This era of massive challenges and critical decisions on how to face these challenges has raised the stakes of school board governance (Eadie, 2009; Reeves, 2011). At the same time, many board members express a strong desire to push their learning beyond governance to essential issues such as student achievement, budgeting and planning, and community engagement (Hess, 2002).

This study was written from the perspective of an aspiring district leader. It follows that the perspective of the researcher is that of an education leadership insider. An intended outcome of this study was to help district leaders to better understand the perceptions and needs of SBMs related to their own PD, and for this information to be disseminated and applied both informally, by superintendents for local board orientation and training, and by broader organizations to inform policy and improve the training of school board members wherever possible.

The research conducted in this study was not intended as a proof of the effectiveness of the Lighthouse Project. For the purposes of this study, participation in the project was viewed as a form of vetting, demonstrating sufficient basic knowledge of and experience with school board training. It was assumed that individuals who participated in Lighthouse had a sound theoretical foundation to comment on the professional development of school boards. The benefit of utilizing WSSDA-trained Lighthouse participants was that doing so helps to increase the validity of the study, in that individuals whose perceptions are assessed have experienced what is generally agreed upon as highly effective school board training (Delagardelle, 2008; LaMonte & Delagardelle, 2009).

Ultimately the value of this inquiry did come not in validating or refuting the effectiveness of any training or orientation program. Furthermore, the primary goal should not be misconstrued as a critique or analysis of the type of structured or semi-structured professional development boards undertake as individuals, at the district level, or through state or national associations. The process of eliciting the thoughts, perceptions, and opinions of sufficiently knowledgeable board members, is itself not a means, but the end. This study endeavored to tell the story of school board training from the perspective of a school board director, through the use of thick descriptions typical of case study research (Holloway, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through the methodology presented in this section, with careful observation and respectful attention to the experiences and perspectives of the participants, it is a story worth telling.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand the training and development of school board members using a case study approach. The examination of the influence of board training on practice, solicitation of professional development needs, and perceptions regarding the quality and content of professional development received. The members of this case each participated in Lighthouse school board training provided by WSSDA. Their involvement in this research-based, in-depth training made them an ideal cohort through which to conduct this inquiry.

This study examined the central question of how school board members perceive the impact of training on their efficacy as school board members. Linkages between board training and the impact on student achievement were examined in this study. In addition, the effects of district size, gender, and diversity on the perceptions of board members were considered in this analysis. Lastly the level of fidelity to which each district participated in the Lighthouse Project through WSSDA, as a function of director perceptions, was considered.

Case Study Research and Data Analysis

This study deployed a bounded case study approach, with the case defined as directors in the eight eastern Washington school districts which participated in Lighthouse training through WSSDA from 2008-2010. Board members who served throughout the training and were still active as of fall of 2013 were considered from this pool. Those board members who met these criteria and agreed to participate in the study made up the case of twelve board members interviewed for this research.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each of the participants, except in one instance where the interview was conducted via phone. Each consultation took place in the district that the board member serves, in a variety of locations including coffee shops and restaurants, a tavern, the participant's office, and one in a participant's home. The interviews provided a valuable opportunity to encounter each board member on both a personal and professional level. The interview questions for this study are included in Appendix A.

Following completion of the interviews and preparation of transcripts, the transcript for each interview was merged into a master interview transcript. Identifiers such as "interviewer" and "interviewee," filler words such as "um" and "like," and words such as "and" that appear frequently without adding meaning to the word cloud, or any typographical errors due to garbled speech, were removed from the transcript. Following the work of McNaught and Lam (2010), the edited master transcript was inserted into the internet word cloud engine Wordle (www.wordle.net), to produce a collage of key terms, or word cloud. The words from the interviews are represented by larger and smaller fonts in accordance with the frequency they appeared in the interviews. The interview word cloud is included in Appendix D.

The word cloud revealed the central terms school, board, and training, as might be expected. Other terms of significance included member(s), people, superintendent, and know. The themes that emerged from this inexact yet insightful look at the data showed that the participants' responses centered primarily upon words associated with relationships (such as community, trying, good, teachers, want, people, etc.) and the acquisition of board-specific knowledge (training, things, members, learn, job, work, question, professional, get, know, etc.). Several value-based words (right, kind, good, great, want, important, etc.) demonstrated a

commitment to serving the community and doing what is right for students and for the community.

Following completion of the interviews, the audio files were transcribed. In total 173 pages of double-spaced transcripts were produced. These transcripts and audio recordings, along with notes, were coded based on methods outlined by Saldana (2009). These included first level initial coding of the transcripts and notes in a line-by-line fashion. Secondary coding involved the holistic examination of the data to identify broad concepts emerging from the research. This coding led to the emergence of a set of themes within the data set.

This chapter appraises the data from the research, as well as what was learned through this study. Themes addressed include motivation of and background of directors, dynamics of board membership, board member orientation, continued professional development and the impact of professional development on school directors. Each of these themes emerges from the interview data, and impacts the following examination of the research questions. Each of the above questions is examined through the lens of the interview data toward the goal of better understanding the professional development of school board members.

Motivation and Prior Preparation of School Directors

Theme 1: School board members are motivated by a strong desire to be an advocate for students and to provide community service. As stated throughout this work, school board governance is a complex endeavor, bringing with it both considerable responsibility and relatively little extrinsic rewards. In light of this, and to create the common ground critical to examining the issues central to this study, participants were asked to describe their initial motivation for joining the board, as well as any prior preparation or experience that may have shaped their initial practice. Strong understanding of the reasons that these individuals sought

the position, and how they were prepared initially prior to becoming board members, is essential to starting to understand their development and growth throughout their service. The major findings from this work are presented below along five main themes.

Motivation for School Board Membership

The school directors in this study presented a variety of reasons for seeking board service. Each of the participants expressed a strong desire to advocate for students and the community, as well as a motivation for civic service. Several of the members noted a need to improve the schools. Some noted this in generic terms of contributing to the community and schools. Based on the hours, lack of compensation, and obscurity of the position, the rewards must clearly be intrinsic. Miriam described her motivation for service: “You don't get paid money wise, the rewards comes through things that happen in the district [and] kids' testimonials [about] how programs turned their lives around. That's your reward.”

Two of the interviewees, Joseph (Greendale) and Daniel (Pleasantville) used the phrase, “born and raised,” to describe the motivation to give back as part of the cycle of growing up in and maintaining lifelong residency in the community. Others viewed board membership as a call to action. Joshua, for example, joined the board to oppose the superintendent in Shermer. Abraham expressed an interest in advocating for Native American students in Pottersville as part of the reason for joining the board. Miriam noted a need to “make a change,” in Mumford.

Board member responses also noted an interest in belonging to the school board as an organization. Jonah wanted to join the board in Shermer to “be involved in education,” in greater depth than his role as a teacher. Joseph was told that Greendale board service required a minimal time commitment and that joining the board “will help you and your kids.” Sarah noted

an interest in joining the Aldera board because she was “impressed by the school board and their interactions . . . [It was a] great group that I wanted to be a part of.”

Board members noted a variety of influences for seeking office. Half of the board members interviewed reported having been recruited to run for or apply for board membership through the encouragement of a seated board member. Often this appeal was expressed with an opinion from the incumbent that the potential new member had the qualities to be highly successful. Three of the board members were encouraged to seek office by community groups. Paul’s church in Ampipe encouraged his candidacy. Jonah was encouraged by the local teachers union to run for the Shermer board, while Joshua was compelled to run for the same board by a “concerned group of citizens.” Two board members were encouraged to run for office by the superintendent. Miriam ran for the Mumford board with a friend, who was also elected. Abraham was recruited by the Pottersville superintendent based on his experience and community standing. The two school board members from Pleasantville, Peter and Daniel, noted only their own self-motivation for seeking office as the impetus to run for election.

Prior Service and Preparation

Board members participating in the study came for the most part with no prior experience as board members. Abraham had worked extensively in the corporate world, had already served on a college board, and served on a private school board prior to service, as did Peter. Joseph had served on the Greendale Water Association, while Matthew was active in community service groups prior to serving on the board. Some board members were drawn to the board through indirect involvement in committees, parent-teacher associations (PTA), and other district and school level initiatives. Miriam considered board membership following work on a junior high parent task force to address low achievement in Mumford Junior High. Samson served on a

board committee prior to running for office in Greendale, as did Peter in Pleasantville. Daniel had been a part of an education committee formed by the governor as an undergraduate, which led him to pursue the directorship.

The participants then shared the types of preparation which they had received following their decision to seek office, and prior to installation. For the most part, these experiences were informal. Some committed to self-directed studies, such as Jonah and Miriam, who both read books on school board membership before deciding to run for office. Others, including Daniel, Esther, and Joseph, received mentoring prior to service from an incumbent director. Two participants received training from district office staff: Jonah was briefed on how to read a budget by the superintendent, and Sarah met with the financial manager for similar training prior to joining the board.

Some of the board members in this study attended meetings prior to joining the board. Paul attended one board meeting in Ampipe prior to his installation, as did Sarah in Aldera. She described her onboarding as an “informal process.” Peter attended meetings as well as WSSDA trainings as a candidate prior to his election. Samson attended board meetings for 11 months prior to joining the board in Greendale, though part of this was due to his activity on a board committee.

Board members noted that the training received in this period prior to assuming office was disorganized and lacked focus and consistency. Many noted that current onboarding programs in their districts are much more robust and clearly organized today. At the same time the board members expressed a sense of being overwhelmed by both the volume and type of information received as they became board members. Daniel noted that, “the information you receive as a SBM is much different than that you receive as a community member.”

Dynamics of Board Membership

Theme 2: School governance is time consuming exercise which presents a host of political and interpersonal challenges for directors within the board, district, and community.

The twelve officials who took part in this research had to respond to a variety of pressures during their service. Each made significant time commitments to serve their communities in this fashion. Many of the participants noted that they faced a variety of challenges through their service on the school board. Through their personal ups and downs, as well as their interactions with colleagues, the internal and external forces that shaped the experience of school board service affected each personally and as a board member. This section will examine the time commitments of participants, as well as challenges faced during service. Lastly the impact of school board training on the interactions between school board members will be discussed.

Time Spent on Board Activities

Each of the board members in this study reported being employed at or near a full-time level. The time spent on board-related activities for each comes in addition to this work time, as well as family and social commitments. The school board members in this survey reported spending on average just under 20 hours per month on board-related activities. This time included board meetings, work sessions, trainings, preparation for meetings, reviewing and/or developing agendas, and other board work.

