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Linda Garcia Mora

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**BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP
IN A SELECTED URBAN DISTRICT SERVING HIGH-POVERTY,
MAJORITY-MINORITY STUDENT POPULATION**

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by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work with love, honor, and pride to my late father, Conrado H. Garcia and my mother, Elvira G. Garcia, who had limited opportunity for formal schooling, yet greatly valued the power of education. Ultimately, they are the most knowledgeable, informed, cultured, and wise people I know.

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BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP
IN A SELECTED URBAN DISTRICT SERVING HIGH-POVERTY,
MAJORITY-MINORITY STUDENT POPULATION

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The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on academic achievement in one Texas school district that serves high-poverty, majority-minority students. Previous studies identified successful school systems with school boards and superintendents who functioned as a true leadership team. However, previous research focused on school board/superintendent relationship and politics, not student achievement. This case study examined the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship and how the dynamics of that relationship influenced the academic achievement of its high-poverty students who were also the majority-minority.

The methodology was an intrinsic and qualitative case study which used the constructive perspective and the researcher as the primary instrument for gathering data (Stake, 1988; Patton, 2002). Qualitative data was collected using a loosely structured focus group, individual interviews, and an examination of district documents and records.

The research suggests that the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship tend to be centered on politics and political power. Politics and political power are impacted by the changing majority/minority composition of the school board, which may lead to instability in the superintendent's relationship with the board. The research also corroborates previous studies in which effective communication, trust, collaboration, support, and a constant focus on student achievement are the essential building blocks of an effective school board/superintendent relationship. Further, the research supports many other studies which found that the campus principal's focus on instruction was the catalyst for improved student achievement. Even though educators believe and support the notion that collaborative leadership between the school board and the superintendent is key to the attainment of high academic achievement, this study found there was no apparent effect of the school board/superintendent relationship on the academic achievement of its students.

This research has practical implications which may be useful to superintendents and school boards as they face the daily challenges and responsibilities of managing and improving academic achievement.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

Generally, educators believe and support the notion that collaborative leadership between local school boards and superintendents is essential for high academic achievement. It is also understood that district leadership is the responsibility of the school board and the superintendent who, together, make up the governance team. The effectiveness of the working relationship between the school board and the superintendent is an urgent issue for all school districts. Positive relationships are even more important to urban school districts as they face issues specific to urban environments.

Mirel (1993) notes that today's urban schools mirror the society in which they operate. He adds that academic underachievement is particularly high among urban students, especially those in minority groups. Mirel's work underscores the notion that urban districts which serve high-poverty majority-minority students face even greater challenges.

How superintendents and school boards deal with the explicit challenges of urban school districts merits some examination. Studies have revealed that there are distinct differences between the opinions of urban school board members and the opinions of the urban public regarding school performance

(NSBF, 1999). Urban school boards have a favorable view of school performance; however, it's a view that does not necessarily fit the public's perception. Two of the four areas identified for improvement in urban schools were meeting academic expectations of the community, and school performance.

Previous studies have identified successful school systems with school boards and superintendents that function as true leadership team. The studies reported in a 1994 joint publication by the National School Board Association (NASB) and the American Association of School Administration (AASA) state that leadership must clarify the organization's goals and purposes through an effective communication system, building trust among all constituents through collaboration and support, and constantly keeping the focus on improved student achievement. One of the most important steps in improving student achievement is the organization's focus on goals. Internal communication and collaboration will lead to a sense of shared purpose among all members of the organization.

A recent governance report (Goodman & Zimmerman, AASA, 2000) states that without collaborative leadership, districts are unlikely to raise student achievement. However, previous research has focused on school board/superintendent relationships and politics, not student achievement (Blumberg, 1985). The school board and superintendent team, if freed from political distractions, can work together effectively to promote high achievement for all students.

Statement of Problem

Prior research has focused on other areas such as school-level leadership, curriculum and assessment, as well as the quality of teachers and their effects on student achievement (Koschoreck, 2001, Fullan, 1982; Darling-Hammond, 1994). Studies have also focused on relationships between school boards and superintendents. However, there is a substantial gap in data regarding the dynamics of a school board/superintendent relationship and, in particular, how those dynamics influence student achievement. The influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on student achievement in a district has not been investigated in depth and merits further study.

In their study of the presumed knowledge of educational administrators, Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001) found that superintendents spend more time strengthening the role and/or image of the superintendent rather than on his or her specific job responsibilities in the school system. Nevertheless, sustaining and building board relationships are the main activities that seem to consume the majority of a superintendent's time.

Johnson (1996) conducted a study to determine a superintendent's approach to leadership. The conclusions show three categories of leadership that appear to shape the role of today's superintendent: educational, political, and managerial. Educational leadership concerns the district's vision and values. Managerial leadership focuses on supervision, support, and development of the

organizational structure. Finally, political leadership is concerned with external relationships and internal operational activities.

Bacharach and Lawler (1998) define organizational relationships as “efforts of individuals or groups in organizations to mobilize support for, or opposition to, organizational strategies, policies or practices in which they have a stake or interest” (p.69). In an older study, the concept of organizational relationships refers to the exercise of power by individuals and groups to achieve the goals and the activities used to expand the power or the extent of its effect (Pfeffer, 1981). In his study of political favoritism, Blasé (1988) found implications that teachers were quite vulnerable to the use of power and political action by school officials. Simply stated, organizational relationships are the way people get things done. Therefore, the relationship between board members and superintendents should be examined not only in the way it affects the organization, but how the relationship influences day-to-day operations.

Purpose of the Study

While collaboration is a desirable feature, not all school board/superintendent relationships fall into the category of collaborative leadership and teamwork. There are school districts that attain high academic achievement without strong board/superintendent relationships and teamwork. These districts deserve researcher attention. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on the

academic achievement in one Texas school district that serves high-poverty, majority-minority students.

Research Questions

1. What are the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as perceived by the superintendent and the board members?
2. How do district principals perceive the effects of the school board/superintendent relationship on their performance as they seek to enhance student achievement?
3. How do the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship influence the academic achievement of its students?

Methodology

This research was a qualitative case study that used the researcher as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data. A case study is not a methodological choice, but the choice of an object to be studied. This was an intrinsic case study which was meant to draw attention to the question of what can be learned from this single case (Stake, 1995). The object selected for this study was a district that historically experienced problematic school board/superintendent relationships; yet, the district managed to achieve a recognized rating by the Texas Accountability System (TEA, 2001).

This case study employed qualitative analysis of data drawn primarily from semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample, observations, and documents for analysis. The data collection and field work strategies described by Patton (2002) were followed. To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, triangulation procedures were used in the gathering of data and in procedural challenges to explanations. Data analysis consisted of gathering all the information collected, constructing the case record, and writing a narrative (Patton, 2002). Grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the data as answers to questions and theories developed (Schwandt, 1997).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used as defined below.

Academic achievement: Those measures used in the school rating system outlined in the Accountability Manual, TEA, 2001. The measures include aggregated district level data of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, the accountability subset that includes grades 3-8 and 10 in math, reading, and writing.

District leadership: The professional staff members at the central office who have a direct reporting relationship to the superintendent. These may include deputy or associate superintendent positions.

Dynamics: "...the psychological aspect or conduct of an interpersonal relationships", as defined in Webster's II, p.412, Riverside Publishing, 1984.

Governance team: The superintendent and the seven board members who have the responsibility for managing the district's affairs.

School Board/superintendent Relationship: The public and formal interactions between and among the members of the board of trustees and the superintendent during formal board meetings.

Superintendent: The person occupying the position of the superintendent whether on a permanent or interim basis.

Significance of the Study

Building a cohesive and effective governance team in a school district is a tricky process. Any given school board election can turn a cohesive governance team upside down, literally overnight. The results of this research could be significant for school board members and superintendents given the challenges that face school boards and superintendents on a daily basis. This study may also result in the identification of procedures and practices that are genuine improvements to urban education, and may serve as information and inspiration for those in leadership positions who want to expand their ability to improve education, and in particular, urban education. The identification of effective management policies and procedures might serve as a guide for other districts. The specific academic policies and procedures this district implemented to achieve recognized status may be useful to other districts who

serve high-poverty majority-minority student populations. Overall, what is learned from this single case can be of benefit to other districts.

Delimitations

This study focused on how the school board/superintendent relationship influenced student achievement in a single school district. This research was not a longitudinal study, although data was reviewed over a seven-year period. This study included data gathered from elementary and middle schools. High schools were not included due to insufficient achievement data from those grade levels. This study did not consider other factors that are more commonly associated with student achievement, such as teacher shortage and certification, professional development, and community influences. Given the focus of this study, the perceptions of central office personnel who reported directly to the superintendent were not included.

Limitations

A case study's limitation, by its very nature, is its lack of generalization. Thus, the findings of this study may be of particular value to urban districts and possibly districts serving majority-minority student populations.

Assumptions

One assumption was that district leadership and campus principals would continue to draw upon established policies and procedures and not allow the dynamics of the relationship between the school board and superintendent to affect their job. While collaboration is a desirable feature, not all school board/superintendent relationships fall into the category of teamwork and leadership. This study determined the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on academic achievement in one urban Texas school district that served high-poverty, majority minority students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Educators believe that collaborative leadership between local school boards and the superintendent is a cornerstone for the attainment of student achievement. The effectiveness of the working relationship between the school board and the superintendent is an urgent issue for all school districts in general and for urban school districts in particular. Although studies have focused on the politics of school board/superintendent relationships, there is a need to study the relationship in terms of promoting student achievement.

Historical Background of School Board/Superintendent Relations

In the colonial and revolutionary periods, there were no superintendents; only boards of education and teachers. School boards were elected as representatives of the people. The schools' leadership was designed to reflect the will of the electorate. Although school boards represented their constituents and their specific needs, they were also considered agents of the state by virtue of being selected via the election process. The school board that originated in New England provided the foundation and pattern for others to follow (IEL, 1986).

As school populations increased, school boards found themselves overburdened with the management of the day-to-day operations of a school. To

help relieve the burden, school boards created the positions of principal and superintendent, who also helped with the supervision of teachers (Cuban, 1976). This may have been the beginning of school board/superintendent relationships. Some tensions between school boards and superintendents have been destructive, while others have been synergistic (IEL, 2001).

Reformers during this early time period thought the politics affecting school boards was how the schools were governed. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, school trustees were elected by wards, and even then they were thought to be “...too vulnerable to political chicanery and boondoggling” (Cuban, 1976). Some school boards recruited prospective board members. For example, when a vacant position existed on a board, prospective members were recruited by the existing board. This recruitment was “...to a large extent to ensure stability, to guarantee consistency and to avoid the election of candidates drastically out of harmony with the prevailing philosophy of the board” (Zeigler, Kehoe, & Reisman, 1985). This method of creating stability can be interpreted as a way of controlling board membership and political maneuvering.

Political maneuvering and the politics of education began during the “...social turbulence in the 1960s, the massive infusions of Federal funding during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the shift from more liberal to neo-conservative values, and in the 1980s, the shift of goals from equality to excellence, inviting state reforms and increased power in the states” (Marshall

and Scribner, 1991). The very nature of how boards are elected to serve by the general population makes the role of the board a political one.

Many school board members are elected to represent geographic areas within their school districts. Therein lays the difficulty of balancing the interests of the community from which they were elected with the needs of the entire district. The transmogrification of a trustee to a politician seems to be a factor negatively affecting the performance of too many school board members (IEL, 2001).

Even in the early days, governance problems were thought to be interfering in the superintendent's business. Because of this perception, it is imperative to understand the board's role in the political arena and in the improvement of student performance. In order to understand the expectations of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, one must have some basic knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of each position.

The School Board's Role

The differences between the school board and superintendent roles are outlined in several publications. In their issue about change, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1994) speaks to the board's role in educational improvement. The report states that for the most part, school boards have spent too much of their time on crisis management and not enough on strategic planning and policy development. The reason, they state, is due to the

increasing influence of special interest groups on the school board and superintendent. However, in an older textbook, Reeves (1954) summarized that it is not undemocratic for a school board to modify educational policy if it conflicts with community desires. Reeves said the superintendent should guide the school board in professional matters. For this reason, the division of functions between the school board and superintendent is not only customary in the control and management of school systems, but is in harmony with sound principles of control and management for other public enterprises. Reeves wrote: “Boards of various public and private enterprises employ a president or a superintendent as their executive officer, give him considerable freedom to manage the enterprise subject to the restrictions of their adopted policies, and hold him responsible for results. A school board consisting of laymen in education should do likewise” (p.262).

In a publication by the American Association of School Administrators, Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) outline the responsibilities of the school board as:

- Selecting, working with, and evaluating the superintendent.
- Serving as advocates for all children, teachers, and other staff by adopting “kids first” goals, policies, and budget.
- Maintaining fiscal responsibility and fiscal autonomy, with the authority to appropriate local funds necessary to support the board-approved budget.
- Delegating to the superintendent the day-to-day administration of the school district, including student discipline and all personnel matters.
- Evaluating their own leadership, governance, and teamwork for children.

The National School Board Association (2001) in *Team Leadership for Student Achievement* outlines the following overview as the board's role:

- Embracing both privately and publicly a united belief that all children can learn and achieve at higher levels.
- Ensuring involvement of a broad base of stakeholders in creating the vision for the community's school and supporting the vision both publicly and through board decisions.
- Committing to training so that all board members have a better understanding of both the importance and the operations of the eight key areas critical to improving student achievement.
- Approving comprehensive plans developed with the superintendent's leadership to move the students in the district to higher achievement levels.
- Adopting policies needed to support improvement initiative.
- Allocating funding for, and alignment of, the resources needed to advance student achievement.
- Monitoring progress toward district goals and supporting the superintendent in efforts to make changes.
- Ensuring clear, concise and user-friendly communications about all facets of the district's emphasis on higher student achievement.
- Serving as the advocate for building community support for student achievement as a priority with a variety of groups, including public officials, parents, media, and business and community leaders.

The two lists of roles and/or responsibilities for school board members differ because each is written from the perspective of each organization's membership. One list is put forward by the membership of the school board association and the other by the membership of the school administrators' association. The concerns regarding roles and responsibilities of board members and superintendents may stem from their differing perspectives. In theory, the roles and responsibilities may all be clear, depending on which list is being considered. In practice, the line between policy-making and approval process and the executive and administrative functions are difficult to determine.

In an attempt to make the line between policy-making and administrative functions more clear, John Carver (2000) outlines a governance approach that calls for an arrangement under which the superintendent gets full authority to run the district. However, the superintendent's actions must be aligned with board policy as well as a set of limitations which the board elects to place on the superintendent. Under this approach, the board treats the superintendent as its only employee and holds the superintendent accountable for the progress of the district. Superintendents rise or fall according to how well the district meets goals set by the school board. However, the question still remains: who has the responsibility for ensuring the improvement of schools?

When American voters were asked who is most responsible for the success and failure of individual pupils, most responded students and teachers. But the perception of those same respondents was that school boards have the most power to change the public schools (Deily, 2002). However, other research has shown that policy considerations facing school boards are influenced by, and are responsive to, internal and external factors with individual board members vying for informal leadership (Blumberg, 1985). Studies of school boards have found that board members often represent special interest or pressure groups. This tends to create divisiveness among board members, and in the administration of the district (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

In his study to identify administrative skills that school boards consider critical in the hiring of superintendents, Pringle found that one of the four

required skill sets was managing the relationship with the board. He states in the conclusions, “The domain of building a positive relationship with the school board was shown repeatedly in this study to be the skill area most critical to success in both selection and contract renewal” (p. 215, Pringle, 1989). Although this study focused on skills during the hiring process, it also points to the importance of positive relationships with school boards and the ability to sustain those relationships.

The Superintendent’s Role

If indeed the boards have the power to change the public schools, then what is the role of the superintendent? Traditionally, the superintendent’s role is to provide leadership to the entire district. Goodman and Zimmerman (2000, p.

11) clarify and outline the responsibilities of the superintendent as:

- Serving as chief executive office to the board of education, including recommending all policies and the annual budget.
- Supporting the board of education by providing good information for decision making.
- Providing continuous leadership to ensure that the board policies and responsibilities of the board/superintendent team are addressed each day.
- Overseeing the educational program.
- Taking responsibility for all personnel matters (hiring, assigning, evaluating, developing, firing, etc.).
- Developing and administering the budget.
- Managing business and financial matters, bids and contracts (up to the minimum established by state law or local board policies) facilities, transportation, etc.
- Developing and supporting district-wide team of teachers and other staff working to improve teaching and learning, and supporting local school councils of staff, parents, and students.

- Taking care of day-to-day management and administrative tasks, including student discipline and personnel issues.

The National School Board Association (2001, p. 16) in *Team Leadership for Student Achievement* outlines the following overview as the superintendent's role:

- Leading strategic planning initiatives, collaborative efforts with the community change initiatives, and training for the board on various aspects of improving student achievement.
- Modeling, through words and actions, support for district initiatives related to raising student achievement and expecting the same behavior from staff and board.
- Implementing board decisions, such as those related to policies, budget, communications, and personnel.
- Developing plans in all areas related to student achievement, including budget, staffing, alignment of resources, assessment, staff development, and communication.
- Informing the board, staff, and community of recommendations, actions, progress, adjustments, and challenges related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, standards, and other components of student achievement.
- Recommending actions to the board based on best practices, data, staff and community input, board policy, available resources, and compliance with current law.
- Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of programs, staff, budget, standards, policy communications, and other appropriate areas.
- Advocating to all stakeholders the importance of student achievement as the community's number one priority.
- Ensuring that change initiatives on raising student achievement are occurring at all levels throughout the district.
- Analyzing the need for new initiatives and changes to existing initiatives based on data from program evaluations and student assessments.

Whether or not the superintendent is one of the key persons involved in improving student performance in the district remains an open question. However, as the title of the publication suggests, every responsibility listed for the superintendent focuses on team leadership for student achievement. The two

lists of roles and responsibilities for superintendents differ because each list is written from the perspective of each organization's membership, one being the membership of the school board association and the other consisting of the membership of the school administrators' association. Again, therein may lie part of the concern regarding roles and responsibilities of school board members and superintendents.