Joshua identified spending 10-12 hours per month on board related activities, while Daniel and Matthew each reported spending between 30-40 hours each month on board work. Most board members reported a time value below 20 hours per week, though Peter also noted that he spent 20-25 hours per week on board activities. Each member noted that these times are approximate, and can vary greatly depending on the time of the school year and events in the

district. As one would expect, the directors from districts which focus the most on whole board training, Greendale and Pleasantville, tend to put in more time than those from other districts in the study.

Challenges of School Board Membership

School governance requires a complex mix of technical, interpersonal, and political skills. While the time demands of board service can be substantial, as discussed above, only one of the twelve interviewees identified this as a challenge related to board service. This time challenge was related not to board activities, but making the time to be visible at schools and answer to constituents. Board members in this study identified a host of challenges related to their service. These included understanding and responding to district financial concerns, responding to the demands of the politics of board service, understanding the pace of change in education, balancing involvement while avoiding micromanagement, and the need for additional training in board governance.

Several members of the case expressed a desire to learn more about school funding and the budgeting process. Sarah noted the difficulties associated with limited funding for education. Peter expressed the need to align limited funds in the district in such a way that the greatest good is achieved for student achievement. Matthew conveyed a desire to, “be a good steward, [making sure that] children get the best education possible, [and] meet the needs of what the community expects.”

Nationally most school board members do not come from an educational background (Maeroff, 2010). Similarly, Jonah is the only board member who works in the public education in this case study. In addition, very few of the individuals in the study brought previous board or political service. The pace of the system, and the change process in education, was new and at

times frustrating for these individuals. The politics of school board governance also presented novel issues for these individuals, most of whom had little prior political experience. Daniel characterized this sentiment, noting that in “the education system [it] is difficult to move quickly,’ and that the system requires “patience with a sense of urgency.” Miriam shared her frustration at wanting to make an immediate impact as a new board member and not being able to do so. The inertia of the educational system also impacted Esther, who identified her biggest challenge as “trying to affect change and not being able to.” Paul pointed more directly to the challenges of collective bargaining. “I like to get along,” he said. “When it’s labor time, the grief starts.”

The demands of the multiple constituencies represented by the school board—namely students, parents, staff, administration, community members, etc.—presented another set of challenges for board members in the study. Board members must focus on policy governance, and let district staff do the job that they are hired to do. Joshua described this as “making 40,000 foot level decisions.” For Miriam, it was difficult initially to resist micromanagement, though as she grew in her knowledge she realized the importance of delegating issues to district staff. She reminded herself that “you are making a difference, [and this] doesn’t have to be [by] handling [your] neighbor’s issue.”

According to Daniel, “board members need to understand how speaking without authority impacts the system as a whole.” These lapses in leadership, which he described as a grocery store conversation where a board member promises to fix a parent or employee’s problem, undermine the ability of district staff to do their jobs. Joseph also stressed the importance of following chain of command: “When a public matter, explain your role; if not, send to appropriate person.” He went on to describe that he is constantly receiving “public input,

trying to sway you to fire a teacher, get rid of a program, etc.” Paul described the same challenge as “sorting agendas of groups versus what is right, without bias.”

At the same time, board members must be accountable and available to the voters they represent. Abraham identified his primary duty as a board member as responding to constituents. Samson described this responsibility to “make sure that the community voice is being heard, [to] hold the district accountable for hearing that.” He went on to explain his duty to “make sure the board’s wants are well explained to the superintendent and staff, to look at data, and to hold the superintendent accountable” for these initiatives. Sarah described the importance during the decision-making process of “[maintaining] objectivity by holding decisions up to our mission statement.”

The Shermer School District faced a period of public upheaval following an unpopular policy decision. Following considerable public and staff dissent, the board became polarized, resulting in a 3-2 ideological and voting split on most issues. Jonah expressed that during this time he was embarrassed by the dysfunction of the board, and stated his desire to “hide the fact that I’m a politician.” Joshua worked to maintain perspective during this period. He noted that “experience helps, otherwise it’s personal.”

School board members with children in school faced additional issues as a result of the dual role as director and parent. Joseph was told by former Greendale board members that his membership would help him and his children, though this was a decade ago when the board was what he described as “a good old boy network.” Board members with children in the district shared the unique challenges of making decisions that impact both the system and their own children. Miriam noted that “it’s not about just your student. [An effective director will] separate the parent and school board member roles.”

Samson identified the challenge of focusing on low achieving students, at times at the expense of higher achieving students. He noted his responsibility to make a “decision best for the majority of kids, even if not for my own kid.” Jonah worked to avoid conflicts of interest by focusing on the fact that he had “no personal agenda entering the board, “and was “here to help.” Esther’s connections as a parent and former PTA member made her more connected to “parents who are frustrated by teachers and policies,” forcing her to balance her responsibility to constituents and to the system. She also faced scrutiny as she made the decision to home school her own child, removing her from the Hill Valley School District for personal reasons.

Many of the directors in this study identified either the need for responsibility to continue to pursue professional development as a challenge related to service. Miriam noted that the time and reading spent staying current on board issues takes up a great deal of time. Matthew also identified a need to “keep current with what’s going on” both in the district and in his practice as a board member. Joseph and Peter noted similar challenges in maintaining knowledge of the district and of board practice. Directors in remote areas, such as Sarah, noted the difficulty in bringing consultants into the district for in-person trainings. Paul noted obstacles related to professional development including “a lack of knowledge [and] keeping up with policies and reforms.”

School Director Interactions

Like any human enterprise, school boards must collaborate effectively as individual members to affect positive changes. As mentioned above, one new board member results in a completely new board. These transitions reveal conflicting views of the purpose, mission, and direction of the board. Daniel noted the imperative to “navigate the personal and professional relationships that come with boardsmanship.” Sarah echoed this as she pointed to the need to

assure that the board members possess “no agendas.” In Joseph’s case, he began board service on a board that viewed its mission minimally, to “rubber stamp” the decisions of the superintendent and administration. The past decade has left him the only remaining board member, a witness to both the old paradigm and a dynamic shift towards greater awareness and initiative on the board, culminating in adoption of policy governance and board-centric meetings.

This generational shift in boards reveals interpersonal disagreements as well. Esther noted that during her early years on the board, she encountered both “lame duck school board members” who were unwilling to make any changes, as well as single issue school board members. She described the latter, noting that this school board member, a dairy farmer, only spoke at board meetings to advocate for the availability of milk in all school meals. A similar shift in board membership exacerbated the difficulties in Shermer. During the difficult situation in his district, Jonah was disappointed by the dishonesty and lack of transparency that other board members brought to their decisions. He wished that other members of the board would “come to the table with the reason why you voted no.”

Governance boards have a responsibility to portray unanimity publicly. Abraham, a veteran of public, private, and higher education school boards, as well as corporate boards, explained this, saying that “boards usually have 5-0 decisions, “ and that boards have a responsibility to “ work out problems in the work session before the vote.” He continued, “A split board is a big problem . . . Portray unanimity publicly.” Joshua echoed the importance of such consensus as the importance of “why you need 5-0 vote versus a 3-2 vote.” Joseph described how this looks in Greendale: “We want everyone to have their own opinion. Everyone gets an opportunity to speak, [and] then we stand behind a resolution.” Sarah pointed to the linkage between effective communication and clear understanding of the roles of board members

as reinforcing the importance of unanimous votes. She went on to explain the crucial nature of anticipating unintended consequences in maintaining board cohesion board. The lack of such cohesion, which exists at present in Shermer, has led Jonah to believe that “collaboration is non-existent with the current board members.”

Participants in the study noted the importance of training received in encouraging additional collaboration. Nearly all of the participants noted the potency of whole-board training for improving board dynamics and collaboration. Paul noted that board retreats have helped the board in Ampipe come together. In Mumford, Lighthouse training led to whole board collaboration to create a district strategic plan. The training also led to a review of the board meeting agenda process. Board members now receive the agenda a week prior to meeting, with the board chair writing the agenda. Prior to the training, the agenda was created unilaterally by the superintendent. The training also led Mumford board members to invite Pleasantville board members to present information on Lighthouse at a Mumford School Board meeting.

Whole board training created both short and long-term changes in the districts studied. Esther noted that strategic planning as a board was the immediate result following whole board training, though she found the lack of long-term change and follow through “disappointing. I thought that we could encourage the group.” The Pleasantville School Board used group training to have, as Daniel noted, “more proactive conversations as a school board.” He added that the board grew to view their “role as ‘leaders in training.’” Peter noted that the Pleasantville directors worked together “as a school board to understand the past, present, and future.”

In Greendale, whole board training also led to collaborations that had much longer lasting effects. Samson described how “training changed the topics that we talked about. How does [the issue] affect our district? What is good for our district? Discussions needed to be more

public, never talked out in detail before.” Fellow Greendale board member Joseph further explained this in terms of the board becoming more “conscious of making an effort to encourage new school board members to voice their opinions.”

School Board Member Orientation

Theme 3: New board members learn the role mostly through on-the-job training, and would benefit from a more structured and systematic orientation. The induction or initial training of school board members is of critical importance. This initial training provides new board members with a conceptual framework through which to understand and conduct the functions of school governance. Such additional training provides an added value, which Matthew described as setting a high standard for future performance and growth, especially in relation to professional development. This section surveys the background of participants regarding their own initial orientation and its efficacy. Following participants discussed their opinions for the induction and preparation of new school board members.

Orientation and Impact of Initial Training

School directors in this survey received primarily two forms of initial training. The first came from WSSDA, mostly in the form of the WSSDA Board Boot Camp for new members. The second form of training came through district-directed training. Participant induction was evenly split between the two experiences, with a handful experiencing both forms of initial training.

Several board members reported attending either WSSDA Board Boot Camp or a WSSDA conference as part of their initial training. The majority of those who attended felt that the training was helpful. Sarah noted that the boot camp was “a great way to get into boardsmanship.” Esther expressed her appreciation for the program, adding that she “was

overwhelmed by how little [she] knew.” Paul appreciated the opportunity to interact with other new school board members from around the state. Matthew expressed a sentiment shared by much of the group regarding the training, noting that while it “helped somewhat, most of the impact came later.”