In investigating types of leadership, Johnson (1996) conducted a study to determine superintendents' approaches to leadership. The conclusion shows three categories of leadership that appear to shape the role of today's superintendent: educational, political, and managerial. Educational leadership concerns the district's vision and the values. Managerial leadership focuses on supervision, support, and development of the organizational structure. Finally, political leadership is concerned with external relationships and internal activities.

Political leadership is the successful management of external relationships and internal activities. Among the leadership skills that successful superintendents displayed were: strengthening the role or image of the superintendent, sharing the mission and goals of the district, upholding personnel standards and improving performance, supporting board decisions, and maintaining board unity (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). The previously mentioned leadership skills are categorized as external relationships and internal activities. The Nestor-Baker Hoy study supports the hypothesis that building and

sustaining board relations is important, but not a primary function of the superintendent's role.

Most superintendents agree that their primary obligation to their school boards is that of professional advisor. Additionally, superintendents and school boards view the superintendency as a position of political counsel, educational reform, and educational advisor (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Research conducted on superintendents has found a variety of personal and political factors that contribute to the success or failure of their relationship with the school boards. To be a successful political, reformatory and educational advisor, it is essential that the superintendent possess interpersonal skills such as communication, empathy, trust, persuasiveness, and role clarity (Peterson & Short, 2001).

If a primary role of the superintendent is to provide political leadership as well as build and sustain school board relations, Owen & Ovando (2000) contend that an understanding and control of conflict is essential. They state:

A fight or conflict is difficult to contain because it can become a chain reaction, spreading from the few actual combatants to the much larger audience. The excitement of the conflict communicates itself to the crowd; if a fight breaks out; watch the crowd, because they will play a decisive role. This is the basic pattern of all politics. (p. 52)

Blumberg (1985) notes that school superintendence is actually a political venture. There seem to be three central facets to a superintendent's political life: the politics of local decision-making, the politics of being a non-elected executive, and the politics of survival.

Political skills are essential in the politics of survival. The American Association of School Administrator's publication, *Challenges for School Leaders* (1988), cites communication and political skills as instrumental in effecting educational change and building the necessary support for change. They go on to say that "the best leaders are outstanding communicators" (AASA, 1988).

The Governance Team

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) notes the absence of clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities between the superintendent and the school board, so the superintendent frequently finds him or herself with a school board who micromanages administrative matters. Individual members may intervene inappropriately in school matters ranging from curriculum design to student transfers. However, reciprocal roles and responsibilities appear not to be as important as some believe. Confusion about roles and responsibilities may be a symptom of a problem rather than the cause (Canada, 1989).

A study to ascertain the perceived current practice of school board/superintendent relationships found that more information is needed to help school boards and superintendents clarify and understand their respective duties and responsibilities (Villarreal, M. L. 1992). The data also indicated there was a strong tendency for the school board to allow themselves to be guided by the superintendent in the role responsibilities; therefore, the superintendent plays an

important role in guiding the school board. Overall, school board members who agree with the superintendent are more likely to adhere to professional standards than those who disagree with the superintendent. This is strong evidence that the quality of the relationship affects the overall effectiveness of a school district. However, Canada's (1989) findings did not confirm that disillusionment with the school board/superintendent relationship resulted in a lack of understanding of their roles and responsibilities. He ascertains that the situation is more symbolic of the existence of problems rather than the cause. He found that the personality and behavior of the superintendent noted by both the superintendent and the school board president were critical factors in dissolving the relationship. He summarized that the souring of a school board/superintendent relationship was due to the deterioration of trust in that relationship.

The work of Alanis (1989) in that same year supports Canada's findings. Alanis confirmed lack of trust was the root cause of conflict between the school board and the superintendent. The purpose of his study was to identify the sources of conflict between and among the school board of trustees and the superintendent. Both the superintendent and the school board see themselves working as a team; however, only the school board member's perceived decision making to be a shared responsibility.

Rather than calling for increased teamwork and shared responsibility, a report from the American Association of School Administrators (2000) calls for changing state laws to limit school boards to policy making and long-term

planning, leaving the day-to-day operations of the district to the superintendent. Although the report states what must be done to develop and strengthen local school board/superintendent relationships to attain high achievement for every student, there are some studies that tie school board/superintendent relationships to improved student achievement. However, the report, insists that without strong collaborative leadership, districts are unlikely to raise student achievement.

Leithwood & Steinback (1995), in a continuing effort to gain education improvement through administrative practices, turned their attention to the superintendent's role. But they are quick to point out that their study revealed that superintendents are more concerned with the process of problem solving than with the actual details of the solutions. In other words (according to this limited study), if the process is right, superintendents believe the outcome will be fine.

Organizations, be they business or education, rely on three organizational communication processes to make a collective effort possible: leadership, climate and teamwork (Cushman & King, 1995). In the public school arena, leadership and teamwork are combined to become the governance team, commonly made up of the school board and the superintendent.

Superintendents indicate that school boards expect them to be educational leaders and general managers (AASA, 2000), yet district-wide leadership and the governance of the district is the school board's and the superintendent's job. The

essential ingredients of teamwork are trust, respect, shared values and knowledge, as well as an understanding of the roles of each (Henderson, et al, 2001). District delineation of the roles and the responsibilities between the school board and the superintendent, clearly stated expectations, continuous sharing of information, and open, honest communication among all parties nurture a positive relationship between school board members and their respective superintendents (SEDL, 1994).

While district superintendents can often find themselves in a vague and uncomfortable harmony of opposing forces, a critical factor in their ability to be successful is their relationship with the school board (Carter and Cunningham, 1997). A significant number of superintendents believe they are not being evaluated on their execution of their jobs as stated in their job descriptions, but rather on the quality of their interpersonal relationships with board members (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

The attributes of social influence theory and social style are perceived as essential to the superintendent's ability to develop and maintain a cooperative working relationship with school board members (Peterson and Short, 2001). Social influence theory sees this behavior as one individual attempting to persuade another. The general attributes of social attractiveness and credibility have been identified as powerful and critical elements of an effective communicator. Credibility has two components; trustworthiness and competence (Cooper & Croyle, 1984).

Blumberg (1985) found that the most critical attribute in operating a successful school system is the relationship between the superintendent and the school board of education. Positive relationships at the governance team level are essential for an organization to be productive. The school board and the superintendent need to project an image of competence and cohesiveness in order to get school business done efficiently, effectively and promptly (Peterson & Short, 2001). To actually get the job done efficiently, effectively, and promptly, an organization must be able to operate productively in a highly volatile environment.

It may be important to take a lesson from the perspective of the business sector by looking at the value chain theory. The value chain theory can be easily applied to public school administration as well as the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. The value chain theory allows the researcher to:

Focus on the internal relationships which influence an organization's reorientation to external forces. Value chain theory involves the examination of an organization's functional units and process linkages between functions and to evaluate its current and desired level of performance (Cushman and King, 1995).

The relationship between district governance and management has changed little in the last century, regardless of the impact of great shifts in demographics, the increasing size of districts, and increased instructional responsibilities. One of the shortcomings of the reform movements has been that

the relationships of superintendents and school board members have been virtually ignored (IEL, 1992).

Dimensions of a School Board/Superintendent Relationship

Empirical findings suggest that a relational dynamic of the superintendent and board president is based on respect and trust, and is essential for effective school governance and progress toward educational improvement (Peterson & Short, 2001). A collaborative relationship between the school board and the superintendent was recommended in a study conducted by the Institute for Educational Leadership (1992). The theme of collaborative relationships within the context of developing a governance team to improve student achievement was also recommended in a study conducted by Educational Research Service (Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman, 1997).

The Political Dimension

A lesson in political relationships between school boards and superintendents may be learned from previous studies of communication and conflict. Behavior in real social conflict depends on an array of complex individual, relational, and cultural factors (Nicotera, Rodriguez, Hall & Jackson, 1995). The researchers assert that individuals more often rely on intuition, hunches, and gut feelings rather than on rationality or well-reasoned and carefully weighed alternatives. If true, implications for understanding the

ongoing political relationships between school boards and superintendents are imperative.

The politics of school board/superintendent relationships is as much about what issues are not discussed as those which are (Bacharach and Lawler, 1998). In the political arena of school board/superintendent relationships, this adage continues to be true. Hoyle (1986) states that “micropolitics are more likely to be oriented to interests rather than goals, coalitions rather than departments, influence rather than authority, strategies rather than procedures.” (p. 129).

Within the political context, the superintendent’s environment is an ever-shifting set of conflicting interests that he/she must try to reconcile. The political jargon of superintendents working in this arena includes: compromise, coalition, mediation, bargaining, and agreement (Cuban, 1976). Even teachers can get caught up in the political machinations of school boards and superintendents.

In his exploratory study of teachers’ perceptions of politics, Blasé (1988) questioned teachers about the role of the school board and the issue of favoritism. He found that teachers thought the politics of favoritism usually occurred in hiring and retention decisions affecting professional and nonprofessional school personnel. Teachers also felt that school board members practiced preferential treatment for reasons primarily related to reelection; status and power are two other prominent factors.

School boards are seen as having the most power to change the public schools. When asked who is the most responsible for ensuring quality public schools, nearly half of the respondents said school boards were (Deily, 2002). Additionally, power and politics play into decisions in every arena of reform, showing that power and political dynamics are present in all relationships (Datnow, 2000).

The Managerial Dimension

The presence and/or absence of leadership in business organizations have also been topics of study. The effects of leadership in business can be applied to school organizations as well. “Management and leadership have two distinct, fundamental purposes. Management is about coping with complexity. Leadership is about coping with change.” (Bencivenga, 2002, p. 36). Endeman (1993) agrees, stating that there is a clear difference between effective managers and leaders and non-effective ones. Traditional leaders have been seen as effective managers. Effective leaders are seen as those who focus on the future and are adept at managing change.

The Educational Dimension

The characteristics of effective school systems include a focus on teaching and learning, a commitment to ongoing instructional improvement, accountability for learning and improvement, and consistency among directives

and policies (Leithwood and Musella, 1991). Much of the existing research focuses on the individual school level.

Datnow and Castellano (2001) led a study of the principal's influence on the issues of leadership in school reform and on student achievement. They investigated the knowledge of leadership in school improvement by looking at the issues that arise for principals when externally developed reform models were implemented in their schools. There are many documented success stories about improved student achievement; however, this particular study points to the existing void in the research regarding superintendent and school board influence on student achievement.

A study conducted by the Dana Center (2000) found that several themes emerged from their research of four successful school districts. Their findings indicated a strong correlation between a school district's leadership response to the state's view of accountability of achievement and quality of the district's transformation. This study showed that in response to the new state accountability system, local leaders developed their district into one in which all students achieved at high levels. Local leaders were defined as not only superintendents, but also district-level educators, school board members, and representatives from the community. These districts knew professional staff had to be treated in a supportive way, and the pursuit of educational equity and excellence became the focus of each day.

School districts are supposed to deliver a single service -- education. Yet much of the conflict in the schools concerns ancillary responsibilities other than providing an education. In school governance, planning the curriculum (what students study) is far less controversial than poor service delivery, labor disputes, and budget reductions (Zeigler, et al., 1985). Curriculum, student achievement and the influence of the governance team are areas that merit additional research; however, limited research has been conducted on the effects of district leadership on academic outcomes, specifically with low-income children and children of color (Koschoreck, 2001). The purpose of public education has been shaped throughout history by the challenges presented by new waves of students who are mostly low-income, minority, and immigrant. The educational responses to these new students have been changes to the direction of education as well as curriculum, but these changes have not been successful. The new demographics of increasing poverty, continued immigrations and even larger numbers of minority students continue to impact all public school entities, particularly in urban school districts. In the 94th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, schools explain the expanding mismatch between the schools and the new students by blaming:

- Students who do poorly.
- Dysfunctional families.
- Insufficiently differentiated schools.
- Differing cultural backgrounds in the local school culture.

- The schools' reflection of the inequalities of the larger capitalist society.

The Yearbook further states that attention to pedagogy is the missing element. External pressure came to bear from the business community, which called for “workers with higher-order thinking skills, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, greater independence and initiative” (p. 25 Yearbook). This external pressure, coupled with internal motivation, can lead to change. The internal motivation was giving more responsibility to teachers. “The efforts of restructuring return greater control to the school level; again, with the argument that teachers and local administrators are closer to students, so the problem of teaching and learning must be in their control” (p.25 Yearbook).

However, “...there have been virtually no examples of entire school districts that have been successful educating children of color or children from low-income homes for any periods of time” (Skrla and Scheurich, 2001, p. 238). There is an even larger void between the influence of the school board and superintendent relationship on student achievement.

In their issue about change, SEDL (1994) reports on a three-year study conducted in Illinois that examined school board meeting minutes to look for motions related to school reform. Only four percent of all motions were related to school reform, which may or may not be related to improved student performance. The report states: “...while the research literature does not contain many examples of board actions for reform, educational publications do contain

fairly abundant writings and exhortations about the role the board should have” (p. 2).

The school board’s role in improving student education, and ultimately student performance (as compared to the actual role they *do* play), provides a strong rationale for the need for further research. Previous studies have focused on the politics of school board/superintendent relationships and the characteristics of successful relationships (SEDL, 1994; AASA, 2000; AASA, 1988). There are limited studies investigating the influence of school board/superintendent relationships specifically on student achievement. The need for research on school board/superintendent relationships as it influences student achievement is based on the modest information available. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to look at the school board/superintendent relationship in a selected urban school district that serves high-poverty, majority-minority students.

From the outset, school boards and superintendents have had different agendas and different views of their respective roles in the management of a school district. History shows that school boards created the superintendent position. In theory, the roles and responsibilities of both the board and the superintendent are clear. In practice, the roles and responsibilities are sometimes blurred and difficult to determine.

The educational, political, and managerial facets of the job shape the superintendent’s role. Although the board’s responsibilities should be strategic

planning and policy development, their role is influenced by the politics of special-interest groups. The roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and school board influence how these two groups interact with each other and how they work as a team to improve their respective school districts. How school board/superintendent relationships specifically affect the leadership of the district and the academic achievement of the district's students is an area that merits further research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the procedures used to study the school board/superintendent relationship in a recognized urban school district serving high-poverty, majority-minority student population and how that relationship influences student achievement. Overall, the urban public is much more critical of public schools, and sees greater potential, for improvement in students' academic achievement (NSBF, 1999).

This single case study was selected because it is critical to the understanding of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, and how that relationship influences student achievement. Specifically, the purpose of this study is to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on the academic achievement of students in one urban Texas school district that serves high-poverty, majority-minority students.

School board/superintendent relationships have long been a subject of study; however, some limited studies have been conducted to investigate how the relationship between the school board and the superintendent influences student achievement, especially in an urban district. This study attempted to provide answers.

The research questions included:

1. What are the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as perceived by the superintendent and the school board members?
2. How do district principals perceive the effects of the school board/superintendent relationship on their performance as they seek to enhance student achievement?
3. How do the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship influence the academic achievement of their students?

Research Design

This research is a qualitative case study, using the researcher as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data. Because the researcher has had direct experience in the field of study, the researcher's tacit theory and formal theory help bring the research questions forward (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). In qualitative research, bias and prejudice are defined negatively and as inhibiting genuine knowledge. However, the researcher understands that bias and prejudice cannot be eliminated; they are an integral part of being and knowing (Schwandt, 1997).

The case study as an overall strategy entails "immersion in the setting and rests on both the researchers' and the participants' world views" (Marshall and

Rossman, 1999, p. 61). A case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. The purpose of a case study is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about a particular case. This will be an intrinsic case study and is meant to draw attention to the question of what can be learned from this single case and because one wants a better understanding of this particular case (Stake, 1988).

Qualitative data are not so much about behaviors as about actions. Well-collected qualitative data are collected in close proximity to the particular unit of study, rich and holistic, and collected over a sustained period of time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The strength of qualitative research is that the researcher can delve in depth into the organization's complexities and processes, the informal and unstructured linkages and processes in organizations and provide insight into real, as opposed to stated, organizational goals (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Qualitative inquiry in the tradition of constructivism will be employed. The constructive perspective will assist the researcher and answer the central questions as per Patton (2002, p. 132):

- How have the people in this setting constructed reality?
- What are their reported perception, "truths," explanations, beliefs, and worldview?
- What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact?

The strength of using the case method in this particular study is to capture the complexities of a single case (Patton, 2002). The researcher argues that one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that

individuals attribute to those actions—“their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds; the researcher, therefore, needs to understand the deeper perspectives captured through face to face interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 57).

The limitation of the case study is the inability to generalize. Problems may arise when the urge to generalize or create theory is so strong that the researcher’s attention is drawn away from the focus of the initial study. Another limitation is the role of the researcher as the primary instrument in a qualitative case study; observations and analysis are filtered through the researcher’s perceptions and values (Merriam, 1988). The goal is to understand the influence of bias and reactivity, not to eliminate them. In a qualitative study, the researcher should be aware of the researcher’s possible bias and reactions.

Description of Sample

The school district selected for this study is an urban district that serves a high-poverty, majority-minority student population. The selection criteria included a district recognized by the Texas Accountability System (TEA, 2001). For the purpose of this study, “high poverty” is defined as at least 70 percent of the student population meeting the definition of economically disadvantaged as per the federal guidelines to qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. The school district also serves a majority-minority student population. At least 85 percent of the student population must be classified as minority. Data

available from the 1993-94 to the 1999-2000 school-years was analyzed and presented as the basis for the selection of the district.

Within the school district selected for this study, a purposeful sampling was used to select participants to be interviewed. Participants asked to be interviewed included board members, superintendents, and school principals. Each group selected for interviews met the specific criteria.

Board members who were asked to be interviewed for the study included those members who served at least two consecutive terms during the eight years of the study. There were thirteen different individuals who served as board members during from 1993 through 2001. Seven people who met the established criteria were officially asked to participate in the study. Two accepted and were scheduled for individual interviews.

Persons who served in the position of superintendent or interim superintendent during the time period of the study were invited to be interviewed. There were four persons who occupied the superintendent's position either on a permanent or interim basis. Of the four who were invited, two accepted and are included in the study.

Persons who were middle school or elementary school principals during the 1993-94 through the 2000-2001 school years were asked to participate in the study. From the staffing rosters provided by the district, there were 33 principals who had been principals during the time span of the study. The 33 principals who met the established criteria were asked to participate in interviews; 14

agreed and were interviewed. The 14 principals interviewed represented 42 percent of the total number of principals who met the eligibility criteria set forth in this study.

Procedures and Data Collection

To gather the data, the researcher sought and obtained permission from the selected district. Because this study focused on the school board/superintendent relationship, a formal written request was made to the school district's superintendent. The request was processed through the superintendent's office by the Office of Research and Development. Once approved, a letter was written to prospective interviewees outlining the purpose of the study, a request for an interview, and suggestions for possible times and locations to conduct the interviews.

The data collection and field work strategies described by Patton (2002) were followed. Qualitative data was collected using loosely structured focus groups and individual interviews. Loosely structured focus groups were used to interview two to three principals at a time. "Loosely structured" means the researcher began with a set of standard questions. Additional questions may have arisen depending on the conversation and comments from the focus group participants. The strength of using focus group interviews is that the participants had an opportunity to hear each other's responses. The structure provided opportunities for participants to expand and elaborate on their original

comments. Participants did not have to agree with each other. The purpose was to retrieve high-quality data in a setting where the interviewees consider their personal views in light of the views of others.

The purpose of all the interviews was to gain detailed descriptions that captured direct statements about someone's persona (Patton, 2002). The data collection was guided by posing analytical questions and making comparisons. Attention was given to processes of the organization studied, which was the school district. The researcher was aware of, and attentive to, the dynamics of the system and the situation.

School board members who had served at least two consecutive terms on the board from 1993 through 2000 were interviewed. Two school board members were interviewed individually. Interview questions for board members included:

1. What was/is your purpose for serving on the school board?
2. How would you characterize your relationship with the superintendent?
3. What are your personal expectations of the superintendent?
4. How do you communicate with the superintendent?
5. How does, or did, the superintendent communicate with you?
6. What is your perception of how you influence the academic achievement of students?

District-level data gathering included interviews with the superintendent. Interviews were conducted separately with two people who served in the position of superintendent either on a permanent or interim basis during the period from 1993 through 2000. Interviews were conducted via telephone, since both superintendents were residing outside of the state. Interview questions for the superintendent included:

1. How would you characterize your relationship with the board?
2. How do, or did, you communicate with the board?
3. How do, or did, the board members communicate with you?
4. Describe the process used to communicate with your immediate subordinates.

School-level data gathering included interviewing 14 principals who were in principal positions at any school within the district since September 1993. Principal interviews were conducted in small focus groups of two or three principals. The focus groups were set up to include, when possible and as schedules allowed, at least one elementary and one middle school level principal. Interview questions for the principals included:

1. How do you perceive the school board/superintendent relationship as you go about improving student achievement on your school?
2. How are decisions made at the board level communicated to you?
3. What is the communication mechanism employed by the superintendent and the principals?

4. What is your perception of the relationship between the board and the superintendent?

An examination of the official minutes of the board of trustees' meeting was conducted to gain further insight into the focus of the board meetings and into the dynamics between the school board and the superintendent during formal board meetings. Documents and records included school board minutes and selected media reports, as well as district policies. Documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned from them, but are also an impetus for inquiries that can be pursued after direct observations and interviewing. Records and documents provided a behind the scenes look at the processes and how they came into being (Patton, 2002). The review of documents provides insight into the values and beliefs of the participants in the setting. Documents such as agendas, policies, and media reports are extremely useful in developing an understanding of the district and relationship studies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The documents are also useful in corroborating information gathered from observations and interviews, which makes them more trustworthy. They may also raise additional questions and lead to new directions for additional questions and interviews (Glesne, 1999). However, the greatest strength of document review and analysis is that it is "unobtrusive and nonreactive: It can be conducted without disturbing the setting in any way" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 117).

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of gathering together all the information, constructing the case record, and writing a narrative (Patton, 2002). Grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the data as answers to questions and theories were developed (Schwandt, 1997). Procedures for making comparisons and asking questions were conducted and adjusted based on evolving theoretical concepts. Theoretical sampling provided opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings. Theoretical sampling was cumulative, and required the sampling and analysis to be done sequentially (Strauss and Cobin, 1998).

To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation and to ensure validity, triangulation procedures were used in the gathering of data and in procedural challenges to explanations (Stake, 1988). Triangulation is the practice of relying on multiple methods of data collection that contributes to the trustworthiness of the data (Glesne, 1999). The purpose of triangulation is not just checking whether inferences are valid, but discovering which inferences are valid (Schwandt, 1997).

Triangulation was categorized by data source, data type, and method. The data sources included persons interviewed, times, and places. Data types included tape recordings of interviews. Methods included observations and interview documents. The purpose was to select triangulation sources that have different biases and different strengths, so that they complement each other. The researcher's aim was to find collaboration among the findings, so that theories

may be developed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The standard procedure of asking questions and making comparisons remained the essential analytic processes. The researcher is “purposefully looking at action and interaction, and noting movement, sequence, and change, as well as how it evolves in response to changes in context or conditions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.167).

Summary of Chapter

This chapter described the procedures used to study the school board/superintendent relationship in a recognized urban school district serving high-poverty, majority-minority student populations and how that relationship influenced student achievement.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The Setting and Demographics

The school district selected for this study is an urban district that serves a high-poverty, majority-minority student population. The selection criteria included a district recognized by the Texas Accountability System (TEA, 2001). Situated in one of the largest urban areas of the state, the district is responsible for educating all children enrolled in the district, the majority of who are from impoverished and high-poverty backgrounds and minority, often of immigrant parents.

For the purpose of this study, “high poverty” is defined as at least 70 percent of the district’s student population meeting the definition of economically disadvantaged as per the federal guidelines to qualify for the free and reduced price lunch program. During the years studied, 1993-2000, the district data in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) shows that the percentage of economically disadvantaged students continued to rise within the time period of the study. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students grew steadily through the years of the study. Beginning in 1994, only 55.5 percent of the students tested were classified as economically disadvantaged. That percentage escalated to 73.4 percent in 2001, a 17.9 percent increase.

The school district also serves a majority-minority student population. For this study, at least 85 percent of the student population must be classified as minority. Data from the 1993-94 and 1999-2000 school-year periods was analyzed and served as the basis for the selection of the district. This data also indicated steady growth in the minority student population. In 1994, the minority student population was at 84.9 percent, but continued on an upward trend to reach 90.6 percent in 2001. Research has shown that children from economically disadvantaged homes are the most difficult to educate, because they lack basic life skills or the readiness to enter school. Educating these same children in an urban area only adds to the complexity of the educational issues.

The economically disadvantaged and minority students that the district serves includes almost 50,000 students within 59 schools. The schools include seven comprehensive high schools that serve students in grades 9-12. There are 11 middle schools that include nine schools that have 7th and 8th graders, and two schools that serve 6th through 8th grades. The district operates 36 elementary schools, of which 22 serve kindergarten to 6th grade students; nine include pre-kindergarten through 6th grades; two schools are for kindergarten to 5th grade students; one school is prekindergarten to 5th grade, and there are two prekindergarten centers. In addition, the district has five schools with altogether different grade configurations: two kindergartens through 8th grade, one 6th-12th grade school and two alternative centers.

The schools in this study were represented by 14 principals who were interviewed and who represent a slice of the whole district. When ranked by the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students, the schools ranged from a high of 96.1 percent to a low of 46.4 percent. Even the school with the lowest percentage at 46.6 percent translates into almost half of the students coming from economically disadvantaged families. The variance from highest to lowest in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students is at 49.7 percent. The percentage of minority students ranged from 99 percent to a low of 79.1 percent, which is only a 20 percent variance.

Purposeful Sampling

Within the school district selected for this study, a purposeful sampling was used to select participants to be interviewed. Participants who were invited to be interviewed included board members, superintendents, and school principals. Each group selected for interviews met the specific criteria outlined in the methodology protocol.

Board members who were interviewed for the study included those members who served at least two consecutive terms during the eight years of the study. There were 13 different individuals who served as board members sometime during the period between 1993 through 2000. Of the 13 school board members identified, the seven who met the established criteria were officially

asked to participate in the study. Two board members accepted and were scheduled for individual interviews.

Persons who served in the position of superintendent or interim superintendent during the time period of the study were invited to be interviewed. Four people occupied the superintendent's position either on a permanent or interim basis from 1993 through 2000. Of the four persons who were invited, two accepted, and their viewpoints and perceptions are included in the study. These two people had been in superintendent positions in other districts. Both brought experience to their positions in the subject school district.

When Superintendent Alpha was named superintendent to this district, he had already retired from a superintendent position in another state. Superintendent Alpha had accumulated 42 years of experience as a teacher, coach, assistant principal, principal, and program director. Twenty-two of those years were as a school superintendent. Superintendent Alpha's experience included midsize and large urban school districts. His educational preparation included bachelors and masters degrees. Superintendent Alpha's resume also listed ABD (all but dissertation).

Superintendent Beta came as superintendent to the district of study from another superintendent position outside of Texas. He brought with him over 25 years of experience in various educational settings. His leadership experiences included those of teacher, school psychologist, and campus administrator. Various other central office leadership positions focused on school reform,

special education, curriculum, instruction, bilingual education and learning support services. His experiences were in large urban school systems in four states. Superintendent Beta's educational preparation included bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees.

Persons who were middle school or elementary school principals during the 1993-94 and 1999-2000 school year periods were asked to participate in the study. Identified from the staffing rosters provided by the district, 33 principals were in those positions during the time span of the study. The 33 principals who met the established criteria outlined in the methodology protocol were asked to participate in interviews; 14 agreed, were interviewed, and their viewpoints and perceptions included in the findings. The 14 principals interviewed represented 42 percent of the total number of principals who met the eligibility criteria set forth in this study. Of the 14 middle school and elementary school principals interviewed, there were 12 females and two males. Their tenure as school principals ranged from seven years to 23 years. The group's average tenure as principals was almost 12 years.

There were four persons who occupied the superintendent's position either in a permanent or interim basis within the seven years of the study. The difficulties and challenges between the superintendents and the school board and among the school board members themselves were very public. Each ensuing school board election changed the majority on the board, thereby usually changing superintendents.

Context of the Study

During the time frame of this study, the members of the school board changed with each ensuing annual election. Changes in board membership usually led to a change of superintendent. Concurrently, there were changes occurring in the Texas Accountability System (the state system of holding schools and districts accountable for the results in student achievement). The Texas Accountability System was changed from an inputs-driven system to a results-driven system. The system measured the performance of schools and districts based on criteria established by the Texas Education Agency. The criteria required schools to attain specific percentages of students to pass the state assessments in reading, writing, and math. This case study focuses on how the district managed to do well academically in the midst of the changes that were taking place.

The notion of “giving principals total authority and autonomy” (Superintendent Alpha)--a change in the district’s culture--worked in tandem with the changes in, and implementation of, the Texas Accountability System. With authority and autonomy came responsibility and accountability. 1994 was the first year that the state of Texas rated school districts and schools using the Texas Accountability System.

Student Achievement Data

With all the children that came to the district's door, this one Texas urban district defied the standard expectations of the minority and disadvantaged children by making "in the 90's, a major turnabout" (www.district webpage). It was during this same time frame that the district became one of the first urban districts to be named a Recognized District based on the district's student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS).

Multi-year historical data for the years 1994 through 2000 showed steady, and in some areas, dramatic increases in student performance as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (AEIS data, TEA, 2001). The first year of data in the TEA database for this district was 1994, at which time 47.5 percent of students tested passed all tests taken. That percentage rose with each ensuing year: 54.5 percent in 1995, 65.4 percent in 1996, 73.4 percent in 1997, 80 percent in 1998, 82.1 percent in 1999, and 83.7 percent in 2000. Exhibit 1: Percent of Student Passing All Tests Taken in Multiple Years depicts the data from the TEA AEIS reports. Exhibit 1 also provides the percentage of students from minority and economically disadvantaged student populations who passed the tests.

It is important to note that the percentages of students passing all tests are clustered within six or seven percentage points among the three population groups, the total students group, the minority student group and the economically disadvantaged student group. Because the district is heavy majority-minority

and almost equally economically disadvantaged, the student groups achieved within the same range because essentially, they are the same students.

Exhibit 1: Percent of Students Passing All Tests Taken in Multiple Years

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
All Students Tested	47.5	54.5	65.4	73.4	80.0	82.1	83.7
Minority Students	44.1	51.8	63.4	71.9	78.6	81.2	82.9
Economically Disadvantaged	41.7	49.8	61.8	70.3	77.4	80.1	81.8

The 14 schools represented in this study have large percentages of low income and minority students; nevertheless, their individual school data shows that those students have done well, academically speaking. Over the seven-year period of study, the schools demonstrated an upward trend in student performance.

As an example, the data from six of the 14 schools represented in this study by the principals who were interviewed were selected to illustrate that whether a school has a stable population or whether the school is experiencing changes in its demographics, all schools showed improved student achievement within the same time period. Three of the six schools selected showed little or no change in the percentage of students who were minority or economically disadvantaged. The remaining three schools demonstrated increases in the percentages of students who were minority or economically disadvantaged.

At HH school the percentage of economically disadvantaged students remained almost stagnant at 87 percent throughout the data covering seven years. The percentage of minority students also remained stable at 97.5 percent. In 1994 only 37.3 percent of the students tested passed all tests taken. Seven years later, with a steady upward trend, the percentage of students who passed all tests taken was up to 90.3 percent, a growth of 53 percent.

At CW school, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students also changed little during the seven years of data. In 1994, the data indicated that 90.2 percent of the school's students had been identified as economically disadvantaged. Seven years later, the percentage had dropped 4.1 percent to 86.1 percent, an insignificant decrease. The percentage of minority students remained very stable at an average of 97.6 percent. The high point of 98.1 percent and the low of 96.6 percent, were also an insignificant variances. In this school, 45.9 percent of the students passed all tests taken on the TAAS in 1994. In 2000, 75.2 percent of the students passed all tests taken, a 29.3 percent increase over seven years.

At SL school, the percent of economically disadvantaged students began at 85.5 percent in 1994 and ended at 82.7 percent in 2000, a decrease of 2.8 percent. The percentage of minority students, which hovered at a 96 percent average, was also stable. The highest percentage was noted in 1998 at 97 percent and the lowest percentage at 94.7 in 1994. In 1994, SL started out as one of the highest performing schools with 53.9 percent of their students passing all tests

taken. By 2000, after a 31 percent increase in the number of students passing, the percentage was at 84.9.

In contrast to the schools whose student populations were stable, three schools showed dramatic increases in the percentage of economically disadvantaged students attending those schools. Although there was also an increase in minority student representations, the increase for this group was less dramatic. TS experienced a 33.9 percent increase in economically disadvantaged students. The percentage rose from 12.5 percent in 1994 to 46.4 percent in 2000. The percentage increase in minority students was still significant, yet less dramatic, at 14.6 percent. The percentage of minority students increased from 64.5 percent in 1994 to 79.1 percent in 2000. As one of the highest performing schools, TS began with 56.9 percent of their students passing all tests taken in 1994. Even with their changing student population, that percentage increased 33.5 percent to 90.4 percent in 2000.

PH school had a 26 percent increase in their economically disadvantaged student population. This population peaked at 68.6 percent in 2000, having begun at 42.6 percent in 1994. The increase in minority students was 8.5 percent, peaking at 83.3 percent in 2000 from 74.8 percent in 1994. PH also showed a dramatic increase in student performance over the seven-year period. From 49.3 percent of students passing all tests taken in 1994, the growth was at 33.1 percent, reaching 82.4 percent in 2000.

The third school, GC, also demonstrated an increase of 26.5 percent in their economically disadvantaged student population. In 1994, the data showed 44.7 percent of the students as economically disadvantaged; in 2000 the percentage was at 71.2. The minority student population went from 79.1 percent in 1994 to 85.3 percent in 2000, a 6.2 percent increase. Starting with 51.7 percent of students passing all tests taken, GC reached 93.6 percent of their students passing all tests taken in 2000, a 41.9 percent increase.

These sample schools, along with the other eight schools represented in this study, illustrate that all of the schools experienced dramatic increases in the percent of students passing all tests taken on the state assessment, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). These phenomena occurred regardless of the students who attended these schools, be they economically disadvantaged or minority students, and regardless of where they began academically in 1994.

**Exhibit 2: Percent of Students Passing All Tests Taken
in Multiple Years for Sample Schools**

Stable Populations	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	Change
HH	37.3	54.7	61.3	76.5	88.1	86.5	90.3	+53
CW	45.9	65.6	66.4	81.4	80.6	70.6	75.2	+29.3
SL	53.9	50.4	66.7	80.1	86.8	84.2	84.9	+31
Growth in Population								
TS	56.9	70.8	68.2	82	89.9	92.2	90.4	+33.5
PH	49.3	59.5	65.2	70.7	80.7	77.7	82.4	+33.1
GC	51.7	59.2	68.5	81.6	86.3	89.0	93.6	+41.9

Exhibit 2 outlines the academic performance of the six schools described above. The starting performance ranged from 37.3 percent to 56.9 percent of students passing all tests taken on the TAAS. By 2000, seven years later, all the schools had shown dramatic gains in student achievement as measured by the TAAS. The first three schools listed are the examples of schools with stable student populations while the last three are the schools that had the most dramatic changes in the student populations. The three schools with substantial growth in their economically disadvantaged student population had increases in achievement just as dramatic as those schools whose populations were stable.