The other form of initial training received by the participants consisted of district-directed training. Again roughly half of the participants highlighted this training. For some this was their only training. Daniel noted the presence of a well-sequenced district training program as key to his early success on the board. In addition he was able to obtain counsel from experienced school board members and the superintendent to get “the lay of land, what we are doing, what we want to do, timelines, challenges,” etc. Joshua offered that his training helped him as he, “better understood the role, relationships within the district . . . and had the ability and confidence to ask questions.” Peter noted that the superintendent in Pleasantville conducted a full training for each of the new board members. While he found the training helpful, he added, “You think you know, but you don't know.”

Unlike Pleasantville, most of the districts in the study lacked a formal program for new board members at the time of the participants’ orientation. Though Matthew enjoyed a series of workshops with the board in Greendale, many reported having only informal conversations with the business manager, assistant superintendent or superintendent. These discussions focused on issues ranging from budgets and learning programs to decorum and board member responsibilities. For instance, Abraham was briefed by the superintendent on “various problems and issues in district.” For most this boiled down to a few key words followed by on the job training. For Jonah his training was mostly “on the job. I listened and asked a lot of questions.”

Reflecting on the impact of orientation was difficult for board members in the study, some of whom have served for over a decade. For those who had a positive orientation experience, the process had substance and led to greater understanding of the role of school board member. For Peter the training brought the knowledge that the “school board is a team of members . . . No one is the authority,” and that their primary duty is to “collaborate.” Daniel learned a great deal about the job functions of other members of the district. He noted that “The role of the superintendent is to lead the district, not wait for things [to happen] in the office.” He also added that, regarding the effectiveness of new member orientation, the “culture of the school board is critical.”

Esther noted that as she “better understood role of SBM, [she] started asking questions, people [were] less suspicious, and [she] got more calls.” She was especially impressed as a new school board member by the “volume of information (assessment, curriculum, union, legislation, etc.)” Daniel echoed this sentiment, noting that the “depth and complexity of school board [governance] in Pleasantville has changed in the last 10-15 years,” adding that there has been a “transition to talking about things that mattered (school improvement instead of asphalt, HVAC).”

For board members that had a less auspicious initial training, the effects of the training were mixed. Though Sarah reports having taken “two years to get up to speed,” she believed that “training didn’t change [her] approach to the job.” Joseph expressed frustration at the amount of time that it took him to become an effective board member, something he believed could have been avoided with more training. He noted that he was “encouraged to jump in and start learning,” though “without training the first year you just sit there, catch up, [and] not saying anything.” For Miriam and the board in Mumford, their superintendent-led retreat for

new board training was poorly received. She notes that the training, which was unheard of at the time, “led to the current board resigning” at the end of their terms. The positives from this transition were “a new board, new team,” and a board that was “receptive to questions.”

Participants’ Opinions on Preparation and Development

With a combined 90 years of service on school boards, it should come as no surprise that the twelve participants in this study have well-defined views regarding the orientation and development of school board members. Directors identified the importance of initial training, and mentoring for new board member development. In addition they described the role of WSSDA trainings, and their own philosophies of effective board membership.

Many of the directors identified the importance of initial training prior to or following election or selection. This training, which several members referred to as onboarding, included briefings on the state of the district, often at the direction of the superintendent or incumbent board members. Joshua suggested that the board hold a work session post election, before the installation of new members, so that the full board can discuss, “hot topics, district status, why [the new candidate] ran . . .” with the goal of there being “no surprises.” Miriam explained how this type of initial work session, especially through the coordination of an outside facilitator, might act as a springboard for launching the annual work cycle of board goal setting and superintendent evaluation.

The need for formal onboarding was also discussed by several board members. Esther noted that school boards should have “written protocols for training.” Daniel stated similarly that districts must, “formalize the onboarding process for new school board members.” He then suggested that these meetings should include a series of questions posed to the new board member, such as “Why did you run? How do you perceive the function of the current board?”

What are your skills [and] talents?” Many participants stated a belief that such initial induction should be mandatory. Since many board positions are appointed instead of elected, whether due to lack of interest or a resignation, Miriam suggested that districts develop a procedure for application to the board.

Peter offered that school board candidates “should attend school board meetings until [the] election is certified (at which time the candidate would commence service).” Esther noted that candidates should attend WSSDA board candidate trainings prior to the election. Miriam suggested that prospective board member training include an open forum for the board to get to know candidates prior to the election. Sarah suggested that districts should design and provide preview and recruitment programs to train and recruit potential school board members. She described this as a “vehicle to understand what it means to be a school board member. There is a huge misconception of the role and power. [Candidates] need to have the right objectives in mind.”

A critical part of the onboarding process, in the estimation of many participants, is that the essential job functions of a school board member are clearly delineated. Miriam noted that new board members require training “to understand the board packet and [board meeting] protocol.” Joseph offered that this type of training should occur within the first month of service. Peter identified these as “roles, responsibilities, duties, advocacy, critical thinking, [and a] questioning attitude--Why do we do what we do?” He then noted the need to return to these items later, and check for understanding on the part of the new board member. Peter and Daniel both mentioned the use in Pleasantville of a 30/60/90 handbook in which the essential pieces of knowledge for the first 30, 60, and 90 days of service are published.

The participants also provided an abundance of ideas for the content of new board member training. Joshua suggested a “6 month crash course bringing new school board members up to speed.” Paul noted that the training should focus on policy and dos and don’ts of board membership. Joshua stated a need for a class that describes the legal issues related to board membership. Daniel suggested that new board members should be given a basic aptitude test, or pre-assessment to help new members understand what they will need to learn. Fundamentals described by participants included district budgets and finance, transportation, labor issues and contracts, real estate issues, and programs and sources of funding, to name a few. Abraham commented on the need for training in ethics, as well as an appreciation of the history of the district. Paul noted his frustration with acronyms in education, as did Samson, who suggested that board members be provided a “cheat sheet with educational acronyms.” Esther and Joseph stated the importance of knowing both what the acronyms stand for as well as what the organizations and programs behind the letters are about.

Nearly all of the participants described in some fashion the critical importance of mentoring from incumbents in smoothing the transition for new board members. Joseph described how each new board member should have one-on-one mentoring from an incumbent, and that the mentor should, “be realistic with candidates regarding time demands and the role” of the school board member. Samson built on this, adding that new members should have “lunches [that act as] recap meetings” following board meetings. Abraham related the importance of receiving mentorship and counsel from experienced board members. In Matthew’s estimation, early mentoring can set the tone for board members to be active in professional development. In his words, such mentoring helps to, “set [an] expectation as a board that new school board

members receive [ongoing] training.” In this way, he added, the board can “put pressure on the person to train, be part of the team, [to] step it up, [and to] be serious.”

Each board member pointed out the essential role of WSSDA in providing initial training for new board members. Many noted their own experience at the WSSDA Board Boot Camp training for new members. Some espoused a belief that the quality of this initial training has improved greatly since their own induction. Jonah articulated that “a lot of people don’t attend the new member boot camp,” and went on to state that it should be compulsory.

Other WSSDA offerings geared towards a wider range of experiences were also mentioned as helpful for new board members. WSSDA workshops, especially those on topics of interest to the board, were mentioned, as were regional and state WSSDA meetings. Paul discussed how the WSSDA document library has assisted his growth, and that new members would benefit from these materials. Miriam noted how the WSSDA online materials and webinars had helped increase her knowledge and effectiveness as a board member. Peter made clear the benefit of the group, noting that, “WSSDA is willing to bend over backwards to help new school board members.”

Two of the participants considered the role of Educational Service Districts (ESDs) in providing support and ongoing professional development for school board members at the regional level. Joseph stated his belief that there should be “one person from each ESD to train new school board members.” In her interview, Esther considered the role of the ESD in training, positing that the “ESD should provide some kind of training, site-based [and] whole board, [coordinated and conducted by] a trainer in each ESD.”

Through this discussion the philosophies of board leadership of many of the participants began to emerge. Matthew, like many of the participants, noted the need to help new board

members understand how the board functions as a team: “board members do not speak for the board. The board acts, not a SBM.” He went on to state that training should be designed to help new board members to understand “what a board can do to affect change in a district,” and that such training “should move from general to specific.”

For Paul, a policeman, the importance of knowing the rules was clear: “When we step across boundaries, issues come up. If you have a policy and you don't follow it, problems [occur].” Abraham, a retired executive, explained his view the role of school board member more as an ambassador: “[the] key is to teach people how to delegate. You can't throw your ball over the fence and run.” He added that leadership “is an art: too tight, it leads to resentment . . . Too loose, to disaster”

Fundamentally each director acknowledged the key role experience plays in building competency. Put bluntly, Sarah stated this as “once you're elected, learn on the job—it's the best way to learn.” Sarah then conveyed the responsibility of the board to help more precisely define the role for new school board members, as she said, “What's really expected of you? Show up to meetings? What else?” Without such guidance, which comes through mentoring and continued training, it is easy to see how this minimum becomes a standard in some districts.

According to the old proverb, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Similarly school boards rely upon new members to get up to speed quickly and to make a contribution. Common sense dictates that this is best achieved through training and education. Joseph noted how training in Greendale has led “to more rapid involvement, and greater board function.” Daniel explored the critical importance of diversity on the board, stating, “A new set of eyes is important. We need to cultivate a role for new school board members.” Unfortunately the capacity for such development is dependent on the capacity of the board and district for growth.

Esther lamented that this is the “luck of the draw based on your superintendent or the school board members,” adding that the effectiveness of onboarding is “based in large part on what has been done in the past.” This speaks to the importance of a culture of learning on the school board and in the district.

School Director Professional Development

Theme 4: School board members prefer whole-board training that is conducted on-site by an outside trainer. In addition to communicating the perceptions of school board members regarding training, one goal for this study was to illuminate the necessity for training for school board members. Towards this end, the next section examines the post-orientation training received during board tenure. In addition, participants were queried regarding the content and format desired for future professional development. These discussions helped to build a foundational understanding of the backgrounds of each participant, as well as develop a framework to better predict the direction each participant is headed for future professional development.

Ongoing Professional Development Received

For the participants in this study, the primary form of professional development was provided locally. This in-house training took a variety of forms depending on the mindsets of the board and the individual. One type of training the participants identified as especially useful was the board retreat. The majority of the interviewees pointed to these trainings, which were often held in a different location than regular board meetings, as a valuable avenue to reconnect and refocus the board. The less formal structure allowed the boards to discuss vision and direction without the structure or scrutiny that came with traditional meetings. Samson noted the importance of such training and pointed to the board retreat as the venue annual review of board

and district goals. Paul identified that these types of training helped him to “better . . . sift through gimmicks, stay out of trouble, [and to] promote movement towards [an] outcome” during regular board meetings.

Another form of in-house training identified in the study was the work session. Work sessions are informational meetings in which the board is briefed on a topic (such as a capital project, instructional strategy, curriculum, etc.). These are often held just prior to the commencement of the formal meeting, many times a half-hour or hour beforehand. One might assume that the work session is simply part of the work done by boards. By examining the perceptions of board members it became apparent that nearly all of the participants viewed these meetings not as informational, but valuable training directed toward the board. Abraham suggested that these meetings served as “workshops on controversial issues, [providing closed sessions]” for the board to explore such matters. Board members, especially Miriam and others from smaller districts emphasized the importance of the superintendent in directing learning for the board in these meetings. Regarding the importance of work sessions, Joshua noted that “the big questions are answered in work sessions.”

Board members also identified less formal trainings that took place at the local level. Sarah pointed to training prior to a levy as well as legal assistance provided by the district attorney via phone. Peter and Daniel pointed to book studies in the Pleasantville School District, which were coordinated by the superintendent. The participant responses led back often to the critical importance of the superintendent in directing training at the local level. Esther echoed this sentiment, saying, “You can learn a lot from a knowledgeable superintendent.” The reality that school boards look to the superintendent to direct local training conflicts with the need for

increased autonomy that many board members expressed during these interviews as well as in other research (Tallerico, 1993).

School board members also received outside training from a variety of sources. Not surprisingly, the most common source of external training identified was WSSDA. Participants attended a variety of WSSDA trainings, including regional and state meetings. Participants reported a variety of opinions regarding these opportunities. Most board members studied had positive feelings toward these trainings. Paul noted the importance of networking with other school board members, and how these discussions helped inform his practice and decision making. Daniel agreed in principal, adding, “Conferences are weird animals because no two districts are the same. What works one place won't always work somewhere else, though the discussions are often good.” Sarah was less enthusiastic, with a minority viewpoint on the WSSDA state conference. She remarked that, “Personally I'm not overly fond of big cookie cutter conferences. WSSDA? I'm not sure about every year.” Abraham stated his perception of conferences, noting, “Workshops are good for large problems, not local ones.”

WSSDA provided a variety of more specific trainings attended by board members in this study. These included WSSDA committees such as the state conference planning committee, legislative committee. Some of the participants also attended webinars to learn more about specific issues, such as Miriam, who viewed these during lunch breaks at work. Peter noted that use of such webinar trainings became a springboard to model professional development for staff. Later the Pleasantville board began viewing all of the webinars (workplace safety, blood borne pathogens, etc.) required of staff in the district.

The WSSDA-provided training through which each member of the case study is linked is the WSSDA Lighthouse Training of 2008-10. The training, based on the Lighthouse work of the

Iowa School Boards Association, centered on the five key roles of school boards to achieve increased student success: “1) set clear expectations, 2) create conditions for success, 3) hold the system accountable to the expectations, 4) build collective will, 5) learn together as a board team” (Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2008). WSSDA provided this training to fifteen school boards across the state, including the eight in the study.

An interesting fact about Lighthouse training in Washington State is that it did not initially originate from WSSDA. Members of the Pleasantville School Board learned about Lighthouse at the NSBA conference and shared the project with WSSDA leadership. When WSSDA did not offer the training for the following year, Peter, Daniel, and their board initiated the project on their own, bringing out of state trainers to Pleasantville. As Lighthouse unfolded in this district, WSSDA subsequently made the decision to offer the program to districts in the state.

Lighthouse training led to varying levels of change in the districts included in this study. The impact of the training will be addressed in a later section. For some districts, such as Aldera, the workload became too onerous, and the project was scuttled. Sarah described the decision to drop the program by saying, “Time is a factor, we got as much as we were going to.” Other boards, like Ampipe, dropped the project as they struggled with the reality of their district’s situation. Paul described this, saying, “[We] didn't see way to present [the] data in positive way.” For Jonah, Lighthouse was a turning point in his service on the board, helping him become more active. He described the training by saying, “Lighthouse was the most influential . . . it challenged me to ask questions.” Similarly Samson identified Lighthouse as a turning point in Greendale: “[Lighthouse was a] big thing. [It gave a] feeling that districts whose school boards are highly involved and high achieving can increase student achievement.”

Leadership WSSDA is an in-depth program provided over five weekends which provides leadership training for school board members (WSSDA, 2013). Joshua, Jonah, Peter and Esther identified having attended these trainings. Esther explained the purpose of the training, which the Hill Valley board attended as a group as “to be a better leader, [and to] encourage people to get involved.” Jonah, an in-service teacher, compared Leadership WSSDA to the professional certification (pro-cert) process for developing teachers in Washington State. Like the pro-cert, Jonah continued, Leadership WSSDA should be compulsory following a set number of years of school board service. Joshua outlined a similar certification process for new school board members.

Board members Joshua, Esther, and Peter identified membership in the WSSDA Cadre, a group of directors who have received additional training and now provide board member training on behalf of WSSDA. Esther especially identified with this service as the main thrust of her own professional development. She remarked upon the failure of Leadership WSSDA in her own district, stating that it was “disappointing, I thought that we could encourage the group.” In light of her expressed frustration with the Hill Valley Board to sustain the momentum of such training, her shift in focus towards other districts more eager to receive training is understandable.

The directors from Pleasantville and Greendale, along with Esther and Miriam, had the opportunity to attend the NSBA national conference. Members of the Pleasantville board discussed their presentation of successful learning improvement strategies at the NSBA conference. Large districts are much more likely to send board members to national conferences (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Pleasantville and Greendale are among the larger districts in this study, so their attendance at national conventions is not unusual. The attendance of other directors,

especially Miriam, is a testament to her dedication to professional development and the commitment of Mumford to developing school leaders.

Peter described the importance of a variety of school board trainings for in addition to conferences, concluding with “Boilerplate’s nice, but everyone’s different.” Other sources of training were separated somewhat based upon the needs and direction of the given school district. In remote or small districts, ESDs provide regional training. For Paul in Ampipe, the ESD has been a resource for information on new trends in education, such as the new teacher evaluation and the Common Core standards. Sarah also noted that the ESD provided training and support regarding budgeting.

Following Lighthouse training, directors in Greendale became increasingly cognizant of increasing student achievement. As part of a focus on identifying and nurturing programs that increased student achievement, these board members studied learning improvement initiatives like Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). The board studied programs such as GLAD and AVID, first through work sessions, then through site visits in other districts with full implementation. While many of the site visits were regional, some required cross-country travel. Once the decision was made to adopt the strategy, in collaboration with the staff and community, a board member accompanied the group to the national training conference. Matthew explained that this level of commitment helped to reinforce the importance of the initiative. Samson added that by having a director attend the trainings, the board could better evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Areas of and Format of Training Desired

Regarding the subject and delivery of training for school board members, each of the participants shared their perceptions and ideas. Regarding training desired, Sarah replied,

“None. Our superintendent does a lovely job arranging opportunities to learn.” Sarah aside, the remaining participants had concrete ideas for both the type of training and delivery format preferred.

Many of the participants reported wanting to learn more about the basics of district function, specifically budgets. Of special interest for the directors was the relationship between budgets and learning improvement programs. As an example shared by Miriam involved advocacy for an expensive yet essential program in the district. She shared that “The business manager says we are overstaffed each year,” and suggested cutting the AVID program during a board meeting. Miriam explained that how the program was retained due to the leadership of the board, sharing that the “board says no [because] kids come first.” In many of the conversations the issue of budgeting seemed to serve as code for not trusting the business manager or superintendent regarding the allocation of resources, one example of the ways that school board members perceived themselves as outsiders to the educational system.

Similarly many board members reported a desire for more training on the relationship and interactions between boards and the superintendent, as well as training on basic issues such as meeting decorum. Board members also expressed a desire receive training on increasing community involvement and community relations. Some of the districts in the study had a long history of short superintendent and board member tenure. While Daniel discussed the topic from the standpoint of group dynamics, for others the intentions were less clear. Whether this desire for such training was meant to improve trust and interactions as a means to increase tenure, or to give board members an upper hand during times of conflict with one another or the superintendent, was not evident. Pleasantville struggled with low graduation rates in its high school, leading the board to take action. During his interview, Daniel was asked why the board

didn't consider removing the superintendent, as many districts would during such a crisis. "The success of the district does not fall on one person's shoulders," Daniel noted, adding, "it's shortsighted to see the chance of success as greater with someone new in leadership."

School directors also communicated a strong desire to learn from board members in other districts. Daniel and Paul both spoke about the growth that came through discussions with directors from other districts. Board members identified WSSDA and the conferences provided by the group as an ideal venue for such collaborations. Peter echoed this sentiment, stating a desire for continued leadership training from WSSDA. In a similar fashion, several board members expressed a desire to learn more about the legislature and school law, areas covered by periodic WSSDA trainings. A few of the participants voiced an interest in book studies and other collaborative endeavors.

Members of the case study also sought out training on specific issues of critical importance to their districts. For Paul, the Common Core standards, along with the new state superintendent evaluation and strategic planning were issues that required more training. A stronger understanding of "why students fail and how school boards can make a difference [especially for] disadvantaged students," was paramount for Esther. In a similar way Samson expressed his desire to "learn about successful programs in districts with similar demographics." Miriam expressed a desire to affect student achievement through learning about "data, understanding the different forms, interventions, etc." Matthew indicated continued interest in learning about specific learning initiatives such as those that Greendale had looked at in the past (AVID, GLAD, etc.).

When the subject turned to format and venue for school board training, board members unanimously identified whole board, in-district training as a preference. Ideally, Peter described,

the trainer would “tailor [the] training to the school board members' skill, and the district achievement level.” Joseph and Matthew both stated a preference for face-to-face training, Joseph noting that ideally an “outside consultant/ trainer comes to the district.” Samson agreed, adding that, “The most effective [training] is when someone comes to the district, tailoring the individual questions to the district.” Jonah also concurred, noting that while “conferences, videos, and online are good, in-person, whole board [training] like Lighthouse is better.” Esther registered her preference in trainings that included the full board plus the “administration team and superintendent, to see issues from different perspectives; though it didn't work here in Hill Valley.”

Many districts in the state of Washington are isolated geographically, including some in this study. Districts can also become isolated due to their small size, the unique challenges that they face in relation to other districts, or by the demographics of the students that they serve. Miriam was able to break through this isolation by inviting collaboration with board members from nearby Pleasantville. She also found that webinars and online trainings from WSSDA and NSBA helped to limit this isolation.