The Guiding Principles and Standards of The Texas Accountability System

The district made consistent, incremental, yet undisputable, gains in student achievement as measured by the state assessments during the time span of the study. The superintendents and principals credited the Texas Accountability System as one of the reasons for that gain. The 72nd Texas Legislature established the Texas Accountability System with an enduring set of very specific statutes that emphasized performance over process. Texas had changed to a results-driven accountability system. In other words, as long as the state-established standards for performance were met, the state education agency would allow districts to make decisions at the local level.

The guiding principles imbedded within the accountability system were intended to improve student performance. Those principles included recognizing diversity among schools and students, setting reasonable standards and appropriate consequences, and relying on local responsibility and supporting local control (TEA). The original standards for academic performance in the state assessments were established in 1993. Precise standards were established for each of the four major ratings: exemplary, recognized, acceptable and low performing.

The standard for meeting the exemplary rating was established and remained at 90 percent of students passing the state assessment. The standard for

meeting the recognized rating began at 70 percent, and was raised to 80 percent by 1997, where it remained through 2000. The standards for being rated as acceptable or low-performing were changed incrementally through the years to allow districts time to meet the challenges. Exhibit 3 shows the percentage of students required to pass the state assessments in order to meet a particular rating. All students, white, Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged students, were required to meet the same standards. The separation of student data into student groups focused on each significant group of students rather than the performance of the whole.

**Exhibit 3: Texas Accountability System
Annual Standards for Performance on
State Assessments**

	Exemplary	Recognized	Acceptable	Low-Performing
1994	90 percent	70 percent	25 percent	<25 percent
1995	90 percent		25 percent	<25 percent
1996	90 percent		30 percent	<30 percent
1997	90 percent		35 percent	<35 percent
1998	90 percent		40 percent	<40 percent
1999	90 percent	80 percent	45 percent	<45 percent
2000	90 percent	80 percent	50 percent	<50 percent

The accountability system itself, of course, cannot make districts improve student performance. The system sheds light on the performance of the major student populations for which districts and schools are held accountable: all students, white, Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged. Before the accountability system was in place, districts gauged themselves against state and national averages by evaluating the performance of the school's student populations as a whole. The Texas Accountability System held districts and schools accountable, not only for the performance of all students, but also for the performance of all of the parts--the different student populations. As found in the study by the Dana Center of four successful school districts, the Texas Accountability System altered the expectations for Texas schools and districts and became the basis for successful changes.

The realization that schools were not meeting the needs of all students mobilized districts and schools into action. As Superintendent Beta said, "The accountability system gave superintendents and principals a license to demand change...the structure in place with regard to student achievement, curriculum standards, state assessments, accountability, rankings, ratings, commissioner's domains...the majority of which were part of the principal and superintendent evaluation, all forced the system to stay the course."

The School Board and its Goals

This district is not any different from any other school district in the state of Texas. The governance structure of school boards in the state varies in the manner by which members are elected and how many members are elected. In this district, the election is governed by local Board Policy BBB. The policy calls for electing the board of trustees from seven single-member districts. The elections to fill positions on the school board are held in May of each year with positions coming up on staggered terms. According to board policy, single-member districts 2, 3, and 5 expired in 2004. Terms for members representing districts 4 and 6 expire in 2005 and in 2006 for members representing districts 1 and 7. Subsequent elections take place in three-year intervals after the terms expire.

In this district of study, the current policy governing school board elections was last issued in January 2004. The policy calls for a resolution for election by majority vote. If no one person receives a majority of the votes, the two people receiving the highest number of votes for that position shall be placed on the ballot for a run-off election. It is important to note the date of the latest policy revision. Prior to the revision, persons elected to serve on the school board had only to have the most votes, a plurality of the votes, not the majority of votes.

Once on the board, the governance team develops goals to guide the direction of the district. A quick search of the district's website outlines the board's goals as adopted by the Board of Trustees. The board goals for the District state that:

- The District will provide a comprehensive curriculum driven by effective research-based practices that result in high levels of academic performance and achievement.
- The District will provide a diverse range of initiatives, enriched learning opportunities and outreach programs that result in increased student achievement and personal and social responsibility.
- The District will provide a safe, secure, nurturing learning and work environment that enhances the social growth of all students and employees.
- The district will provide effective and accountable early childhood to post-secondary guidance, counseling, student advocacy, and support services.
- The District will develop collaborative partnerships that promote shared responsibility for student success.
- The District will provide equitable state-of-the-art learning and work environments that integrate instruction and technology for all students and employees.

- The District will provide highly motivated, trained, creative staff and governance structure focused on students' achievement of the District's Vision.
- The District will establish and maintain a system of internal administrative and accounting controls that provide reasonable assurance of the accomplishment of goals.

These lofty goals address the main objectives that the district wants to focus on. Of the eight goals listed, seven refer to students in terms of their performance, achievement, success as well as nurturing learning environments, student advocacy, and state-of-the-art learning environments. However, in practice, the written goals focusing on students, student achievement and performance did not match the actions of the Board, as found in the official minutes of the Board for the period 1993 to 2000.

When community members opt to seek a seat on a local school board, most will tell you that they want to live up to the goals established by the governance team and to make a difference in their community. The focus on areas within the district that had previously been neglected appears to have brought political pressure on board members. To acquire a sense of focus for the board meetings, official school board minutes were reviewed.

The official minutes of the deliberations and decisions of the board of trustees were requested for the same time period of this study. For the sake of continuity, minutes were requested for the regularly scheduled meetings of the

school board for February and October for each of the eight years of the study. The minutes were examined for key words and phrases that might relate to any action taken by the school board regarding student performance and achievement. Some key words and phrases that were found in the minutes included classroom support, assessment, planning, or specific courses of study.

Consistencies were noted in certain areas within particular time periods. For example, during the years analyzed, five of the eight October meetings indicated the approval of the district improvement plans and the school performance objectives. These actions however, are not unusual events given that Texas Education Code, Section 11.251 (a) requires that school boards “ensure that a district improvement plan and improvement plans for each school, after receipt of AEIS data, are developed, reviewed, and revised annually for the purpose of improving the performance of all students. The board shall annually approve...” (p.38). In October of 1995 there was no formally called meeting. The minutes of October 1998 and 2000 did not contain any references to planning processes or the approval of district improvement plans.

Further, study of the minutes indicated that sometime between February and October of 1998, the district began to operate under the direction of an interim superintendent. Two years later in October 2000, a second interim superintendent was in place and the Texas Education Agency had intervened and assigned a master to oversee the district. It is interesting to note that there was instability at the superintendent level during the two years when there was no

mention or action taken during the board meetings regarding district and school improvement plans. This, of course, was due to the fact that there were interim superintendents in place. Although the minutes do not reflect specifics, it can be assumed that the strategic planning process and school performance objectives are directly related to the attainment of student performance. Yet during 1998 and 2000 the approval of district and school improvement plans, actions which were required in the statutes, were not accomplished, at least during the same time period as in the other five years.

School Board Elections and Superintendent Tenure

The membership of the Board of Trustees can be monitored and related directly to the change in superintendents as seen in an analysis of the official minutes of the Board. In the five-year time period from February 1993 through February 1998, the district functioned under the direction of one superintendent. In October 1998 there was an interim superintendent in place. In October 1999 another superintendent was in place. However, one year later, in October of 2000, a different interim superintendent was named.

**Exhibit 4: Annual Election of Board Members in Relation
To Superintendent Tenure**

Year	February	May Election	October
1993	Superintendent Alpha	New board member elected	Superintendent Alpha
1994		New board member elected	
1995		New board member elected	
1996		No new members elected	
1997		New board member elected	
1998		New board member elected	
1999	Interim Superintendent Number 1	New board member elected	Superintendent Beta
2000	Superintendent Beta	Two new board members elected	Interim Superintendent Number 2

Exhibit 4 shows timelines for the election of new board members, when they were seated on the board according to the official minutes, and the changes in the superintendent. The chart also indicates that from February 1998 to October 2000, a thirty-two month period, four different individuals occupied the superintendent’s office. Again, an examination of the board membership throughout the years indicated that the board majority had shifted. The changes in superintendents point to the importance of building and sustaining positive board relations.

Aside from the aforementioned strategic planning process, the analysis of the board minutes revealed there were few other actions related to student achievement and performance documented as board actions. Items related to

instruction included contracts for tutoring programs, whole language programs, play productions, a math instructional system, and computer-assisted instruction. There was also an educational technology proposal and two requests for class size waivers. At one point, the 15 schools that were officially recognized in the state accountability system were also publicly recognized by the school board.

In contrast to items related to instruction, most of the actions of the school board were centered on contracts with construction companies and architects, budget amendments, compensation, and other legal matters. A review of the official minutes of the board during the time span of the study revealed actions related to issues other than instruction or students. Twelve actions items were related to contracts or settlement agreements with construction companies, architects, or both; five separate actions concerned contracts and fees related to attorneys; eight actions were related to personnel issues, including hearings, grievances, and settlements; various other actions related to personnel contracts,, incentive plans and compensations rates.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on the academic achievement in one Texas school district that serves high-poverty, majority-minority students. Research states that collaboration and strong school board/superintendent relationships are necessary for school districts to attain high levels of student achievement. While collaboration and positive relationships are desirable features, not all school board and superintendent relationships have the attributes of collaboration and strong relationships. School districts that attain high academic achievement, especially with poor and minority children, without strong school board superintendent relationships and teamwork are even more rare.

Research Questions

The research questions posed in this case study were as follows:

1. What are the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as perceived by the superintendent and the board members?

2. How do district principals perceive the effects of school board/superintendent relationships on their performance as they seek to enhance student achievement?
3. How do the dynamics of the school board relationship influence the academic achievement of its students?

Context of the Study

This study was conducted in an urban Texas school district serving a high-poverty majority-minority student population and received a recognized rating by the Texas Accountability System. Situated in one of the largest urban areas of the state, most of the students enrolled in the district were from impoverished and high-poverty backgrounds and were also minority, often of immigrant parents. For this study, at least 70% of the district's student population met the definition of economically disadvantaged as per the federal guidelines, which qualifies them for the free and reduced price lunch program. Additionally, the school district served a majority-minority student population. For the purpose of this study, 85% of the district's student population was classified as minority students.

Findings

Several themes surfaced in this one case study. Although the themes can be singly identified, it was difficult to isolate them, because they were so very interdependent and relational. The various emerging themes included politics and political power, the superintendent's leadership style, conflict, communication, change, trust, empowerment and support, a belief system, and roles and responsibilities.

Research Question 1

The first question in this study was: What are the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as perceived by the superintendent and the school board members? The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as perceived by the superintendent and the school board members differed because each person was seeing things from their own individual perspective. The dynamics included conflict, change, lack of trust, superintendent leadership style, and communication, all interwoven with politics and political power.

Politics and Political Power

Politics and political power emerged as a major theme in the dynamics between the school board and the superintendent. Dynamics was defined and used within this study as the psychological aspects or conduct of interpersonal

relationships. Politics and political power had two facets: The first facet was the politics of the elections process; how members were elected to the school board. The second facet was the manner in which people assumed their roles and responsibilities.

Politics of the Election Process

The dynamics of the interpersonal relationship between the school board and the superintendent was affected by their opinions on the politics of the election process and the advantages and disadvantages of school districts electing board member representatives from single-member districts.

In this school district board members were elected to represent single-member districts or geographical areas within the larger school district. School board members from the single-member districts were primed to be the most polarized due to the very nature of the election process. The election process, the expectations of their constituents, and board members' personal goals and individual agendas all converged and contributed to making a school board member's position a political one.

In the district of study the election process required school board members to be elected from single-member districts. The fact that school board members were elected by their constituents made being a board member a highly political school district position. The interview data indicated school board members and superintendents had differing opinions regarding the advantages

and disadvantages of single-member district elections and the roles and responsibilities of the school board members.

Politics of Roles and Responsibilities

The second facet that impacted the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship was the lack of understanding and divisiveness between the school board and the superintendent regarding their respective roles and responsibilities. Citing an example of a school board action as not being congruent with board members' roles and responsibilities, Superintendent Beta recalled one particular school board meeting after the recent election shifted the board majority. Superintendent Beta said,

The school board froze all of the hiring; they froze all of the construction contracts...a lot of the construction problems that would have occurred and the law suits would have affected the district budget in such a way that money that was going to programs would have had to be redirected because you know, we were talking big bucks.

Unilateral actions as these almost rendered the daily operations of the district immobile. The school board's action was the direct result of the governance team, the school board and the superintendent not working in tandem to achieve the primary mission of the district, student achievement.

These two facets of politics and political power resulted in conflict, change, miscommunication, and a lack of trust.

Conflict

The second theme found in this district was one of conflict. The school board members and the superintendents held different opinions about single-member districts. Conflicting attitudes became an implicit source of contention among the school board members and between the school board and the superintendent.

Reflecting on elections from single-member districts, a school board member said:

I had mixed feelings. I like single-member districts...for the constituents, but the mentality of the board members should be at-large and it isn't, unfortunately...You know, one's mind set has to be not just for the district [single-member] but for the whole district...and very few of the members...from my experience, even think of it that way. I think that's where the problem starts. Boards are a problem. Something is wrong with the system...I don't know what is a better system but it is breaking down nationwide.

This board member points to the difficulty of balancing the interests of the community from which they were elected with the needs of the entire district. Furthermore, in the larger scheme, this one board member addressed the greater issues of nationwide school board problems.

Prior to single-member district elections, school board members were elected as at-large representatives. Under the at-large election process, many of the district's heavily minority and disadvantaged areas were underrepresented on the school board. Elections from single-member districts allowed the school

board members to represent all areas of the district. Superintendents said that prior to board members being elected to represent single-member districts, many areas of the district were underrepresented on the board. Those underrepresented areas were the very poor and heavily minority neighborhoods.

In reference to the political impact of wider community representation on the school board, Superintendent Alpha said:

Suddenly, there was a voice from south of the freeway and from the north east. And it was a fractured voice in many ways because each of them [board members] wanted to do what was best for their area.

Superintendent Alpha's conclusion about the politics of single-member districts supported the board member's view that few board members backed at-large issues; rather the board members supported specific issues that were representative of their individual areas or met their personal agendas.

Superintendent Alpha expanded his perspective and in doing so, further explained the reason for conflict among the school board members. He said,

People blame single-member districts for the fractionalization of the board. In one way you could say they're right, because the single-member districts basically allowed an election, a voice from South of the freeway that had never been there. In the history of the district the board was almost all Anglo and they were elected from north of the freeway.

However, Superintendent Alpha continued:

Somehow, we were able to come together [as a governance team] to say that all the areas are going to be attended to, particularly in the area of construction--the worst situations being fixed first and then the others having to wait. And so in that regard, that was one of the little pieces of tension but they were very good about that. They understood that the major problems were south of the freeway and that those had to be fixed first before we moved anywhere else. So the single-member district did

bring some tensions but then I guess I would equate it with the same kind of tension as any racial block.

Superintendent Alpha asserted that even though the governance team made a concerted effort to consider the issues affecting the entire district, he mentioned that tensions among the board members did exist. The tensions resulted in conflict which in turn brought about increased involvement, particularly of district personnel, in politics and the political process.

Superintendent Beta confirmed the active involvement of district personnel in the political process. He observed,

There was a tendency to get very involved in the local politics, more so than I've seen in the other districts that I've worked in. As much as I think that some of the principals who did try to get involved in that structure [politics], it kind of deflected, if you will, some of that potential disruption.

The superintendent's reference to disruption pointed to the election process, the politics, and the struggle for political power in the district. The struggle for political power propelled groups to vote in blocs to facilitate the election of candidates who would be supportive of their particular causes. A strong force in determining who got elected to the school board was the local teachers' organization.

Superintendent Alpha confirmed the power of the teacher's voting bloc.

He said,

They [board members] got elected primarily by the sheer numbers of the teacher unions who lived in our community and they [teacher groups] were not real happy with what I was dealing with because I wasn't going

through them. I was going through my principals because they could accomplish what I needed to do.

Both superintendents agreed that teachers, as a group represented by the local teachers' organization, did not relate to, or agree with, Superintendent Alpha and vice versa. Superintendent Alpha said,

I used to meet monthly with the teachers' union presidents. They [union representatives] dominated the board meetings. The complaint was that the meetings were just a one way monologue for them. At one point the president came to see me and said, 'you know, if you just communicate with me', and I said, why would I communicate with you? I say you are irrelevant to this thing. You have no stake in what's going on, you don't want to have a stake in it. All you want is to be an obstruction to what we're trying to do and so I said, 'I don't want to waste my time with you'.

Superintendent Alpha's rigid stance and refusal to work with the teachers' groups led the teachers to get even more involved in the political processes of electing board members who were sympathetic to their causes.

The politics of being elected and the political issues with which school boards and superintendents dealt were varied and complex. The election process, single-member districts, constituent's priorities, and board member's individual agendas impacted the dynamics between school board members and the superintendents. Each and every one of the political issues led to conflict.

Teacher group agendas, political power and equitable school performance were political issues that drove school board elections. Superintendent Alpha's previous reference to political tension and conflict due to racial block were not

attributed to racism as such, but couched in terms of ensuring that all schools were performing equally well.

A board member substantiated that conflict within the board began when schools with extremely high percentages of low-income and minority students began to perform well academically, or at times even better than other schools with fewer minority and poor children. When student performance data was shared with the school board, members were informed that in many instances, “poor schools were doing better than affluent schools.”

Not all board members agreed that schools were supposed to meet the needs of all students. To substantiate this statement, a board member said,

The problem that I have with that [teaching all students], is that we’re teaching them [immigrants] and a lot of them return to their country; they do some good over there. I’m a little greedy when it comes to that. I felt that if we’re going to allow them to go to our schools, they should have some obligation to our nation. I don’t mind them coming; I just don’t like for them to leave and take what we have given them for free.

All school board members and the superintendents did not agree on the district’s mission to educate all students; therefore, conflicts began to arise.