School board members are adult learners, who, as mentioned in the literature review, learn much differently than the children and adolescents that the school system is geared towards educating (Merriam, 2001). According to Jonah, it is imperative that providers of school board training maintain a “focus on adult education.” According to Sarah, “Training needs to be 1) relevant, 2) concise, and 3) well done to validate time spent on it.” Paul revealed a preference for trainings to be “interactive if possible. Usually it’s only informational.” Joshua stated it more emphatically, “Slides, internet? NO! Most school board members are not the type [of people who] learn that way.”

The Impact of School Director Professional Development

Theme 5: School board members see great value in training, and use professional development to improve student outcomes in their districts. In this final section of results, the school board members were queried regarding the impact of training received on practice. In the first portion the board members were asked to reflect upon the impact of training by pointing to specific instances that were altered or shaped by professional development. In the second section the participants were asked to state the importance of training for school board members in their own words.

Actions Impacted by Training

The directors who shared their stories for this study provided several concrete examples of instances where training led to large-scale changes or initiatives within the board and district. A nuance that is easily lost in a narrative such as this are the small scale shifts in perception and attitude towards the role of school board member. For example, Joshua shared how the comment of a WSSDA trainer shifted his focus as a school board member: “It's your duty to ask why. That's always stuck with me. Why is that? Why is that important? [Your job is to] keep asking questions until you understand that it's their job to make you understand.” In a similar manner, Esther shared a quote regarding the power of a question that she picked up during WSSDA training: “How you ask it changes everything.”

Many board members felt that training had helped them to avoid becoming a distraction in their district. In her interview Sarah expressed how her board's experience with training in basic governance has “helped us stay out of the weeds . . . [it's] not our action to take. [Training] made us more mindful of governance, not operations.” She continued by stating the importance of leaving “the work to the people hired [to do it].” Paul reaffirmed these same sentiments,

sharing that training had helped his board “sift through gimmicks, stay out of trouble, and to promote movement towards [an equitable] outcome.”

Joseph shared a similar story on how he grew to understand his role as a school board member, as well as the limits. “We are not there to micromanage, but to give guidance and direction. We approve, we don't hire and fire.” He continued by sharing how training on board governance impacted the decision to expand or limit Greendale’s dual language program, saying that “[we] must reach our full potential as a board, [we did] better with the dual language experience. [We] took the time to research, get public input, [provided resources and] gave direction for the process.” Matthew was a part of the same process, and noted that the, “training helped to understand where [the school board’s] role is, the school board impact on student learning, [and to] clarify the line between micromanagement and a prudent board”

Training helped Jonah to define and to advocate the vision for the districts needs regarding a recent superintendent search. He noted an “idea of what I wanted, not sure I could have had this without training.” He went on to discuss how training on district achievement data, budgets, and his Leadership WSSDA training had helped him to identify the needs of the district, and to create a vision for the type of candidate who could best lead Shermer. Jonah then worked to share his vision with fellow board members during the search, which is ongoing. Paul echoed this belief in advocacy, formed by his own introductory board trainings, when he remarked, “If you are a school board member and you are not an advocate for what the school is doing, you're not a good school board member.”

In Hill Valley, the board had worked sporadically for several years on making better sense of student achievement data, with little to show for their efforts. Following WSSDA training on district scorecards and district dashboards, which represent student achievement data

in a form accessible to parents and the community, things began to change. Hill Valley subsequently completed work on a district dashboard, which is posted on the district web site and updated periodically. Esther explained that “WSSDA helped make sense of what data worked for Hill Valley. [This] would not have been possible without WSSDA.” She added that the process “led to important conversations among SB regarding important benchmarks along K-12 [the pathway from kindergarten to high school].” The work also propelled “discussion of 6th grade junior high readiness.” Esther described how the work led the board in Hill Valley to understand the link between low attendance in grade school and high school discipline. Overall, the process led Hill Valley “to finding meaning in the data,” according to Esther.

In Pleasantville board training has led to an increase in student learning. The graduation rate at Pleasantville High had plummeted well below fifty percent. Peter noted, “We knew that we had to find something.” At a NSBA conference, Peter, Daniel, and other board members saw a presentation on a program called Lighthouse that promised to help school boards increase student achievement. The board members contacted WSSDA, which had no plans to offer Lighthouse in Washington. Undeterred, the board worked on their own to bring in trainers from outside the state and implemented the program, which became a keystone for the learning improvement efforts and guided board decisions on other learning improvement efforts. Through the hard work of the board, superintendent, staff, and community, Pleasantville High School more than doubled the graduation rate in the district.

In much the same fashion, a member of the Greendale board attended a session at the WSSDA conference related to policy governance. Following the session the director shared the content with other members of the board and the decision to attend further training to discern whether or not to adopt the management philosophy. What is interesting about this decision

regarding training is that prior training is what shaped this decision. Samson shares that the Greendale board “would not have made the decision to go [towards policy governance] without [Lighthouse] training” received from WSSDA. He added that the training impacted the, “way that we think, why we do it that way, what we can and should be doing as a school board.” Once the decision was made to make the change, the board undertook four full day trainings and three additional half day trainings on the program. During this training the board developed district goals, which were also new in Greendale. The shift towards policy governance in Greendale has transformed board meetings. Samson described how “now the board runs meetings, [having] meaningful discussions with the superintendent there to answer questions.” Joseph noted that the “format clarifies school board and superintendent relationship, and defines gray areas.” Samson explained that policy governance “led to the board president preparing the agenda for first time in district . . . a big change.” Matthew concurred, adding that “the superintendent spends [his] time making sure the goals of the school board are accomplished.”

In Mumford the board had not established goals or a board protocol, which Miriam described as helping the board “agree on how to work as a team.” Training transformed the Mumford board from disengagement to high engagement. During Lighthouse training the board established goals for the first time. According to Miriam, “Training on understanding data led to increased participation on the board.” The Mumford board members used an accountability notebook, which Miriam described as containing board “goals, protocols, data, targets, and a calendar for reports by month.” More importantly, Miriam described how “Lighthouse led to a shift from superintendent-driven to school board driven” board meetings and board processes. The superintendent in Mumford is now required to provide a “work plan for the school year” and, according to Miriam, to assure that “each school board meeting agenda [includes] part of

the work plan embedded.” As an added benefit, Mumford was able to maintain the relationship with the Lighthouse trainer, who still provides regular professional development in the district.

The Value of School Board Training

In the final portion of the interview protocol, school board members were asked to comment on the importance of training. To elicit deep responses from the participants, the question was posed in the following manner: “Some people say that there is little value in professional development training for school board members. What would you say to them?” As written the question appeals to emotion to some degree and also runs counter to all of the previous questions in the interview protocol. The rationale for the placement of the question was pragmatic for should the question not sit well with participants, the majority of the data had already been collected. During the pilot study it became apparent that the question draws out both an initial emotional response as well as a longer reflection centering on the practice and experience of the individuals related to their training.

With their rich backgrounds in board training, it should come as no surprise that the participants voiced strong disagreement with the hypothetical individuals behind the final question. Participants voiced justifications for the importance of school board training in several areas. One argument expressed the importance to training to maintain effective board function. Another group pointed to the need for board members, lay people for the most part, to understand the complex nature of education. A third argument identified the philosophical importance for leaders to understand the system that they govern. Lastly, participants noted the benefit to relationships within the board and district leadership derived from training, as well as a strong need for local control in education governance.

Regarding the effectiveness of board operations and training, Daniel put it best: “How the board operates, the system operates.” Joseph recognized the importance of training for board members as he stated emphatically, “Without professional development your school board will not function properly and in doing so will be a disservice to your students.” Without training, the experience of board governance would be a “disaster or total failure,” Abraham asserted. School board training can also help the board come together as a group, he added, “If a school board member is out of line, the board has to come together to bring into line.”

Peter’s response to those who doubt the effectiveness of board training was that these individuals were “wrong.” He continued, “It’s based on what kind of SBM and district you want to have.” Jonah shared strong words for those who don’t place importance in board training, calling them “Idiots! You don’t know enough to know you don’t know enough.” He continued by identifying professional development as a necessity to avoid board micromanagement, and professed that “We’re not the boss. We’re here to ask questions. Kids are the boss, not school board members or the community.” Peter explained how such experiences help curb micromanagement, explaining how board training “helps school board members recognize the big picture” and to recognize that “other things are taken care of by the professionals that you hire.”

Beyond benefits to board function, participants noted their need to better understand the school system, an area foreign to most board members at the start of service. Echoing this outsider role, Sarah commented, “We are well-intentioned lay people overseeing the education of the youth of America. It is important to get the best training that we can.” Peter added that this lack of knowledge of school function often confuses the public perception of schools, noting, “Most school board members are not in education [for a career] . . . and most parents don’t

recognize the school district as a business,” which he argued it is. Esther’s experiences have helped her to understand the complex nature of school systems. She related the issue to student achievement: “People often ask, ‘is it the students or is it the teachers?’ Training helps one understand that it's not one or two things.”

Beyond general lack of knowledge of board function, directors also described the need to understand specific aspects of the system to make better informed decisions. Miriam noted how program decisions require specialized knowledge: “School board members need more training to help the district with transitions to Common Core, and to help support students to be successful.” Joshua remarked similarly, “We want school board members to make the best decisions possible;” adding that such “decisions have long-term ripple effects.” Sarah reinforced this point in her interview, noting that, “People who know far less than they think they know . . . Are making important decisions . . . The more training, the better.”

The members of the case study also identified specific ways in which training has been a benefit as a means of justifying continued professional development. Peter identified that “training provides opportunities for networking [and a] place to share good news,” regarding district achievement in Pleasantville. Paul also identified the “essential” nature of networking towards improving practice. Miriam noted that her training through WSSDA has helped her avoid making costly mistakes by helping her and the Mumford board to “understand when to ask for training.” That training empowers board members to ask questions was reinforced in a lighter tone by Esther, who remarked “Without training I would be less of a pain in the ass.”

Several of the board members interviewed cited the philosophical belief that a leader should have a clear understanding the organization. Matthew expressed, “If a school board isn't being trained, I don't see how it could be of any value at all,” adding that “a school board needs

to understand the system and the needs of the district to affect change.” Paul approached the issue in a similar manner, evoking the analogy of the big picture: “How can you understand the pieces unless you know how to put them together?”

Esther has experienced disappointment in her career, noting that training in Hill Valley has not led to the type of reforms she envisioned. “There is some truth as sometimes you're training short-timers.” Nevertheless she embraced the value of training, even when there is board turnover: “The risk is in having a leader who doesn't know anything or takes a long time to figure it out, [or] who is short sighted. It's a small price to pay.”

Samson conveyed perhaps the strongest attitude regarding professional development. As a health care professional, he values training in his career and as a school board member. Regarding those who do not value board training, he stated, “[I] absolutely, 100% disagree. [It's the] same as my own profession, even more so. Nothing changes faster than education.” He went on to refer derisively to those who do not value board training as “rubber stampers.”

Training improves both board function as well as the relationships that exist between board members and the board and superintendent, according to the participants. Daniel's comment above regarding board members speaking without authority stands as a clear example for how training, or lack thereof, affects relationships in the district. For Esther, the benefit of training is in building relationships and promoting longevity. She described the benefit, stating that training, “makes sure that you don't chase away good staff . . . create positive relationships with employees [and] builds the school system.” For Jonah, training has helped his relationship with the superintendent, as he has learned that “everything should go through the superintendent, [through] the chain of command.” An important consideration in training is the question of who provides the training for the board. Peter discussed this during his interview: “The assumption is

that the superintendent is responsible for school board training. In my opinion, the school board members and WSSDA are."

Summary

In this section the data from the participant interviews has been presented, organized conceptually to tell the story of the each participant through the shared experience of the case. By examining the motivation for service, dynamics of board membership, orientation, and professional development of board members, a clearer understanding of training and development of board members has emerged. Additionally, the examination of the experiences and anecdotes provided by participants regarding the ways that board training has influenced actions, attitudes, and the personal beliefs regarding the purpose and role of board membership, demonstrates the profound impact of professional development on these individuals. In the discussion and conclusion, the findings of the study will be examined through the lens of the purpose and research questions. In addition, implications for practice, policy and future research will be discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This study sought to address the problems of limited research on school boards as well as a limited understanding of the orientation and training of board members. Through the use of a qualitative research design the participants were given the vehicle to share a broad range of experiences centered on their own induction and professional development. The open ended nature of the interview protocol also allowed the board members to share experiences, opinions and beliefs regarding a wide range of board-related activities.

The study had a threefold purpose. The first was to examine school board members' perceptions of how a professional development program influenced their school board-related activities. The second was to identify their perceived professional development needs as school board members. The third purpose was to determine the perceptions board members held regarding the quality and content of professional development received. This inquiry led to a strong understanding of the efficacy and relevance of training for board members, as well as needs for future training.

The central research question for the study was: Do school board members perceive a link between professional development and their ability to impact student achievement?

Under this overarching question the following sub-questions were examined:

- 1) What are the relationships, if any, between board members' perceptions of professional development and school district size?
- 2) What are the relationships, if any, between school board member gender and their perceptions in these areas?

- 3) What are the relationships, if any, between board members' perceptions and diversity (either within the board, student population, or local community)?
- 4) What differences, if any, are reflected in terms of professional development needs or gaps in training exist between districts that participated in Lighthouse training with high, moderate, and low levels of fidelity?

The results of these questions, as well as the implications for practice, policy, and suggestions for further research related to these, are presented in the findings section below.

The literature review in chapter two provided a strong background on the prior research conducted which related to this study. This chapter included information on school board demographics, the background of school board members, and the place boards hold in American democracy. The motivation for service, as well as the powers and responsibilities of boards and board directors was examined. The dynamics of boards, their internal and external relationships, and their interactions with the superintendent were then discussed. Previous studies on board member professional development and training and related issues rounded out the literature review.

A careful review of the research methods was provided in chapter three. Through the presentation of qualitative methodology, case study, and grounded theory, the philosophical underpinnings of the study were established. A discussion of the Lighthouse Project and selection of the research participants followed. Lastly the protocols for data collection, establishment of trustworthiness, analysis of the research results, ethical concerns and limitations were presented in this section.

The fourth chapter of the study presented the findings of the study. Through careful examination of the data and synthesis of the interview responses, a series of themes emerged

from the inquiry. These areas touched upon by the participants included motivation for service, dynamics and challenges of membership, perceptions regarding initial training and orientation, and continuing training. Board members explored their own history of professional development in addition to as the impact of their training on past actions and the value of future training.

The discussion and conclusion contained in the fifth chapter will address the findings related to the research questions, as well as additional findings which emerged during the interviews and data analysis. The implications presented include suggestions for continued practice and training of boards and individual members, plus implications for policy. Finally the limits of the study and implications for future research in the area of school board orientation and professional development are analyzed.

Findings

The analysis of results revealed a number of salient themes. (1) A strong relationship between board training and student achievement in the districts included in the study; (2) variations in perceptions between board members from different sized districts; (3) differences in board member perceptions in relation to gender; (4) variation in board member perception in relationship to diversity; (5) perceptual differences among participants related to level of district participation in Lighthouse, as assessed by WSSDA; (6) the multiplicative nature of training; (7) the responsibility of school board training; and (8) an examination of the definition of school board training.

The Impact of Board Training on Student Achievement

The essential question of this study was how, if at all, board professional development might impact student learning. The fundamental concept behind Lighthouse was that districts which outperformed their peers were shown to have higher functioning boards than

corresponding boards. Lighthouse training was tailored to identify and nurture the traits of the boards of high-achieving districts, identified by Bartusek (2000) as: “1) shared leadership; 2) continuous improvement and shared decision making; 3) ability to create and sustain initiatives; 4) supportive workplace for staff; 5) staff development; 6) support for school sites through data and information; and 7) community involvement” (p. 2). These outlier districts also demonstrated the belief in the board to improve student achievement and worked together to focus on student achievement (Rice et al., 2001).

A recognizable and valuable outcome for a well-trained board is that it resists micromanagement through clear understanding of board and superintendent roles, focusing on policy formation and governance. Each of the board members in the study expressed how the training received in their districts had helped prevent micromanagement. A second general positive outcome from board training reported by the participants was board cohesion and unanimity. Positive interactions with the superintendent, labor unions, and community, were pointed to as resulting from professional development. Each of these can be considered as indirectly impacting student achievement, for it stands to reason that the converse, board and community discourse and strife, ought to lead to the type of distractions and misuse of time and resources that lend themselves to a decrease in student achievement.

When looking more specifically at ways that these school boards used training to positively impact student achievement, perhaps the greatest example was in Pleasantville. A district in crisis, with a high school graduation rate below 50%, the board took a series of steps, based on training received, to correct the situation, more than doubling the graduation rate over the next few years. Although a host of programs were used in the effort to address this problem, each came about as the result of the board and superintendent working as a team to identify

strategies that might work in Pleasantville, then applying their knowledge to build consensus and assess the efficacy of each intervention to affect increases in student achievement.

In a similar way, the boards in Greendale, Mumford, and Hill Valley faced challenges in the area of student achievement. Each applied lessons from professional development to provide additional programs for students and to closely examine student data. The board in Hill Valley embraced the use of data dashboards to track student achievement, while Greendale and Mumford adopted programs such as AVID to increase student engagement and achievement. In each of these cases the board relied upon prior training to assess and adjust learning improvement programs. By contrast the board in Shermer used the professional development they had received to determine that a learning intervention in their community had not lived up to its potential. As a result the board removed the superintendent, applying lessons from training towards identifying qualities needed in a successor.

Based on the findings of this study, the availability of professional development for boards did not, in and of itself, directly increase student achievement. At a fundamental level, the boards that sought out professional development attuned to increasing student achievement were very successful in working together to find ways to do so. Their efforts were collaborative and focused on solutions that would meet the unique challenges of their own communities. These findings suggest a tentative grounded theory that in the case of boards that focus on increasing student achievement, professional development has a positive impact on student achievement.

Board Member Perceptions and District Size

Eight school boards participated in this study. Each of the districts provides instruction to students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade. All of the districts in the study have a

single comprehensive high school into which the other school(s) in the district feed. All of the districts in the study had some experience working with WSSDA on the Lighthouse trainings. The districts studied included (with student enrollment numbers): Pleasantville (6500), Pottersville (4800), Shermer (4500), Greendale (3800), Hill Valley (2700), Ampipe (1000), Mumford (900), and Aldera (400). For the purposes of this section, the assessment of how engaged the individuals and districts were regarding professional development was based on the following: their posture and opinion of the reasons for professional development, the type of training received and desired, the breadth and depth of training, board unity and function, and the interpretation of responses provided during the interview process.

Pleasantville, the largest district in the study, portrayed both the most extensive use of professional development as well as the most favorable views on board training and its impact on student achievement. The story in Greendale was very similar, as the boards in both districts reported receiving an abundance of training, including several trainings geared more to teachers and administrators that the boards attended to gain perspective on educational initiatives.

The remainder of the districts with over 2000 students, or first-class districts, had mixed results and opinions on training. The board in Pottersville had only limited exposure to Lighthouse; the participant from the district reported that the board attended only limited training beyond state and regional conferences. Board members from Shermer had attended more training modules than those in Pottersville, though these fell far below the level and scope of Greendale and Pleasantville, the perception being that most of the training had been based on individual efficacy. This lack of focus or concern with whole board function was evidenced by the self-reported 3-2 voting split that has predominated in Shermer. Similarly Hill Valley featured a participant who has attended a large variety of state and national trainings and

conferences, though the individual went on to share that her zeal for professional development had not been shared or taken root in the board culture.

The second-class districts in the study have student enrollments below 2000 students. The school board member in Ampipe portrayed a board that is very eager to engage in training, though the type of training centered upon technical skills such as the new evaluation system, Common Core curriculum, suggesting a tendency to focus less on policy governance and more on the day-to-day management of the district. The Mumford board seemed to embrace training, though the participant reported difficulties with engagement and board longevity. Her responses communicated a willingness to seek out new training, and an understanding that board training is key component towards increasing student achievement. The board member from Aldera seemed indifferent to training, in most forms, in most of her responses. She expressed a level of trust and contentment regarding training directed by the superintendent that is unique to the study and most research on the topic.

An initial review of the data would suggest that larger districts had more favorable and progressive views on professional development than the smaller districts in the study. However, more careful examination of the types of training received, and motivations for this training, while taking into account the size of and resources available in each district, would suggest a different conclusion. While two of the largest districts were clearly at the head of the class regarding board training, Pottersville had little to show in terms of meaningful board training, while training in Shermer and Hill Valley brought mixed results. Similarly two of the small districts had only marginal exposure to training while the third, Mumford, showed a solid commitment to training for board members.