Conflicts arose when school board members did not understand the school district’s goals or the superintendent’s agenda. Conflict was clearly evident in this board member’s statement:

I felt in working with the superintendent [Alpha], a lot of his plans in the future outcome was something that would benefit him specifically and that’s where I had a problem. He [Superintendent Alpha] was a very strong-minded man; very smart. I’ll never take that away from him. He had a plan; the plan included him and that is the problem I had. I could tell him, look, your plan is fine but when you start doing this or that;

that's where I draw the line. If you wouldn't do this I would favor you, but you do not.

A lack of understanding of the superintendent's goals for the school district caused conflict between the school board and the superintendent.

Superintendents perceived that school board members who agreed with them as superintendents were more likely to adhere to established professional standards than those members who disagreed with the superintendent. However, when the superintendent's agenda and individual board members' agenda did not mix, problems and conflict resulted. The lack of agreement on agendas prompted community members to put their names on the ballot and campaign to get elected to the school board during the annual school board election. The results of the election placed new members on the school board who were against the sitting superintendent, particularly Superintendent Alpha, who had established a vision and belief system about equity for all students.

Superintendents agreed that some board members had their own agenda.

Superintendent Alpha said,

They [school board] were not there for the children and the community. They were there for their own power...I never did figure their agenda though...they had one agenda, to get rid of me.

When asked about the causes and probable rationale for the conflict, Superintendent Beta gave his perspective. He speculated the relationship among the school board members had some long-standing history. He explained,

There was just bad blood. The longer I was there, the longer I realized that it [problems and conflict] went way back. It went back to the early

90s. It doesn't matter who the superintendent would have been; this is something that was a very personal thing for those folks. They were on a mission and unfortunately, not all of them were there for kids.

Even a board member agreed the school board was partly, if not completely, the root of the conflict. The board member said:

I think morale improved [when Superintendent Beta was hired], unfortunately, the board did not let it...did not let it work. I think the problem when [Superintendent Beta] was here was the board. Well, because it changed. The board changed after he [referring to a specific board member] got elected. It changed the majority, changed it to...to a vote that would not give up on [Superintendent Alpha]. That's all I can say.

The shifting majority on the school board influenced decisions regarding who occupied the superintendent position. The decisions about who would be the superintendent caused internal conflict within the board itself and among its members.

School board members claimed that the basis of conflict for some members of the board concerned money, not simply who would be the superintendent. The issues were about people who were awarded contracts for services, such as "architects and attorneys", said one board member.

Superintendents also agreed that money and contracts were issues of conflict among the school board members. Superintendent Beta said:

When I got there, there was a federal investigation into contracts and perceived corruption. That's when it [conflict] started to get tense. Then we found that all of the contracts being handed out...the district weren't complying with any of the policies and procedures. That's when the board really became much more cantankerous and lining things up on the agenda.

Board members confirmed the actions noted in the researcher's review of the official board minutes. The minutes reviewed indicated school board actions were not focused on student achievement or performance as outlined in the published school board goals. A board member said:

I knew some of the things that some of these board members were into and the things they were saying to contractors. I mean there was stuff that was under the table that I didn't like. I like to bring everything above board; when doesn't happen, I do become very leery about that person; I can't trust them and that is the problem. When individual board members are in it to make money or to gain from it; they're looking after themselves, not the district.

Another board member agreed. He said, "It's all about money and the people who wanted control--the architects and attorneys".

Finances in this school district were volatile issues and also became a focal point during school board elections. One board member recalled that the teacher's organization consistently pushed for higher salaries. In one particular instance, rather than provide raises for teachers, the school board decided to fund instructional programs and construction to repair older schools. In one board member's opinion, this use of money, coupled with Superintendent Alpha's disdain for the teachers' group was a major impetus for the its involvement in school board elections.

Regardless of the conflicts that arose from each ensuing election, superintendents had a slight difference of opinion on single member district elections. Superintendents perceived there was a very minor yet positive angle to

single-member district elections. Superintendents thought elections from single-member districts presented a plus for superintendents. One superintendent said,

I never had a problem with the single-member districts. The positive aspect of a single-member district was that the board changed very slowly, over a period of time. Either you have a majority of the board or a minority of the board change every three years.

Superintendents viewed the slow changes in membership on the board as a positive move toward increasing the length of their tenure as superintendents. In this district, the balance between the majority and minority factions on the board teetered by only one member, making the shift of the board majority change literally each year.

Change

The conflicts the school boards and superintendents dealt with led to change, another major theme identified in this study. Annual school board elections invariably led to changes in the membership on the school board. However slowly the school board membership changed, change it did, with each election.

Persons who sought a seat on the school board had very personal reasons for seeking election. In this district's case one school board member wanted to accomplish change and make a difference in the community. The board member said, "My objective was to make a difference. I started to feel like we [as a governance team] were going to make a difference."

Another board member stated his reason for seeking a seat on the school board: “I began to see that things were not right...there were differences in the schools, and discrimination”.

Both school board members had personal reasons for seeking a position on the board. One school board member wanted to make a difference; the other board member saw differences. Both board members wanted to effect change, but for very different reasons. Although change is the theme in this section, the board members’ rationale for wanting to make a difference was rooted in differing philosophies, which also caused conflict.

Board members’ personal reasons for seeking a position on the local school board were perceived by others as personal agendas. Personal agendas were viewed by superintendents as board members wanting to know what was going on in the schools, particularly with regard to the appointment of principals within the single-member district that the board members represented.

When school boards changed, so did the majority-minority faction on the school board. When the majority faction on the school board was in power, invariably the majority voted to change the superintendent, particularly if that superintendent had been the choice of the previous school board majority. When new superintendents came into the district, they also made changes.

Referring to the changes instituted at the central office, Superintendent Alpha said,

I took some of my best Anglo people and asked them to go down south of the freeway; we mixed this thing [administrator assignments] up so that Anglos and Hispanics could function anywhere. That [segregation] had to be broken down. The principal is the key, the lynch pin in this whole thing.

On describing another change to the organization of the central office staff, Superintendent Alpha said:

Most, if not all, of the people in the division of instruction were formed into teams. Each team was assigned two feeder patterns--two high schools and their feeders. They were responsible for going out into the field. They had to be in these schools at least four days a week. And they were supposed to work with the schools, the principal, and the staff, to deal with the instructional program. They were to be their support system and linkage to the central office. In the monthly meetings that we talked about, there was very little management that was discussed. It was mostly instruction that was being discussed all the time. So I think we developed a culture through the system where everybody understood that we were there for instruction. That was the single most important purpose for us being there. So it was really the development of the culture.

The restructure of the central office staff was Superintendent Alpha's method of changing the standard operating procedures so that campuses were provided with the necessary support. However, school board members had their doubts about the administrative changes made at the central office by Superintendent Alpha. One board member said,

He [Superintendent Alpha] knew what the problem was because he gave them [principals] the right to do what they did. It was his experiment, and I told him--it's going to ruin the system.

In referring to the superintendent making some administrative changes, the same board member added:

When he decided he was going to take over the school, I said then, if that's the problem, take him [principal] out. You make an example of one or two people and show that you're taking a hard line and you'll take care of it, but to penalize the whole school...because you're destroying some of the good people. I mean a lot of good people.

When the membership on the school board changed, the dynamics of the school board and superintendent relationship inevitably changed as well.

Regarding the changes on the school board, Superintendent Alpha said:

The last board I had, the one that fired me, the relationship was one of total disrespect between them and me. I didn't respect them. I didn't like them. I just felt they should not be on the board; they were evil people that were out to fill agendas. We really had two boards. The second board that I had, I had absolutely no respect for them. They were people with little minds.

Changes on the school board were most evident for Superintendent Beta, who worked for three boards during his eighteen-month tenure. He said:

I actually worked with three boards when I was there, you know. The first board I would say was excellent. It really was. I came in with a four-three [vote of the board], which was interesting. It was a good learning experience because, you know, I was told that it was a seven-zero [vote]. Then, that night, it was obviously planned. That night at the board meeting, it was all of a sudden four-three and they were trying to railroad it...I was there through that year and then there was a board change in May 2000. I came in April 1999 and then in May it changed and then we had a different board. So there was a change on the board, it shifted to a four-three overnight.

Coping with and managing change and the different philosophies among school board members was a delicate balancing act for the superintendents. In spite of the difficulty of the task, superintendents were obligated to provide commensurate services and a quality education for all students in the district

regardless of where they lived, what their personal circumstances were, or which school they attended.

To accomplish this, the superintendents made changes at the central office level to support the individual schools. The changes at the central office meant there was less control by the central offices. The district's organizational structure was changed so that principals had central office support, but at the same time, principals were given total discretion to manage and make decisions at the school level. However, it was evident that not all school board members supported the superintendent's actions. The lack of school board support for the superintendent's organizational changes led to a lack of trust between them.

Lack of Trust

Politics, conflict, and change were inextricably interwoven, and each played a key part in the emergence of another associated theme—lack of trust. In this district, school board members agreed that trust was a major factor in sustaining positive relationships with the superintendents. Even a slight hint of impropriety led to suspicion, and eventually an erosion of trust. One school board member explained his perspective:

I expected him [the superintendent] to keep the budget and have open discussions, which we didn't have. There was a lot going on behind closed doors that would not have been brought up with everybody, including the board.

Board members perceived that superintendents were not open, honest, and upright with every individual board member. All the conflicts, changes and politics resulted in a lack of trust between them.

Superintendents agreed there was an uneasy climate, one of fear and distrust. Coming into the district from the outside, Superintendent Beta said,

I tried to find out for myself personally...talk to people and get a feel for the climate. There was a lot of fear, I have to tell you. Some principals were very fearful of talking because they had the notion that you know, your head is going to roll if you say the wrong thing or you do this or that.

During the perceived climate of fear and lack of trust, Superintendent Beta also observed the teacher groups lobbying for support of their agenda. A lack of trust was generated by the teacher groups' active involvement in board elections. During this time, board meetings were extremely well attended by many interested parties. Superintendent Beta said,

The board room was full. They [the board] weren't focused on kids. They weren't focused on students learning and creating learning environments. The focus was on all this disruption that was now starting to occur overnight. Parents were getting personally involved and going to their PTA's [Parent-Teacher Associations] and getting them riled up to go to the board meetings. It just was a crazy time.

The disruption in the district as described by Superintendent Beta can be partially attributed to his leadership style.

Superintendent's Leadership Style

The political issues and the dynamics of the interpersonal relationships among the school board members and the superintendent were greatly influenced by his leadership style, another theme identified in this study. Trust, or rather the lack of trust, played a major role in the emergence of conflict, and impacted the play for political power. Developing trust was fundamental to the superintendent's leadership style.

School board members agreed the superintendent's style of leadership impacted the dynamics of their relationship. Board members also agreed the superintendent's personality and leadership style influenced their relationship with the superintendent.

Referring to the differences in the leadership styles between Superintendent Alpha and Superintendent Beta, a board member said:

We did have a good relationship. I thought he [Superintendent Beta] was a good superintendent, had the ability. He was a people person. Superintendent Alpha was not, unless you played his game. I didn't have a problem with Superintendent Beta until the year when he was to leave. What he should have done was to be sterner and more forceful in a lot of things, although his vision was good. He was too lenient and to be fair to him, he had a board that was going to take its revenge [on him, the superintendent].

This one board member's statement is strong evidence that board members reacted to superintendents based on their perception of the superintendent's leadership style and personality, and whether or not board

members agreed with the way the superintendent managed the day-to-day operations of the district.

Referring to Superintendent Alpha's leadership style, the same board member said, "His approach was very wrong. I just had a problem with his approach, it was kind of intimidating." In the political context, the superintendent must be able to reconcile the interests of the board and the community by compromising, building coalitions, and coming to agreements, not just managing the complexities of the day-to-day management of the district.

School board members and the superintendents saw the dynamics of their relationships from different perspectives. Their perceptions were largely dependent on the composition of the school board and the individual occupying the superintendent's position. The superintendents clearly perceived that when board members agreed with and supported them, the dynamics of the relationship were positive. Board members perceived the dynamics of their relationship with the superintendent as having a lot to do with the individual superintendent's leadership style, the trust board members placed in the superintendent, and their levels of communication with the superintendent.

Adding to the perception that the superintendent's leadership style was important, board members thought superintendents and school board members needed to be open and honest with each other. School board members also thought people needed to work with each other, whether or not they liked the other person(s). Referring to one superintendent, a board member said: "One of

the things I liked in him [Superintendent Beta] was that he and I were very open with each other.” Openness and honesty were critical components of effective communication.

Communication

Exacerbating the lack of trust was lack of communication--the fifth theme identified in this one case study as a dynamic of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. Communication consisted of two sub-themes; miscommunication and lack of information.

In this district, the manner in which superintendents communicated with their boards was dependent not only on the individual superintendent's leadership style, but also upon the composition of the board and whether or not the superintendent had the support of the majority of the board.

Referring to communications from the superintendent, at least one board member said, “I didn't want all that information. I trusted him [Superintendent Alpha]; he had carte blanche to do what needed to be done.” The same board member insisted on trusting the superintendent, adding that it was the “superintendent's job to run the school district; a board only gets involved in the day-to-day operations of the district when the superintendent allows it.” These differences of opinions on how a school district should be managed on a daily basis led to a stressful school board/superintendent relationship. The

superintendents literally had to adapt their communication styles to the individual school board members' needs.

On the importance of effective communications skills, one board member said:

The man on the top has to have some good communications skills and not just communications, but actually know when a board member is out of line; he needs to tell him [board member] too. And he needs to be outspoken too, and the way you handle them [the board] is obviously very important too. You can tell somebody off and do it diplomatically and nicely.

Understanding the importance of communications in their relationship with the school board, superintendents established communications systems to keep board members informed of district activities and other issues important to them as representatives of the community. The data in this study show that there were formal and informal communications structures for conveying information to the school board.

Superintendent Beta outlined the policies and procedures that were in place during his tenure which outlined how the superintendent and school board members communicated with each other. These formal structures, outlined in school board policy, also addressed issues such as how items would be placed on board agendas, how inquiries from the board would be handled, and specified time frames for responses to those inquiries. Superintendent Beta explained:

The school board had policies in place as to how the superintendent and the board would communicate. There were procedures for how items would be placed on the agenda. There were procedures outlined to follow when there were inquiries from the board; how the inquiries would

be communicated in writing; which items would be deferred to staff...we had a certain amount of time by which we needed to respond. So there were some formal structures in place in terms of how to communicate with the board.

The interview data revealed there were also informal communications structures used by superintendents. The informal structures for communications included phone calls to and meetings with individual board members that sometimes led to lunch or dinner activities.

The superintendents stated that some board members requested increased communication on every issue; other members thought the weekly newsletter was sufficient, and yet others did not want any additional information. Individual school board members had differing opinions regarding the types and frequency of communications.

Superintendent Beta's method of communicating was to share the information requested by one board member with all other board members. He said,

When they hired me I said, you know, if I share information with one board member I'm going to share it with all. And they liked that. So I did what I called the Week In Review with board points of whomever called and asked for information, I'd make a note to remember which board member requested information, and what information was found.

School board members agreed that the Week In Review and the weekly newsletters were the major forms of communication.

Superintendent Beta also said it was important to meet the board members' individual needs and preferences on communication mechanisms. To

accommodate individual needs for communicating, the informal procedures were adapted to board members' individual preferences. Superintendent Beta elaborated by stating that adapting to the board members' individual perspective was considered communication by design, an attempt to foster board support for him as superintendent.

Communication by design was, according to Superintendent Beta, established particularly because he had been hired on a split vote by the school board in April 1999. Superintendent Beta thought it was important to gain support from the minority faction on the school board. Indeed, Superintendent Beta was encouraged by the board president to seek liaisons with board members on the minority faction of the school board. Superintendent Beta said the board president suggested he focus his efforts on courting the minority members on the board. Superintendent Beta stated that the board president told him:

'I would encourage you to spend a lot of time with them [minority faction]; you know, take them to dinner, get to know them, help them out.' You know, and so I did. So there was some communication that was deliberately occurring in an effort to try to gain support from the board minority at the request of the board majority to see if they could move beyond their past problems.

As Superintendent Beta quickly found, communication with the board minority who did not positively vote for his appointment became increasingly difficult regardless of his efforts to bridge the gaps in their understandings.

When asked how the school board members communicated with them, the superintendents said that for the most part--especially when things were going well--the school board let them do their job. Superintendent Alpha said:

For the most part, the board I had [the board who hired him] was probably the best board I ever had. They gave me total support and authority. The first board was the best board I ever had in my career. They were community people; they would speak to the community; they understood the community. That board was fantastic. It was a great relationship...they were totally supportive...they were tremendous. I couldn't ask for a better school board and better supporting system...except for one board member. The one board member that hassled the whole time was totally hypercritical; she would say she was from the community but she never went to a school.

These two scenarios point to the importance of communication in building and sustaining relationships. When school boards supported the superintendent, superintendents thought that all was well in the district and things were moving in a positive direction. However, when superintendents felt boards did not support them, then the boards were considered to not be good school boards.

One of the major issues of miscommunication was the differences of opinion between the school board members and superintendent regarding board members' visibility in the schools. One school board member said:

The superintendent [Alpha] was very adamant about board members not visiting the schools. The problem is that it was only a one way street to certain board members. But I always told him, I'd like to go see this and this at this school, so I could understand the district. I'd always call him [principal] just to say I'd like to see your school just to get an idea what is what you're doing and that's how I did it.

This board member's perspective was that he, as an individual board member, was not being treated fairly. This board member interpreted that it was

permissible for some board members to visit some schools, but it was not permissible for others to do the same. Lack of clarity of purpose led to misunderstandings and misinterpretation of the other person's intent.

Although miscommunication was an issue, the more important issue was the lack of trust created by it. Miscommunication also hindered clarity on the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and those of the school board members.