In terms of the districts, the boards that sought training and applied it with the greatest dedication were Greendale, Pleasantville, and Mumford. These districts also have large migrant populations made up almost exclusively of Hispanic families. It stands to reason that the leaders in these districts, faced with challenges in student achievement, looked toward systematic solutions for the inequity in achievement and opportunity that existed in their districts. Their higher levels of achievement as boards, especially when considering the limited funds and isolation of Mumford based on size, had far more to do with their commitment as a board and district to the training, and their commitment to system-wide change, than size. The notion that larger boards receive more training and have more sophisticated views on professional development is not supported by the findings of this study.

Gender and Board Member Perceptions

Nine males and three females participated in this study. Each shared the rewards, challenges, and motivation for their service on the school board. Two board members had unique experiences and perceptions in relationship to the rest of the group. Jonah, a board member on the minority side of a 3-2 split board, expressed a sense of alienation and lack of engagement with his board. Sarah expressed an overall lack of motivation for training at the scale in which the other participants had experienced professional development. For the purposes of this section, each will be treated as an outlier and not considered in the analysis of the question of differences in board members and perceptions of professional development along gender lines.

The male board members in the study expressed a sense of teamwork and shared purpose, reminiscent of the sentiment of a sports team. To an individual, each of the eight remaining males in the study discussed the importance of working as a team, building consensus, and

collaborating with one another and with other boards to improve board function. Males also stated a desire to change the system, many to the point of controlling the board, district, or the superintendent in some fashion. Each of the board members was strongly positive about his service, leaving the researcher with the impression that each genuinely enjoys serving on the board.

The two remaining female board members in the study expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction and frustration. For Miriam, her frustration was centered on a lack of engagement in her board and community. Her efforts to increase longevity on the board, to engage others in the same level of training, and to encourage members had yielded only mixed results. Esther faced similar struggles in engaging colleagues in training. Her frustration was focused primarily upon a “good old boy network” or status quo mentality within her board. Her inability to inspire other board members to receive training and to embrace the new direction of the board left her feeling disenfranchised, leading her to focus her reform efforts more toward her work as a trainer with WSSDA.

In each example the males, with the exception of Jonah, tended to approach their work on the board with the positionality of an insider. To a much greater extent, the females, not including Sarah, described greater resistance on key issues and suggestions for policy which belied an outsider status. It is possible that this was due to the fact that Miriam and Esther described a more specific vision for change of the board and district at the outset of their service. Their agenda for immediate change may have placed them on a collision course with the status quo of the boards they joined.

By contrast the male board members moved more slowly, finding their way on the board and gathering information before suggesting big changes. In Joshua’s case, his opposition to the

superintendent began slowly, while Abraham, the most experienced board member, slowly gathered information before suggesting any changes. It is likely that at least some of this dichotomy is the result of power issues and gender. However it is equally likely that the female directors in this case were simply more ambitious and expeditious, and faced resistance and separation from the rest of the board as the result of their advocacy for changes and the discomfort it caused the status quo members of the old guard. Whatever the fundamental causes of differences between female and male directors regarding their place in the board, these issues were real and detectable through the interview narrative, and worthy of greater examination in future studies.

Board Member Perceptions and Diversity

As noted earlier, nationally four in five school board members are Caucasian (Hess & Meeks, 2011). The participants in this research included three persons of color. Each of these individuals represented a sizable constituency in their communities, yet brought diversity often lacking from the boards on which they served. Of special interest in this study was the positionality of these individuals on board training, related to diversity.

Abraham, a Native American, spoke with great candor on the issue of diversity as it related to his community. He addressed the need for the Pottersville School District to do more to engage Native American students, who make up over ten percent of the district's enrollment. Abraham added that the district should take into account what he believed to be a unique learning style among Native American students. However, he did not describe any specific programs that the board or district had undertaken to promote learning within this subset of the district, nor did he note any specific advocacy for this group which moved into practice.

Miriam and Daniel, both Hispanic, were very open in relating their experiences to increase student achievement through programs they had advocated and nurtured in Mumford and Pleasantville, respectively. Unlike Abraham, neither indicated any clear advocacy for Hispanic students, as they addressed the need to increase achievement in their districts as a whole. It is difficult to determine with great certainty whether these perceptual differences were due to the communities each lived in, or personal beliefs. Mumford and Pleasantville are only a few miles apart, and both serve student bodies that are over 90% Hispanic. It is also possible that when a majority of the students in a district come from diverse backgrounds, the discussion shifts away from advocacy for a single group. In terms of their perceptions regarding professional development, all three of these individuals viewed board training in a favorable light, whereas two of the three had a strong track record of putting training into practice toward increasing student achievement.

Regarding the diversity which existed within the school district and the community, the perceptions of board members were somewhat more predictable. Worthy of note is the large Native American population in Pottersville, and a growing number of Eastern European students who are English Language Learners in Shermer. With these exceptions, the majority of students in each district in the study were identified as Hispanic or White. For the purposes of this analysis, the degree of diversity was measured by percentage of students of color. Following this, the districts, from least diverse to most were: Aldera, Shermer, Pottersville, Ampipe, Hill Valley, Greendale, Pleasantville, and Mumford.

The three districts with the greatest student diversity, Greendale, Pleasantville, and Mumford, also exemplified the greatest commitment to board professional development as an avenue to increase student achievement. The board in Hill Valley struggled through internal

issues, yet had embraced data dashboards and had begun in earnest to examine student data as a board nevertheless. Ampipe, the last remaining district in the study whose student body reflected a majority of students of color, sought out training, though on technical issues. The district had not yet made a clear connection between training and student achievement. The three remaining districts had mixed perceptions and results regarding professional development. Board members interviewed from Shermer had received considerably more training than directors from Ampipe and Aldera, and recognized the importance of board training. Nevertheless, none of the three districts had put into place extensive learning plans or made strides in effectively impacting student achievement through their board training.

Many school districts in eastern Washington experienced demographic shifts over the past twenty years, primarily in the form of increased enrollment of Hispanic students. Many of these students were English Language Learners. The five most diverse districts in the study have large agricultural workforces. Each of the districts has faced declining student achievement, and adopted a proactive approach to increasing these numbers. It stands to reason that districts with the greatest need to act have done so, and embraced board training as essential to providing opportunities for students. In terms of the perceptions of board members regarding professional development, the diversity of the student body was highly predictive of greater interest and utilization of board training, while the diversity of individual members was not.

Level of Participation in Lighthouse

Prior to conducting interviews, near the inception of this study, the researcher obtained information from WSSDA regarding the level of participation of each of the districts in the state in Lighthouse training. The information was not considered in any way prior to the data analysis. However, this inside information provided the opportunity to examine how board

member perceptions of professional development varied in relation to the district's commitment level to Lighthouse. Phil Gore, formerly of WSSDA, coordinated the Lighthouse training from 2008-10. He offered his own estimate of the degree of fidelity to which districts participated in this WSSDA-led training. The list, which ranked districts from greatest to least in terms of participation, was the following: Pleasantville, Mumford, Aldera, Shermer, Greendale, Ampipe, Pottersville, and Hill Valley (P. Gore, personal communication, September 18, 2012).

Examination of the data from this study shows clearly that Pleasantville and Mumford were two of the districts most firmly committed to professional development. Both of these districts exhibited the mindset that board training was essential for promoting student achievement. The participants from Shermer related a strong commitment to professional development despite the political upheaval that had engulfed the district. Board members from Greendale described how Lighthouse was a catalyst for their current efforts to increase student achievement in the district. Generally speaking, four of the five districts that were most active in Lighthouse demonstrated a firm belief that board development leads directly to improved district function and to increased student achievement.

The board in Aldera presented unique qualities and a perspective on training not seen anywhere else in this study. The strong participation of the board in Lighthouse, described by WSSDA, seemed incongruent with the manner in which the board in Aldera abruptly ended their affiliation with the training. The reasoning behind the move away from Lighthouse was what Sarah described as a sense that the training had taken too much time already, and "we got as much as we were going to." The concept of training that was too costly in terms of time or that a finite amount of training was adequate for a board were both distinctly Aldera sentiments.

Interestingly, Lighthouse served as stimulus for Aldera to step back from professional development, focusing training on technical issues, provided on an as-needed basis.

Two of the remaining districts in the study, Ampipe and Pottersville, had only a handful of trainings on Lighthouse through WSSDA. The board in Ampipe was presented as more focused on technical issues. The board in Pottersville seemed focused on the process of functioning as a board, and making the board and district function. Neither of these districts presented a measurable level of commitment to, nor an understanding of, the fashions in which a board might act as an impetus to improve student achievement.

The final district, Hill Valley, received a single WSSDA-led Lighthouse training. The struggle described by Esther, to motivate a deeply entrenched board to shift its focus towards student achievement, was met with a great deal of initial resistance. Unlike Miriam, the board in Esther's case did not turn over quickly, and her story was became one of long-term advocacy which led to some important achievements, though it would not be appropriate to point directly to the single Lighthouse training as causative.

Clearly the districts investigated showed a varying commitment to Lighthouse. For the most part, the districts that participated in Lighthouse at higher levels tended to show the greatest commitment to board training. It would be easy to assume that these boards had a simple preference for training, and sought out training, including Lighthouse, at higher levels than their counterparts. This simplistic approach ignores how the board members from Greendale, Mumford, Pleasantville, and Shermer described the Lighthouse training as the impetus for seeking out further training, and how the training shifted the board from a sole focus on governance to one that included student achievement. Clearly the majority of districts that

demonstrated high engagement in Lighthouse presented a strong commitment to board professional development as well as greater interest in student achievement.

Implications for Practice

This study reinforces the critical nature of school board training. Pragmatically speaking, school superintendents and others who rely upon high functioning and well-adjusted boards, should encourage a breadth of relevant and engaging professional development for school boards. First, as evidenced by this study, school boards that demonstrated higher levels of effectiveness also demonstrated a shift away from management or micromanagement, showing a preference for policy formation and governance. Second, this study demonstrated that boards with a focus on student growth, that received training, were able to affect increases student achievement. Third, boards in the study that received training tended to function more effectively, and with less acrimony. Therefore the primary implication for practice is that school board training should be promoted and fostered by those interested in school district function and student achievement.

Training Begets Training

One of the most interesting findings from this study came from the remarkable transformation of the board in Greendale. Over the ten years of Joseph's tenure, Greendale's board witnessed a remarkable transformation. According to Joseph, "In the last five years, our board has taken ten times as much training as the previous twenty years combined." Interviews with each participant from the district revealed a quantum leap from a board described by Samson as "rubber stampers" to one that had shifted to policy governance, was highly engaged, and set an example for the staff and community by attending many of the same trainings that were required of teachers and administrators as part of district learning initiatives.