The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship were conflict, change, and lack of trust. Each of the dynamics was under-girded by politics and political power, particularly the board members and superintendent's view of the politics of the election process and of the role and responsibilities of each. The dynamics were also influenced by the superintendent's leadership and communication styles.

Research Question 2

The second question in this research study was: How do district principals perceive the effects of school board/superintendent relationship on their performance as they seek to enhance student achievement? District principals perceived politics and political power, conflict, change, lack of trust, the superintendents' leadership style which included the establishment of a strong belief system reinforced by empowerment and support affected their performance as they sought to enhance student achievement.

Politics and Political Power

The dynamics of politics and political power between the school board and the superintendent affected principals as they sought to enhance student achievement. Principals perceived that being elected from single-member districts naturally pitted school board members against each other and onto opposing sides. They perceived that when decisions were made at the school board level, the members vied for those items that impacted the particular geographical area which they represented.

One principal interviewed said,

The board was very competitive with each other and there were more bond projects in their area and they were either thinking if [their school] is going to get that, then [my school] wants it too. If you're going to get a new gym in your area then...you know, it goes on and on.

Another principal confirmed by saying,

That's the downside of single-member districts. It's the 'my schools, my area' type of thinking. I am sure it [play for political power] did impact instruction. It impacted a lot of things. It impacted who would be hired in certain places. One superintendent had and used the power to hire and fire. However, the board removed that authority from ensuing superintendents.

During interviews with the principals, several comments were related to the power and politics of being on the school board. In one principal's view, "It became a real power struggle of everybody's getting something and some schools getting a lot more." Another principal said, "Whatever faction was stronger, that's where things were beginning to get done." Still another principal

believed, “We had several very strong board members that had personal agendas and it deteriorated from there.”

Principals perceived problems began when school board members’ personal agendas collided and were in conflict. “I think that what the district’s problems were...personal agendas that were so opposite of each other; we had conflict”. And under conflicting circumstances, the principal continued, “it really does not matter what is good for the district. They’re going to do whatever they want...I just lost a lot of faith in school boards, period.” Still, another principal said, “Back then there were a lot of personal agendas.”

Principals knew at least some board members had specific agendas. One principal said, “When a minority of the board did not approve of the superintendent, somehow things began to change. [Board member’s] campaign was that he was going to come on board and get rid of him [Superintendent Alpha].”

Indeed, one principal corroborated the impact of board members’ political power. The principal said,

Toward the end of [Superintendent Alpha’s] tenure, I think what I saw is that relationship become much more political. Prior to that, was a board that worked along side the superintendent to help the district move forward. Well, the minority [on the board] had favored [Superintendent Alpha] and the majority got rid of him. Then the majority got [Superintendent Beta] and the minority didn’t like him. Then it [being named superintendent] became highly politicized and the people who occupied the superintendency thereafter understood that the position is political.

The push for political power at the school board/superintendent level was most evident when some board members attempted to get involved in pressing for administrative changes, especially at the individual schools located within particular board member's single-member district. Board members' involvement in administration changes was involvement in the day-to-day management of the district which principals asserted should be the superintendent's responsibility.

Yet, principals understood the school board members' involvement and attributed the involvement to being elected, thereby making theirs a political position. Board members involvement in pressing for administrative changes led principals' to become actively involved the political process. Principals felt the impact of the school board/superintendent relationship on their performance at their school. As a result of the politics of the school board, principals said some of them, as individuals, got involved in school board campaigns and the election process.

Principals recalled their involvement in school board elections. One principal said, "I remember getting our [school] community to vote one way for board members and it was really tenuous. Could we do this, could we not do this? I mean there was a lot of political activity going on."

Another principal elaborated on the outcomes of the involvement in the political process and said,

If you were an individual who truly supported [Superintendent Alpha], you made yourself a moving target and so you know, I was extremely cautious at that time and many, many people were, because basically,

anybody that had anything to do with him [Superintendent Alpha] or if they had a lot of authority under him, one by one, they've been removed from their positions.

There were clear disadvantages to principals' involvement in the politics of the school board elections. On the down side of involvement in politics, a principal said,

Others warned me about my involvement in the campaign; that there were a couple of members on the board that were displeased at my activity. I was told to be careful. They [school board] were impeding our rights as citizens to become involved, if that were our choice to do on our own time.

Still, describing the involvement in the politics of school board elections, another principal added,

I was very much caught in the political thing because I was a principal at a school which was in [a certain board member's] district and that board member never wanted me there. I was not the person the board member wanted.

The struggle between the school board and the superintendent and the politics and political power affected the principals. Principals perceived the political nature of their positions gave school board members the power to push for particular administrative appointments. This very real perception led principals to get actively involved in the political process regardless of the downside. One very real downside was conflict.

Conflict

Principals perceived there was conflict in the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. However, principals did not see an immediate effect of the conflict on their individual performance as they sought to improve student performance.

Principals called the conflicting times between the school board members and the superintendent relationship turbulent. One principal described the relationship:

Yes, I would say it [school board/superintendent relationship] was turbulent...divided, although I really was not aware of all the relationship...It never seemed like they were, you know, all on the same team. There were factions, but one superintendent was much more prone to please the board, but he was still unable to bring them together.

Using almost exactly the same words, another principal said,

It was really always a tumultuous relationship. As long as the superintendent has the majority of the board, then, he pretty much ruled, even though there were some members that openly disliked him and they were very vocal at that time.

Conflict between the school board and the superintendent invariably led to changes that most affected principals.

Change

The tenor of the working relationship between the school board and the superintendent changed when new school board members were elected. Changes in school board membership usually changed the majority faction on the school

board. The school board majority then made changes in who served as superintendent. Change became evident to school principals who were most impacted by changes in the administrative structure. One principal described the situation:

It's just that we've been through so many interims and so many superintendents, you know. You have to build a trust factor with people. I think just about the time that we think, okay, I know this person, they're gone. And so then we have to start learning someone else's expectations and personality. Just about the point when we get to know that one, they're gone and so now here we are again.

Principals perceived administrative changes were significantly determined by whether or not the superintendent had total authority in the hiring process and in the assignment of personnel, particularly principals. Principals agreed there was a distinct difference between making administrative changes for improvement and making changes without any reasonable rationale. One principal said change was inevitable, "Isn't that what superintendents do? They move principals and they change the central office structure."

Another principal espoused saying, "...change can be good, but it needs to be very purposeful and needs to be handled in a direct, open sort of way." Regardless, principals understood that change should be made by the superintendent and in the best interest of the district; not because the changes were requested or expected by individual school board members.

One principal's experience on administrative changes initiated by a particular board member was substantiated during Superintendent Beta's

interview. Superintendent Beta said when he came to the district, he thought he too could make a difference. He said,

I'll make it better. I really believed that. Then when I wouldn't do what they [board members] wanted, a board member came in and demanded that I fire all the people that I had hired in the entire cabinet. I told him, 'I can't do that, and you want me to hire your friend as a principal. Then it started going sideways.

This single statement by one superintendent validates the principals' concerns regarding administrative changes made at the urging of individual board members.

Principals verified that change and fear of the unknown within the school district was exacerbated by a lack of trust, especially regarding a change in superintendent, the appointment of whom only added to the uncertainty. One principal said, "If I have a real issue or concern with something, I have problems expressing it. I don't know what the ramifications from that will be." Another principal added, "When we had these changes, when a new board is elected, when we have a new superintendent, and a new interim superintendent, we go back to the drawing board and we start at square one again."

Not all changes were perceived as being unwarranted. Superintendent Alpha made changes to the organizational structure that provided continued support for the principals' autonomy and responsibilities. Superintendent Alpha commended the principals for the job they did to improve student performance in academics. Superintendent Alpha explained:

I did make changes and I had some very good principals. My principals were the best in the country. I was not going to micromanage them. They had to manage their own schools and I only held them responsible for the results. There was a license to do what you had to do to accomplish certain results. The results were fairly well spelled out...through TAAS.

Administrative changes, perceived or real, affected principals. Principals knew change was inevitable as superintendents changed along with the changing faces on the school board. Lack of trust emerged as a result of this change.

Lack of Trust

A principal noted that during the changes in superintendents, trust became a major issue in the professional relationship between the principals and superintendents, as well among the principals themselves. A principal said, “I wasn’t trusting at all in what was going on; secrecy led to a lot of suspicion. Trust takes a long time to build up and it can really be destroyed on one fell swoop.”

A major cause for the principals’ erosion of trust during Superintendent Beta’s tenure was the perceived lack of communication with principals, and the hiring process used when filling vacant positions. One of the reasons for the lack of trust was the principal’s notion that the superintendent’s communication with them was limited, and they had little knowledge of what was happening at the school board level.

Principals noted that Superintendent Beta made administrative changes which principals thought were being done at school board members' urging. Principals also recognized that many people hired during this time period were from outside the district. Principals stated that hiring staff in critical positions from outside the district gave them a powerful message. Principals perceived that Superintendent Beta was making changes in administrative appointments and other decisions based on a directive from individual board members rather than with the board as a governance team. One principal said, "It was really a lack of trust issue; that the district did not have qualified, worthy applicants".

As an example, principals cited positions that were not open to prospective internal candidates nor advertised as vacant positions. To substantiate this, another principal said,

When Superintendent Beta came in, he brought some of his own people when he first got here. He started bringing in others; I don't know...it creates an atmosphere of suspicion. It seems as though he didn't trust many people in the district. And when he came in he started bringing people from the outside and we were not used to that.

Still another principal said, "I don't think he [Superintendent Beta] respected the responsibilities we had and maybe a better word, he didn't trust us for whatever reason".

Changes and instability in the position of superintendents created what one principal called "a lack of accountability". Principals thought they needed to be held accountable by the superintendent; however, they also understood accountability could not happen if the superintendent did not have the necessary

support from the board. At least one principal thought the instability at the board level was so obvious that no one wanted to take a stand or position on difficult issues.

The lack of accountability could be a reason that principals corroborated the board members' perception of Superintendent Beta being too lenient. The board members' opinion that Superintendent Beta was too lenient and not forceful enough was confirmed by one principal's comment:

He [Superintendent Beta] didn't stand firm and say, 'I'm not going to do that.' I mean, you know, I think you, as a superintendent, have to sometimes just say, 'I'm sorry, I can't do it that way'.

Another principal added, "He [Superintendent Beta] lost a lot of respect among the campus administrators in the matter in which he did that [make administrative changes]. But I think he was told to do it".

Superintendent's Leadership Style

Principals agreed that the school board/superintendent relationship was affected by the superintendent's leadership style. Additionally, the superintendent's leadership style highly influenced the principals' performance as they sought to enhance student achievement on their campuses. Two sub-themes connected to the superintendent's leadership style deserve mention: The established belief system, and empowerment and support. The superintendent's level of authority and responsibility mandated by the school board was directly related to, and also influenced, the principals' performance.

Referring to the importance of the superintendent's leadership style, a principal said Superintendent Alpha learned to manipulate the board. The principal elaborated, "He manipulated and antagonized. It's a quality in leadership; it may not be your style or mine, but it was his style. He was not a dictator, but he enjoyed the fight."

In explaining Superintendent Alpha's leadership style, another principal added,

He always did what he felt was right no matter what the ramifications were. Number one, financially, obviously he could afford to do that. Many of us don't have that luxury. But number two, he did it without fear and he did what was right and he didn't worry about the dual role of pleasing the community and administrators.

Yet another principal added that Superintendent Alpha "was not intimidated by the board."

Principals noted the impact of Superintendent Alpha's leadership style on the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. One principal recalled:

His [Superintendent Alpha] attitude was 'I'm the boss' and you allow me to do it or I'm leaving; that's just a little too hard a line. It does matter and you do have to be relational with the school board and you do have to try to work both sides to create the whole.

Principals also perceived that teachers saw Superintendent Alpha's personality as "very abrasive". In explaining the perception of abrasiveness, a principal said it was tied to people not liking to hear the truth. The strained relationship between the superintendent and the teachers' organizations impelled

the group to get involved in politics. The principal further explained that Superintendent Alpha was honest and not afraid to speak the truth to anyone, including the board. Principals thought it did not matter whether or not board members liked you on a personal level. However, principals also said it was important to respect on a professional level those for whom they worked. Principals contended the real measure was what the action did for children.

In a focus group interview, the principals agreed that one aspect about being an effective leader Superintendent Alpha never seemed to learn was “to get a good relationship with his board”.

One principal questioned, “How important is the relationship between the superintendent and board? I think, I mean, it’s critical”. Another principal quickly added, “Where the superintendent is not looking at building that relationship with his board, you’re going to see what we’ve seen over time”. And what these principals have seen over time, at least in the seven year time span of this study, was a continuous change in superintendents with brief tenures.

In contrast to Superintendent Alpha, principals saw Superintendent Beta as having a completely different leadership style. One principal described his perception of Superintendent Beta’s leadership style:

His style was more for...’ make me look good so I can get out of here with as much as I can take from this district’...as opposed to ‘I’m here for the needs of the kids’.

Another principal said, “He [Superintendent Beta] never had the opportunity to show his leadership. He never did. It just wasn’t there.”

Yet another principal said,

Some superintendents come in and they've got preconceived ideas about what really works, and let me bring this to you. That was kind of the (Superintendent Beta) approach. The mentality that he took, I perceived with him was, you people don't know what the hell you're talking about or what you're doing.

Another principal added:

But our perception about him was 'you don't know what you're talking about. And you're not supporting us and we're the ones with the kids'.

Regardless of the principals' perceptions about the superintendent's leadership style, principals understood that the relationship between the school board and the superintendent was an important one. Principals realized that without a unified board, political factions would emerge, and those factions would ultimately impact instruction quality and student achievement at their schools. One principal said, "It did affect instruction...it affected decisions being made for kids and politics seemed to be center stage".

The Establishment of a Belief System

Principals credited Superintendent Alpha for establishing the district's vision and setting the course for their work based on a strong belief system grounded in the conviction that all children can learn and achieve regardless of their economic status or ethnicity. In a group interview one principal said,

He [Superintendent Alpha] set the standard from the beginning. But he expected results--the responsibility and the freedom, but with that accountability tied into it. So we knew. We worked our tails off.

Another principal quickly added, “And there was a lot of stability in the administration; campus-level administration. I mean, there were some changes, but not like now”.

All principals interviewed stated very clearly that the belief system and their individual role and commitment to the success of all children sustained them through the turbulent times in the district. One principal summarized:

He [Superintendent Alpha] came in and told us--and to this day I say it--there are no excuses. He said to us, ‘you know, all students are going to perform well and that is our goal.’...Those were his expectations--we are all going to achieve whether we’re low income, whether we’re Hispanic, whether, you know, depending on the area you live, because I think at that point, you know, it was, if you live in this area, the kids are supposed to perform well, they are in a higher income area, their parents both work or they have a college degree or it might be ‘pobrecitos’, the ones that live in the lower valley. He said, ‘No, and I’m not going to accept any excuses’ for any kid.

Principals attributed the district’s belief system to Superintendent Alpha who expected them to act on that belief. A principal said, “He set the bar, and then he also gave us support, and no other superintendent has done that.” Another principal added, “We’re empowered with site-based management, and I think if we can maintain as much of that as we can, we know what we have to do...to pursue those programmatic instruction.”

A principal verbalized that belief system as, “We are to take all kids, no matter what and work with them”. The belief system conveyed the idea that the school system is for all students regardless of the background from which they come. Principals did not accept excuses for students who did not perform well

academically. Poverty was not an excuse, language was not an excuse, the home environment was not an excuse, and neither was the neighborhood in which students lived. Principals were encouraged to question the status quo and, as one principal said, “encourage creativity.” As another principal so eloquently said,

In my opinion, we have a moral obligation, because our children have three strikes against them. They come from poverty. They come from minority backgrounds. And they come from a lack of experiential background in social skills. So, we’re it.

Another principal said, “I think I felt that someone believed in what I could do as a principal when we first started our journey. And that belief system is still there.”

Principals explained how the belief system kept them focused on their roles, which they saw as critical to the success of their students. One principal said, “It always goes back to what you believe; the fundamental belief that it’s about children. And if that’s not why we’re here, then it’s time to move on.”

Empowerment and Support

Empowerment and support surfaced as the other subtheme of a superintendent’s leadership style that most affected principals as they sought to improve student achievement on their campus. Although principals felt that the school board/superintendent relationship affected them in various ways, all principals, without exception, were unanimous in their agreement that empowerment and support were critical elements to their jobs as principals. All

of the principals interviewed said Superintendent Alpha was a good leader, that he cared for kids, but most importantly, he empowered the principals to become leaders as well.

Board members also corroborated the principals' views that the empowerment and support bestowed on the principals by the superintendent had a positive impact on them. The principals' perceptions were that the swing of control from the central office to the school level in local decision making was an enormous change in the district's culture and to the standard responsibilities of the central office staff.

Major decisions affecting the schools had been the responsibility of the central office. As part of the reorganization under the leadership of Superintendent Alpha, those decisions were transferred to the school level. A principal confirmed this and said, "We had strong leadership that the superintendent made sure occurred at the campus level".

One principal said, "It bothered central office, because the money was at central and now the money was sent to the schools. It was diverted to the schools. There was more decision-making on our school."

A school board member also agreed with the principal's view and said, "Principals were king—they were empowered by the superintendent through site-based decision making, and there was less control from the central office".

How much authority the school board gave the superintendent was dependent upon whether or not the majority of the school board members were in

favor of the superintendent during that particular time. When the majority of the school board members were not in sync with the superintendent, board members tended to get more involved in administrative matters than under other circumstances.

The autonomy and responsibility transferred to the schools in the name of site-based decision making meant principals made decisions based on what they thought was best for their schools and the individual students. The principals had decisions and choices to make as they sought to enhance student achievement on their campuses.

Principals cited the following decision points as impacting their school's achievement: flexible scheduling, extended days for teachers and students, the number of teachers hired, staff development, consultants, Saturday summer school, and tutoring. The idea, the principals said, was to make decisions based on individual school needs versus what the district wanted to do. Principals asserted that a one size fits all philosophy did not work in this district. A principal said, "It's based on school needs versus trying to fit something into all schools which will not work...I think that was a key to success". However, principals were quick to point that without the superintendent's support, they would not have been as successful. The authority the school board gave the superintendent directly impacted the principals' performance at their schools. The superintendents' authority was directly linked to the relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

Principals interviewed echoed that, as a group of professionals, they were “loyal principals, not just because the superintendent [Superintendent Alpha] supported us, but because he listened”. Another principal described her experience:

I remember we, as a campus, struggled for our scores...we struggled for--you know, and he would tell me, he would talk to me. He was hard on me, but I respected the fact that he would listen, to you know, issues that I was working towards. A plan that was just not working...just having a difficult time climbing up but of course, he wasn't happy when, you know, the results came in differently, but with me, that's the way he would talk to me. You know this is the way he was going to be, direct.

Superintendent Alpha held principals accountable, but gave them the autonomy and responsibility necessary to accomplish their work. Another principal said,

We took twenty steps forward as principals because [Superintendent Alpha's] style let us be...he would tell our group, ‘nobody tells a principal; no one but me’...we had power. And with that power and responsibility transferred to the campus, there was a focus on instruction, because with the money came accountability for us to produce.

Additionally, another principal said, “He backed us up; he took us at our word. I mean we were truly treated as intelligent professionals who knew what they were doing, and then he got out of the way and let us do it”.

Again and again every principal interviewed said that trust, empowerment and support to make decisions at the school level instituted during Superintendent Alpha's tenure made their school, and therefore, the district successful. There were many quotes and phrases from various principals that verified their faith in the critical importance of empowerment and support.

One principal thought, “He [Superintendent Alpha] really believes we can do this, so I guess we can. I can pass this belief system on”. Another added, “He made the principals and administrators...he built us up on a pedestal. We could do no wrong”. Still another principal said, “We knew we had the superintendent’s support to do what needed to get done to ensure that all kids are successful”.

One principal summarized the impact of empowerment best:

I think everybody wants to hear, especially from your superintendent, what a wonderful person you are; a professional. If you did something wrong, he would get after you, almost like a father figure. But his praise was very much valued. To receive that praise, all you had to do was keep your school running well and keep your scores up. A lot of different principals were using a lot of different methods, but I think that is really what sustained the district. We were riding that high wave and thinking very highly of ourselves.

Although principals relied heavily on the empowerment and support from the superintendent, they also understood that the roles and responsibilities impacted their jobs.

Roles and Responsibilities

Principals understood the critical relationship between the school board and the superintendent, and that an understanding of the separation of the roles and responsibilities of each had to be in place. Principals thought that without clear and delineated roles, the school board tended to get involved in matters which should be the superintendent’s responsibility. One principal surmised,

“The superintendent works for the Board, but I think there needs to be mutual respect and relationship between them, and the Board needs to know what their role is”.

Another principal expounded,

It then becomes the job of the superintendent to keep school board members away from us; it becomes his job then, to focus on bigger issues...what they [board members] are supposed to be doing. They're not supposed to be micromanaging.

Still another principal elaborated:

I think that's when the superintendent [Beta] lost it. He allowed them [board members] to come into the schools; therefore, he couldn't pull them back, you know...and their interference was enormous because he lost control. Well, he never had it.

Principals attributed the lack of defined roles and responsibilities for the school board as the responsibility of the superintendent. The principals asserted it was the superintendent's job to remind the board of their role lest they overstep their boundaries. One principal surmised:

If a superintendent does not communicate with the board members...that they are not supposed to go to your campus and ask questions and things like that, it may lead to disruption in the schools.

Principals saw that when the school board did not provide the superintendents with the authority to make personnel decisions, including the right to hire or fire, the board appeared to become involved in administrative changes. One principal described a personal experience:

I got called in by [Interim Superintendent C] and was told that I was being transferred to another school. I of course wanted to know why and there was no reason given except that it was for the good of the district.

And how could it be for the good of the district? My school was more successful and I had only been there at the end of my first year.

When [Interim superintendent C] was named, one principal said,

Everybody said, 'I can't believe they [the school board] did that.' I happened to be there [at the board meeting] that night; it was quite a night. There was a lot of politics going on and I can only tell you, it was rumored that one of the board members did not like the principal at a particular school and wanted to get rid of that principal. That principal was a successful person but they wanted to move her...they wanted to move her someplace where it wouldn't seem like the move was so bad.

Although principals believed their role as the campus leader was most essential to the success of their school, they also agreed the relationship between the school board and the superintendent did not immediately impact their performance as they tried to improve student achievement. Primarily, principals saw their roles as critical to the management of their schools. The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship focused on politics and political power. At the school board level, the dynamics which impacted principals' performance were conflict, lack of trust, and respective roles and responsibilities. One caveat to their role was the importance of the superintendent's support for them. It was the superintendents' leadership style that unequivocally affected the principals' performance the most.

Research Question 3

The third research question was: How do the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship influence the academic achievement of its students?

The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship did not have an immediate influence on the academic achievement of its students. During the time span of the study, testing data indicated a consistent and steady rise in student achievement; yet in the last thirty-two months of this study, there were four different individuals in the superintendent's position and a great deal of turmoil at the school board level. As the researcher sought answers to this question, several themes emerged: the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, the role of the principal, the belief system, and politics and political power.

The Relationship Between the School Board and the Superintendent

Principals perceived that the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship did not have an immediate impact on them or their schools. During the time span of this study the data corroborated the principals' perceptions that the school board/superintendent relationship did not impact student achievement. On the contrary, as the district data indicated, there was a steady rise in student achievement as measured by the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. During

interviews, principals made many comments regarding the school board's role in influencing student academic achievement. One principal said:

It didn't impact it, wouldn't you say? Because the principals were very focused on our vision that we know all our kids had to be successful. They [teachers] were kind of sheltered from that [school board/superintendent turmoil]. We didn't bring it up at meetings or anything. We just kept going, doing the curriculum. But for how long can you keep doing that with that [school board/superintendent turmoil] going on? We didn't even deal with that. We dealt with what we had to do on our campus.

Principals protected their 'little world' from the turbulence and instability of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. Principals felt strongly that the schools were their personal responsibility, and they would do whatever they could to stay the course.

In one particular interview several principals addressed the correlation between the school board/superintendent relationship and the academic achievement on their campuses. One principal said:

There is no association between the relationship of the school board with the superintendent and achievement because the achievement went on in spite of poor relations under the different administrations.

A second principal stated, "I don't think it [school board/superintendent relationship] influenced it at all".

Additionally, another principal said, "It didn't. We learned to tune it out".

Still another principal added this perspective:

It's a miracle that we've done as well as we have given the turmoil at the top. And I think that's why our district has remained as so; because we

have been professional and we have set those expectations, and regardless of what's going on, we remain as we should--loyal and focused.

Yet another principal added,

I'll share what I've had and it's wonderful. [Superintendent Alpha] set those standards and we really internalized them and then we...it rolled on down to our teachers. For me, it's taking an even greater turn because the collaborative did it...it [the collaborative] came in with [Superintendent Alpha] or just about the same time....

These comments point to the principals' overwhelming agreement that school board/superintendent relationship had little or no influence on the academic achievement of the individual schools. A principal summarized:

The decisions that were made or not made did not impact us at the campus level. It was pretty much business as usual....I haven't been not allowed to do anything that I wanted to do or been asked to do anything that I could not work around in some way with any of them. And so it just kind of, well, you know, in fact, we used to joke, it doesn't matter who is the superintendent...we just do; we come to school every day, we do school.

The Role of the Principal

Principals strongly believed their roles and leadership on their campuses were critical to the attainment of improved student performance. One principal said, "It goes back to the fact that we're here for a greater purpose than the board and the superintendent. Yes, they provide the direction and guide us, but we know...." Another principal finished the sentence by adding, "Yeah, we know that our greater purpose is to serve and ensure that these children are ready for the world out there. And if we don't have those barriers put up, then we're okay."

In one focus group interview, three principals discussed how they remained focused on their responsibility at the campus. The first principal said:

So I think now with our teachers, mine has always been, you know, we're here for the students and we're going to remain focused regardless of what's going on [with the board and the superintendent] and I think that's the way we've all gotten through.

The second principal explained:

I think that's how we made it through. The past few years is that we kind of retreated back to our campuses and ...and we remained focused with those objectives and held those expectations for our teachers. I think we're all very professional and through all the turmoil, we've always been supportive of our Superintendent because that is the professional thing.

The third principal added:

And in some way, I've trained my staff right. You know, we often have that tendency, you know, to go and make derogatory comments. And it's an us-against-them type of thing and I speak to my staff constantly about never doing that. And if I ever become aware of it, I will show you the door because those are the individuals who sign our checks. We do owe them our respect, professionally and having our self-integrity. If you feel that strongly, then you're the one that should leave.

Principals said that sharing the leadership role at the campus was also a key to enhancing their role in increasing student achievement. A principal said:

That leadership role has to be spread through out the school; it can't just be me. As I was saying, top down doesn't work all the time, but sometimes things do; these are the nonnegotiable. Kids will all be successful. The question is, 'how can I best utilize the resources to serve my students' needs?'

In further explaining the principals' role, a principal said, "We set the pace. We set the expectation. They [school board and superintendent] need to

let us do for the students”. Remembering the principals’ goals to improve student performance regardless of the local situation, a principal recalled:

I remember a retreat that we had and I remember [Superintendent Alpha] talking to us about, you know, you’re important people...we’re doing very well within our test scores, but you need to understand that if we work together and unite together that is just very important because, you know, that’s going to display power in you as a group. There’s going to be...I don’t know that he was necessarily talking about boards, but he said there’s going to be a lot of people trying to bring the district down.

In reference to the politics being played out, one principal said,

I’ve never been political; I know how to run a school and how to build student success. The philosophy of success within the school, the positive learning climate and all those things made my school very successful, the most successful middle school in the district, as a matter of fact. And I tried very hard to insulate the teachers and myself from what was going on with the board. I never mentioned it to them in the meetings. It was never a topic of discussion; it just never entered into our little world.

Another principal explained how student achievement increased under these conditions. The principal said,

So we just fended for ourselves, and incredibly, we had some of the highest scores we ever achieved with no leadership. The campus level achievement seemed to be there.

Still another principal concurred,

It [campus leadership and student achievement] was very solid and it continued to, you know, grow into one of the biggest increases was during the time when we had no leadership.

The principals were in agreement that the role they played was the absolute key to increased student achievement. A principal said,

We know what to do and how. We’ll go forward again, but in the bad years like with [Superintendent Beta] and the board, as bad as it got ...we

grew. Our scores went up. Our scores continued to climb up. You know, schools just handled it. We were strong principals.

One principal summarized their role in increasing student achievement best:

We do it in spite of them [school board and superintendent], and that's because I think in the bad years when we were going through [all the superintendents], I mean, not that it was bad, but I'm saying all this turmoil was going on. We had been given the authority by [Superintendent Alpha] and we had three to four years under our belt to manage on our own. We continued that momentum. So in spite of what was going on with the board and the superintendent and all the interims in between, we continued to shine. We continued to move....To me, all of these were sidetracked because the conversation in the board was more about--it was about politics, and it was about awarding [contracts].

The Belief System

The authority and responsibility given to the principals was embodied in a belief system embraced by all administrators. In this district Superintendent Alpha is given credit for establishing the district's vision and values in terms of a belief system that espoused equality for all students. The belief system began with Superintendent Alpha's tenure in 1993 as he began to systematically alter the mind-set of low expectations for students who were minority or economically disadvantaged, and in some cases, both. The belief system kept the principals focused on their charge.

One of the contributing factors for Superintendent Alpha's interest in and acceptance of the superintendent position in this district was to prove that an

entire school system could change its culture of underachievement with minority and poor children. As verification, Superintendent Alpha said,

I tried to address the major items and the belief system that we needed to embrace more than anything else. I constantly dealt with very large ideas and beliefs as a way of communicating those beliefs.

Superintendent Alpha said that in order to establish the culture of support and empowerment, he “depended greatly on strong principals.” A principal confirmed Superintendent Alpha’s comments when he said, “Support for principals was unequivocal.” Principals were given the autonomy and responsibility to implement programs and initiatives on their campuses as long as they were successful.

Another principal further explained the autonomy and responsibility principals shouldered:

We could implement model programs. Everyone did it a little differently, but I think it was that autonomy and the power to put in place whatever they wanted. They had enough money for it.

The principals kept the momentum going in spite of the turmoil between the school board and the superintendent and even among the board members themselves. However, some principals and the superintendents believed such turmoil would eventually impact student performance and achievement in a negative way. Primarily, the campus leadership needed the continued support of the superintendent, who may not have been able to focus on the direction of the district because his focus was required to be on the relationship with the school board.

Explaining the impact of the turmoil between the school board and superintendent on the campuses, one principal said,

So again, I think it's just the leadership at the campuses. But a lot of them [principals] are leaving and those coming in, do they have the same focus, determination, and belief system, or hey, nobody cares?

The turnover of campus-level administrators can be directly tied to politics and political power and the struggles between the school board and the superintendent.

Politics and Political Power

The dynamics of politics and political power between the school board and superintendent was most evident and affected principals mostly when school board members pressed the superintendent for administrative changes, especially at the individual schools located within a particular board member's single-member district. Principals viewed changes to the administrative structure as the superintendent's responsibility. Principals attributed board members' involvement to their being elected, thereby making their positions political.

Principals reported that the times when school board members did not understand or adhere to their specific roles and responsibilities was when they most felt the impact of the school board/superintendent relationship on their performance at their school. Their lack of understanding of their roles and responsibilities led them to get involved in administrative matters; therefore,

principals were inclined to state that they, as individuals, got involved in school board campaigns and in the election process.

The most tumultuous times occurred when school board membership changed and when new superintendents were named. It was during these difficult times, along with the changes in superintendents that the principals retreated and turned to each other for support. Principals sensed that the superintendents were in survival mode. The principals said the tenuous situation between the school board and superintendent forced the superintendent to focus on them rather than the district and its direction. The turmoil led principals, as one principal stated, "...to keep a low profile, stay on campus, and don't get involved."

During a focus group interview session one principal said, "That's when we backed into our own campus and said, 'forget the outside world; we're staying here within our own safety net'". Another principal added, "You didn't speak to anyone about anything. It was horrendous." The last principal summarized:

That's why we retreated. I think we have a greater obligation than the superintendent; it goes back to our fundamental beliefs of why we came in here. I think there's always going to be road blocks and barriers and it's just ...doing what's best for kids.

Still another principal explained how they survived the politics and political power:

We joined together, you know, we built contracts together. You know, we did that ourselves. We didn't do that because [Superintendent Beta]

was there or the board was telling us. They [school board and superintendent] had their own fight going on and the schools continued. So in spite of what was going on, I think that's why otherwise we'd be in the gutter right now and yes, we're a little bit low but I think we've kind of rested on our laurels and that's all it was. I don't think it's because we made it a terrible turnaround.

The principals' focus was on their individual schools, their faculty and staff. Even Superintendent Beta said that being held accountable for student results forced the principals to "stay the course and not be distracted by the dysfunctional board behavior." Principals believed their empowerment and accountability was instrumental in the continuation of their schools' success even through the turbulent years.

Referring to the perceived detrimental influence of the school board and the superintendent relationship and the continued changes in superintendents, a principal said,

Yes, at some point, I'm sure it [school board- superintendent relationship] would be, because the principals were probably not going to obtain the level of autonomy that they had for very long without [Superintendent Alpha]. And so I think eventually it [gains in student achievement] would have slowly eroded.

Another principal described a different situation:

Things got pretty loose there under [Superintendent Beta] because, like I said, there was a level of suspicion there...a high level of suspicion and he didn't really give us the reinforcement or the accolades that we were used to, and the principals' meetings were just more of the same. They didn't have the same rejuvenating impact that they had had and I think that was probably the beginning of the end, actually.

Principals perceived there was no immediate effect of the school board/superintendent relationship on their performance as they sought to improve

student achievement. During the years of turmoil, principals depended on each other for support and refocused their efforts on their students and individual schools.. They relied on the belief system that had been established during Superintendent Alpha's tenure. In fact, principals believed schools continued to experience an improvement in student achievement in spite of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent, which was focused on politics, political power, change and conflict instead of students.

With the changes on the school boards and the changes in superintendents, principals agreed that the catalyst for moving student achievement forward might fade from focus. Principals also agreed that many of their peer principals had left the district, leaving a void among the new personnel who were not familiar with the belief system that principals said sustained them through the seven years of the study.

One principal said, "There is now a lack of direction in terms of 'you've got to do it this way'." Another added, "We stayed with that same vision that was set before, because nobody's changed it since."

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Studies claim that a positive and effective working relationship between a school board and a superintendent is necessary for the district and its schools to improve student performance. While a collaborative relationship is a desirable element, not all school board/superintendent leadership and teamwork relationships can be described as such. School districts, particularly urban school districts with many low-income and minority students, and which also attain high academic achievement without strong school board/superintendent relationships, deserved researcher attention.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on the academic achievement in one Texas school district that serves high-poverty, majority-minority students.

The research questions posed in this case study were:

1. What are the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as perceived by the superintendent and the board members?

2. How do district principals perceive the effects of school board/superintendent relationships on their performance as they seek to improve student achievement?
3. How do the dynamics of the school board-relationship influence the academic achievement of its students?

To accomplish this research, the methodology used was a qualitative case study, using the researcher as the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data. The case study was not a methodological choice, but a study of a selected Texas school district. This was an intrinsic case study and drew attention to the question of what can be learned from this single case. The school district selected for this study was a district that historically experienced problematic school board/superintendent relationships; yet the district achieved recognized status as rated by the Texas Accountability System.

This research study used qualitative analysis of data drawn primarily from semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample, observations, and analysis of documents. To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, triangulation procedures were used to gather data and to explain procedural challenges. The strength of using the case study method was to capture the complexities of a single case.