In a similar manner the story played out over and over in conversations with board members across the case study. An initial training at a national conference spurred Pleasantville board members to investigate and ultimately adopt Lighthouse training a full year ahead of WSSDA and the rest of the state. Board members as individuals had similar experiences, becoming members of the WSSDA Leadership Cadre, in essence becoming trainers for other school board members. Miriam's story captured the essence of the impact of training, showing how someone with little experience, through her initial experiences, began to seek out more and more training, including WSSDA and NSBA webinars during her lunch break at work.

Each of the board members in the study espoused the critical importance of professional development. With a single exception each of the board members told similar stories of how initial training in one area led to additional training as well as new trainings in other areas. Simply put, the board members who experienced training recognized the benefit of this training. This compelled them to discover new content areas, formats, and providers for additional training to augment their practice as board members. In essence, training led to more training for the vast majority of the board members in this study.

Who Trains School Boards?

Another interesting question that emerged from this study regards the role of different groups in training school boards. WSSDA emerged from the interview data as the most frequent and reliable provider of outside training, with the superintendent and district office staff providing most of the in-house training. Many participants identified the need for additional sources for their training. Several identified ESDs as a source of that training. Multiple participants noted the need for the ESDs to assume a greater role, while Joseph suggested that each ESD provide staff to train new board members and lead board development.

School boards often look to the superintendent to act as an overall director of board training, especially for new member orientation. Participants voiced a need for superintendents to possess and develop skills in directing and providing board training. At the same time many board members in this study and in other research have voiced a need for greater autonomy regarding professional development (Tallerico, 1993). This, coupled with the mistrust of the superintendent and other district staff mentioned by some participants, implied that superintendents must walk a fine line, directing board member professional development while at the same time giving board members freedom in self-selecting the content for training.

What Constitutes Board Training?

Nearly all of the participants spoke highly of board retreats. Most included these events at or near the top of the list of most effective forms of professional development. Some participants intimated that these informal meetings, usually held off-site, lacked the structure of formal meetings and sometimes a clear agenda as well. In some instances it seemed that these retreats were more social gatherings where little happened beyond social activities amongst board members. This begs the question: is any time that the school board members spend together as a group considered, in some manner, professional development?

One might view standard board operations as on-the-job training, the lowest form of professional development. Similarly, whole board training led by a WSSDA Cadre facilitator might be considered high level professional development. The time that a board spends together, neither focused on the tasks at hand, nor upon professional development, held great value for many of the participants. The implication is that whole board activities, for the purposes of building team and consensus, should rightly be considered as part of the professional development spectrum when training boards.

Implications for Policy

Who advocates for school board member professional development and training at the regional and state level? This is the most pressing policy issue surrounding professional development for school boards. While superintendents and board members themselves advocate at the local level, WSSDA is charged with representing board members and selecting the course for training statewide. The important question is: Who decides what type of training is available, and do school board members have a say in this? WSSDA carries out member surveys on various topics, and should begin to or continue to include board members in professional development selection and design. In addition, WSSDA and other state agencies, as well as NSBA, should follow the lead of IASB in the research of effective boards, as well as the development of programs which identify and nurture the traits critical for successful board function.

Local Control is Essential

That notion that school board training is essential for not only board function but for the health of the district and for student success has been a central feature of this study. Accepting that this is the case, one wonders what training should be required for school boards, and who should mandate and monitor the receipt of said training. Recently policymakers in Washington State have suggested a need for increased training for public officials. This movement led to the passage of Engrossed Senate Bill 5964, legislation which mandates Open Public Meetings Act training for elected officials (Office of the Attorney General, 2014).

Many of the participants bristled at what they perceived as the state legislature and federal government encroachment in the governance of local school boards. Paul noted that “local control is critical, especially in this time of increased state and federal mandates.”

Matthew succinctly stated, “Top-down education is not good for our community or our society.” During the interview with Esther, the researcher, in an effort to clarify a question, made a comment about the legislature directing training for board members. This comment elicited a strong response: “I would not want the legislature to set that because the legislature has no business telling school directors what to do.” Esther continued, “School directors are the last remaining vestige of local control and there’s not much left. So I don’t think the legislature has any business legislating it.”

Who Speaks for School Boards?

Clearly the main advocacy group for school boards in Washington is WSSDA. The state board association provides the majority of training for board members in this study and across the state, and also provides lobbying in Olympia for issues of interest to boards. At the same time, the function and purpose of school boards remains unclear for the majority of the population. In partisan politics the candidates campaign for office, clearly stating their purposes for seeking office. Since many board elections are uncontested, and even those that are contested are usually nonpartisan, the motivation of individual board members, as well as the purpose behind boards themselves, often remains shrouded.

At a fundamental level, most branches of local and state government have a designated spokesperson, such as the house speaker, mayor, or spokesman for the governor. Though the superintendent is referred to as the secretary of the board, in practice the chief executive does not usually speak for the board. At the local and state level, a glaring need exists for school boards to provide greater information for the function and scope of boards, rationale behind decisions, and more broadly, vision and philosophy of the board. Though board agendas and minutes are public records, the proceedings of board meetings rarely make the news, and only in times of

upheaval. Boards and school policy makers must find ways to advance board platforms publicly, and in a manner accessible to lay people.

Implications for Future Research

Clearly the greatest limitation of the study was the limited number of participants. The intention of this work from inception was to relate the experiences and lived stories of school board members regarding their development and professional development. To achieve this level of narrative required a small group and a qualitative approach. Applying the results of this study deductively in an effort to make broad generalizations about all board members regarding professional development would not be prudent. To do so would require more focused qualitative or quantitative research regarding specific facets of the findings presented. At the same time the research provided a strong understanding of the professional development for school board members which might serve as the foundation for further studies.

An interesting area for future research would be to examine the perceptions of western Washington Lighthouse participants. Seven additional districts took part in the training. Four of these districts are much larger than any in the study, and all of the seven are less reliant upon agriculture for their economies, making the extension of the research beyond eastern Washington a worthy endeavor. While the focus of this work was not to prove or disprove the efficacy of the training, a comparison between Lighthouse and non-Lighthouse districts, might shed light both upon differences in perceptions between the districts as well as other pathways that high-functioning boards followed outside the Lighthouse paradigm.

Given the opportunity to learn more about school boards, it would be especially interesting to take an iterative approach to the study by digging deeper in three key areas. First, conduct research aimed at determining what type of trainings most strongly motivated drive to

receive more training, as evidenced by the most successful boards in this study. Second, the examination of what catalytic event or experience led to the whole-group shift in mindset towards effective board function in districts that did not participate in Lighthouse. Third, in the minds of future participants, what do they perceive as the future of school board training.

By using the results of this study as a starting point, a new interview protocol might be devised to focus on key questions that emerged from this study. Of critical importance is continued work on the tentative grounded theory suggested by this study: that board professional development, when carried out with a focus on increasing student achievement, has a positive impact on student achievement.

Conclusion

This chapter restated the problem and research questions forming the foundation of this inquiry. In addition, the findings related to the impact of school boards on student achievement was presented, as well as differences in participant perceptions based upon gender, diversity, district size, and level of participation in Lighthouse training. Finally, implications for practice, policy, and future research were addressed as well.

Through this research school board training presents itself as an overlooked key to school improvement. The intended result of this was the articulation of the critical need for well-thought out and thorough orientation for new school board members, as well as systematic and relevant professional development for incumbent directors. An additional hope is that this inquiry deepens the discussion of how the success of a school system is defined, especially in this era of accountability.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol for School Board Members

- 1) Tell me why you decided to become a school board member.
- 2) What preparation did you receive prior to becoming a member of the school board? Who provided this training? Have you served on other public boards?
- 3) Has this training changed your approach to serving as a school board member? If so, please explain.
- 4) Please give an example of an action that you have taken (decision, policy, etc.) that was impacted by training you have received. Can you think of any other examples?
- 5) Please give examples of how you collaborate with other members of the school board on district-related matters. Has the training that you received changed these interactions? Please explain.
- 6) What are the greatest challenges that you face as a school board member, and why is each a challenge?
- 7) In what areas would you most like to receive professional development training, and why?
- 8) What delivery format would be the most efficient for you to receive training, and why?
- 9) What school board training have you received since joining the board of directors? Who provided this training?
- 10) If you had not received the training you discussed previously, how would your practice as a school board member be different?
- 11) In your opinion, what should be done to prepare and develop school board members' skills and knowledge?
- 12) Please describe your vision of an ideal sequence of training for school board members.
- 13) Some people say that there is little value in professional development training for school board members. What would you say to them?

APPENDIX B

Reflective Journal Template

Format (Underline One or More):

(Reflection, Pre-Write, Pre-Planning, Post Interview, Other)

- **What are my key learnings today? What did I accomplish?**

- **What choices am I making in this phase of the research project?**

- **What actions do I need to take (gaps in knowledge, challenges to face, etc.)?**

- **Reflection: How do I feel right now (what did I like/dislike, find easy/hard, etc.)?**

APPENDIX C

Participant Interview Consent Form

April 2014

Name
Title (School Board Member)
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear Director _____ ,

My name is Bervil Marsh. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Educational Leadership, Sports Studies and Educational/Counseling Psychology at Washington State University (WSU). I am conducting research on the professional development of school boards in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ed.D. in Educational Administration at WSU. The focus of my study will be on directors in districts that participated in the Lighthouse Project through the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA). Semi-structured interviews will be the method of data collection for this qualitative, bounded case study.

The study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Washington State University. I am requesting your participation in an interview. The interview should last about 45-60 minutes. Notes will be prepared from the interview (using pseudonyms for actual names and school districts) and will be destroyed after writing the dissertation required for my doctoral study. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from it at any time. There is not any anticipated risk of embarrassment or harm as a result of your participation in the interview. Your identity will remain confidential. You will not be identified, nor will your comments be connected to you in the report of this study. You may freely withdraw from participation in this qualitative study at any time. Your participation is greatly appreciated. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have about the project at any time.

I can be reached at 509.307.2825 (cell) or 509.397.4368 (work). You may also contact the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Forrest W. Parkay, at 509.335.9570 or fwparkay@wsu.edu. If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant you may contact the WSU Institutional Review Board at 509.335.9661.

_____	_____
Participant's Name	Date
_____	_____
Bervil Marsh	Date