This single case study was indeed complex. The researcher found a strong indication of the constructive perspective. The people involved in this

study constructed their own reality based on their personal and individualistic perception of truths and beliefs.

Summary of Findings

The research study sought to answer three questions posed at the beginning of the study. The following is a brief summary of the findings..

The Dynamics of the School Board and Superintendent Relationship

The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship were centered on the psychological aspects and the conduct of interpersonal relationships. The dynamics of the relationship as perceived by the superintendents and the school board members differed because each individual was seeing things through his or her own distinct filter. Even so, several dynamics which affected the school board/superintendent relationship were identified by the study participants: (1) politics and political power, (2) conflict, (3) change, (4) lack of trust, (5) superintendent's leadership style, and (6) communication.

The six dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship were greatly intertwined, making it very difficult to isolate one dynamic from the other. Politics and political power were the themes encompassing all the other dynamics in some form or fashion.

In the public school arena, leadership and teamwork are combined to become the governance team, which is comprised of the school board of trustees and the superintendent. The governance team in this study faced many issues that impacted their relationship. Glass, Bjork, & Brunner found that superintendents and school boards viewed the superintendency as a position of political reform and educational advice (2000). Politics and political power were the major factors contributing to the success or failure of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. These factors related directly to the American voters' perception that school boards had the most power to accomplish change in public schools, and that the power for change was influenced by internal and external factors (Deily, 2002).

The internal factors impacting the relationship between the school board and superintendent included the superintendent's leadership style, the authority given the superintendent by the board of trustees to make administrative changes, and the autonomy and responsibility given to the principals via the superintendent's authority. External factors being influenced by political power were demonstrated by the teacher group's involvement in school board elections and conflicts which evolved from external pressure by special interest groups vying for the school board's consideration.

Zeigler's (1985) study found that in school governance, much of the conflict concerned labor disputes and budget reductions rather than planning what students learn. Indeed, this school district's actions, as documented in the

official minutes, corroborate Zeiglers's findings. In this district the major conflicts among the school board members concerned the assignment of administrators to schools within a board member's particular representative area, awarding of contracts to attorneys and architects, and other financial matters. A review of the official minutes of the school board meetings revealed there were limited actions concerning students or student achievement.

The increasing political pressure of special interest groups on school boards has forced school boards to spend most of their time on crisis management (SEDL, 1994). In this study, board members, superintendents and principals substantiated Carter and Cunningham's (1997) study, which found that school board members who represented special interests, pressure groups or distinct geographical areas tended to create board divisiveness and problems in the administration of the district. Indeed, in this district, the board's focus clearly was on special interests and the coalitions of the shifting board majority. There was absolutely no focus on student achievement at the school board/superintendent level, as evidenced by the review of the official school board minutes.

Marshall and Scribner (1991) stated that the mere fact that school boards are elected to serve by the general population make the role of the school board a political one. The IEL (2001) report said the move from trustee to politician seemed to be a factor that affected the conduct of many school board members. The findings in this study validated the results of the studies previously

referenced. School board members who represented single-member districts had great difficulty representing the whole district. The school board members focused mostly on the geographical area from which they were elected.

School board members and superintendents held differing opinions regarding electing representatives from single-member districts. Further, school board members' perspectives of single-member districts differed, even among the board members themselves. Board members blamed single-member districts for some of the politics and political power inherent in board membership. The very nature of being elected to the school board made the position political, and thus the school board became a problem. The broad representation of the district's diverse population was itself an issue of contention among some board members. However, other board members said that without single-member districts, certain areas of the school district would have no representation and no voice.

Superintendents, on the other hand, deemed single-member districts as an advantage for the whole district and for themselves. Single-member districts allowed representation from the entire district, whether rich, poor, minority or non minority. On a personal level, superintendents saw single-member districts as a process that changed the membership on the board over time, which improved their tenure in the school district. The issues that drove school board elections and led to conflict in this district were individual school performance, the hiring of the superintendent, board members' personal agendas and the

influence of special interest groups. These same issues also impacted the school board/superintendent relationship.

Blumburg's (1995) research study found the most critical association in operating a school system was the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. The AASA (2001) report also contended that without collaborative leadership, districts were unlikely to raise student achievement.

The Nestor-Baker Hoy (2001) study supported the hypothesis that building and sustaining board relations was an important, if not primary, function of the superintendent's role. In this research study, school board members and principals agreed that building and sustaining board relationships was a primary role of the superintendent.

In theory, school board/superintendent relationships may be easier to accomplish than in actual practice. Superintendents must be able to build positive relationships with board members who, because of political issues, may not be supportive of them. Superintendents in this district were not able to build positive relationships with newly-elected school board members. This was particularly evident when the new board members aligned themselves with other board members who were not supportive of the superintendent. This one finding related directly to Pringle's (1989) research, which found that building a positive relationship with the school board was a skill most critical to success; not only in being selected (and reelected) as a superintendent, but also in contract renewal.

School board members were perceived by the superintendent as having personal agendas which were not aligned with the district's mission or the superintendent's goals. Indeed, even school board members were distrustful of each other and of the political power plays among them. The circumstances of distrust led to conflict among the school board members and eventually between the school board members and the superintendent. The politics, political power, and competitiveness among the school board members for a greater portion of the district's pie for their geographical area led to conflict, and eventually, to an erosion of trust.

Behavior in real social conflict is dependent upon an array of complex factors. The Nicotera study (Nicotera, et al, 1995) found that individuals more often relied on intuition and hunches rather than well-reasoned and carefully-weighted alternatives. Given the Nicotera theory, it is even more imperative to identify and understand the ongoing political relationships and conflict between a school board and superintendent.

Continuing issues of conflict among the school board members became political fodder, particularly for the teacher organizations that made such issues the driving force in school board elections. Each election invariably changed the membership and the majority-minority representation on the school board. The shifting makeup the school board led to frequent changes in superintendents.

One of the major special interest groups in this district was the teacher organization, which was actively involved in the political process of school

board elections. Blasé's (1998) study of teachers' perceptions of politics indicated that they thought political favoritism was usually a factor in hiring decisions of professional and nonprofessional school personnel. Although Blasé's study dealt with teachers' perceptions, those perceptions match those of the principals in this district of study. Principals were adamant that some school board members were actively involved in administrative personnel decisions affecting their schools. These perceptions were authenticated by the status of the school board/superintendent relationship. Whether or not the superintendent had total authority to make administrative decisions regarding personnel issues was definitely dependent upon the status of the school board/superintendent relationship.

The data in this study revealed that school board members were involved in personnel issues and visited schools for their individual purposes. The data further revealed that the school board's focus was not on students or student achievement as outlined in the district's mission and goals.

The divisiveness on the school board directly affected the superintendents, who found themselves in a political dilemma. According to Cuban (1976), the superintendent's environment is an ever-shifting set of conflicting interests that must be reconciled. Conflicting interests arose due to internal and external factors brought forth by individual board members vying for informal leadership (Blumberg, 1985).

Owen and Ovando (2000) contended that the understanding and control of conflict was essential in sustaining school board relations. In this district, conflict was caused by the internal and external factors outlined earlier. The internal and external factors were what Hoyle (1986) referred to as micro-politics; a focus on special interests and coalitions rather than on the district's mission and goals.

Superintendents were in precarious positions. They were caught between doing what was right for the students, meeting the needs of the district's administrators, and keeping all school board members informed and content.

In order to address the school district's needs, the superintendent must possess leadership skills. One approach that shapes the role of the superintendent according to Johnson (1996) is educational leadership. Educational leadership concerns the district's vision and values. The district's vision and values were established and inculcated into the district's culture, particularly under the leadership of Superintendent Alpha, who had the longest tenure.

Leadership changes at the superintendent level developed into a lack of trust. When the school board majority hired the superintendent, both the school board and the superintendent felt the relationship was going well, because the majority was in control. However, the annual school board elections were instrumental in shifting the school board majority from one to another. Conflict among the school board members and conflict between the majority and the

minority factions as well as the change in district's leadership resulted in a lack of trust.

The lack of trust was perpetuated by the superintendent's leadership style and was exacerbated by the perception that the superintendent was not honest, open, and communicating with all school board members. Alanis' (1989) work confirmed that the lack of trust was the cause of conflict between the school board and the superintendent. In his study, Alanis found that both the superintendent and the school board saw themselves as a working team. However, only the school board members thought that decision making should be a shared responsibility. Hence this one factor--the lack of understanding of respective roles--was one cause of the deterioration of the school board/superintendent relationship.

The superintendent's leadership style also affected the school board members and their relationship with the superintendent. It was abundantly clear that the school board members who were in the majority when the superintendent was hired were also the same board members who agreed with the superintendent's leadership style. Conversely, those minority-faction school board members who did not vote for the superintendent's appointment did not concur with the superintendent's leadership style.

The three leadership approaches that shape the role of the superintendent are educational, political and managerial, according to Johnson (1996). To build and sustain an effective relationship with the school board, superintendents need

to employ and carefully balance each of the leadership styles. To have one leadership style overpower the others may lead to polarization among the school board members. The superintendent's individual personality, tightly associated with his or her leadership style, also greatly influenced the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship.

Communication was an extremely important factor, not only in building a relationship with the school board, but also to maintaining that relationship. Superintendents established systems to facilitate communication with the school board. The findings indicated that regardless of how effective the communication system was, the superintendent's leadership style, personality, and the school board faction that hired the superintendent overrode the intent and purpose of the communication system.

An effective communication system between the board and the superintendent was dependent upon individual personalities as well. This factor was cited in Canada's (1989) study where he found that the personality style of the superintendent was identified by both the superintendent and the board president as a critical factor in dissolving the relationship due to the lack of trust. The findings in this study concurred with Canada's research. Evidence revealed that school board members agreed that the superintendent's leadership style and personality greatly influenced their relationship with the superintendent. If board members agreed with the superintendent, superintendents thought communications were positive.

Villarreal's data (1992) also indicated that school board members who agreed with the superintendent were more likely to adhere to professional standards than those who disagreed with the superintendent. Disagreements between the school board and superintendent caused conflict, and eventually led to an erosion of trust and respect.

The data in this study strongly supports Villarreal's findings. Disagreements between the school board and the superintendent were caused primarily by a lack of trust. In this district, the lack of trust was automatically triggered by the minority faction on the school board. Regardless of the effectiveness of the communications system, the minority faction on the school board had no trust in the superintendent or the school board members of the opposing faction. The political issues and the lack of respect among school board members greatly impacted their relationships with the superintendent. The superintendent became the expendable pawn between the dueling school board factions.

Peterson and Short (2001) state that it is essential for the superintendent to possess interpersonal skills that include the ability to communicate, establish trust and clarify board member's roles. In this district, the superintendents had very distinctive leadership styles. Their leadership styles were dependent in large part on the support they had from the school board and in part on their individual personalities. However, if school board members thought superintendents were not open and honest, trust almost immediately eroded. The

relationship between the school board and superintendent impacted not only the communication between the board and superintendent but also the communication between the superintendent and the principals.

Each of the six dynamics affected the school board/superintendent relationship. Sometimes the dynamics were individual interactions, at other times the dynamics were so interconnected that the identification of a single dynamic was difficult.

Principals' Perceptions of the School Board/Superintendent Relationship on Their Performance as They Sought to Enhance Student Achievement

As principals sought to enhance student achievement, they saw the following dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship as affecting their performance: (1) politics and political power, (2) conflict, (3) change, (4) lack of trust, (5) superintendent's leadership style, (6) establishment of a belief system, (7) empowerment and support, and (8) the role of the principal.

Principals did not believe that the school board/superintendent relationship influenced their performance as they sought to improve student achievement. However, principals did agree that some dynamics influenced how they coped with the effects of the school board/superintendent relationship as they performed their daily duties.

Politics and political power impacted principals in somewhat subtle ways. Principals agreed that superintendents were in precarious leadership and political

positions, but they also agreed it was the superintendent's responsibility to keep the school board members focused on their role as policy makers. Principals maintained that school board members' roles and responsibilities were not as clearly delineated in practice as they were in theory. The responsibility given to the superintendent by the school board depended on the school board majority faction in power at the time the superintendent was hired. The authority given the superintendent by the school board clearly impacted the principals as they performed their duties.

Conflict and change played minor yet important roles in the principals' perception of the school board/superintendent relationship. Although principals were witness to the conflict between the school board and the superintendent, they chose to depend on each other for assistance and support. It was the conflict between the school board and superintendent that led to change. Administrative changes affected principals the most, because change caused a lack of trust between the superintendent and the school board.

In the principals' views, their lack of trust resulted from administrative changes requested by school board members, lack of communication between the superintendent and the principals, and the instability of the superintendent's position.

Providing principals with autonomy and responsibility to operate their schools with accountability for improving student performance is one of the many leadership roles of the superintendent. Goodman and Zimmerman (2000)

said it was the superintendent's role to provide leadership to the entire district. Among the responsibilities listed were overseeing the educational program, taking responsibility for all personnel matters, and developing and supporting district-wide teams of teachers and other staff working to improve teaching and learning.

Principals claimed that the belief system established and engendered throughout the school system by Superintendent Alpha was the sustaining force behind their success. It was the belief system that clearly delineated the principals' role of instructional leader on their campus. The sense of empowerment and support provided the principals with the impetus to continue performing their jobs, even in the midst of turbulence and lack of instructional focus at the school board/superintendent level.

The two most positive aspects of leadership that were clearly communicated by one superintendent were empowerment and support for the principals. The school board, the superintendent and the principals each acknowledged that empowerment and support were clearly the catalysts that helped the principals improve student performance on their campus. Principals saw their roles as instrumental in keeping the focus on raising student achievement. It was clear in this study that the tense relationship between the school board and the superintendent was focused on conflict, politics, and political power, not on the academic achievement of students.

Principals attributed the systematic and incremental increases in student achievement to the belief system and the support and empowerment provided to them by the superintendent. These findings support the research conducted by the Dana Center (2000) which found that positive support was critical to implementing change and being accountable.

It was clear that leadership at the school level was extremely critical to student achievement. Many previous studies have focused on school level leadership, curriculum and assessment, and teacher quality. The results of these studies have shown a direct link to student achievement. Successfully making things happen at the school level is in line with the Datnow and Castellano (2001) study of leadership. The efforts at restructuring were shown to have better results when greater control was given at the school level; again with the supporting argument that teachers and local administrators closest to the students must be in control (Grubb, Yearbook, 1995).

Principals overwhelmingly agreed that the role they played in increasing student achievement in this district came directly from the leadership style of Superintendent Alpha. Principals also agreed it was important for the superintendent to have a leadership style that promoted empowerment, trust, and support, coupled with authority, autonomy and responsibility.

The Influence of the Dynamics of the School Board/superintendent Relationship on Student Academic Achievement

The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship did not have an immediate effect on the academic achievement of the students. This case study identified reasons--perceived or real--of how this district was able to attain student achievement levels unprecedented for the noted student populations, even in light of publicly-documented, unstable school board/superintendent working relationships. Four major themes influenced the academic achievement of the students: (1) the roles and responsibilities of school board members and the superintendent, (2) the role of the principal, (3) the belief system, and (4) politics and political power.

Previous studies identified successful school systems with school boards and superintendents who functioned as a true leadership or governance team. However, prior research was focused on school board/superintendent relationships and politics, not student achievement. The research further stated that if freed from political distractions, the school board and superintendent could work together more effectively to promote high achievement for all students. A recent AASA (2001) governance report indicated that a stable board of trustees whose mission included the welfare and education of all the district's children and a positive working relationship between the school board and the superintendent was necessary to attain high levels of student performance.

Both AASA (2000) and NASB (2001) state that there are three major characteristics that must be in place between the school board and superintendent for a district to see a rise in student achievement. They are: (1) an effective communication system, (2) a building of trust through collaboration and support, and (3) a constant focus on student achievement.

Although communication systems were in place in this district, other factors had an impact on the effective use of the communications systems. The superintendent's leadership style and lack of collaboration between the school board and the superintendent perpetuated the lack of trust and support. Lastly, as evidenced by the official board minutes, there was little focus on student achievement.

The building of trust through collaboration and support was simply not evident. There was a distinct difference in how the superintendent and school board saw their respective roles and responsibilities. There were distinct variations in the way the school board members perceived their roles in the day-to-day operations of the district. School board members thought their role in the school district included visiting schools and being involved in personnel matters. Board members were particularly interested in administrative appointments at the schools within the single-member areas they represented. Superintendents did not agree with school board members that this was the board's role. Principals agreed with the superintendents, and stated that board members' presence in their schools interfered with the daily management of the schools. The data indicated

a lack of clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the school board members.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) noted that the absence of clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities between the school board and the superintendent frequently resulted in the micromanagement of administrative matters by school boards. Villarreal's study (1992) found that more information was needed to help school boards and superintendents clarify their duties and responsibilities. Even though there is a lot of material outlining the roles and responsibilities of the school board and superintendent, in practice those roles continue to be blurred.

Additionally, the NASB (2001) publication regarding the superintendent's role outlines responsibilities that specifically point to leading the school system to raise student achievement. Two particular responsibilities tied to student achievement included modeling support for district initiatives related to raising student achievement, and ensuring that change initiatives on raising student achievement occurred at all levels throughout the district. Apparently, the principals in this study agreed. Principals were trusted and supported in making wise decisions that positively impacted students.

Managerial leadership, a category of leadership style, shapes the role of today's superintendent. Managerial leadership focuses on supervision, support and development of the organizational structure. Support and empowerment appear to be interrelated and almost synonymous. Bencivenga (2002) said that

management and leadership have two distinct and fundamental purposes. Management is about coping with complexity. Leadership is about coping with change. Other research by Endeman (1993) says a clear difference exists between traditional leaders who are seen as effective managers and effective leaders who are seen as those focusing on the future and are adept at managing change.

Superintendent Alpha was seen as adept at coping with change, especially the changes he made at the school and central office level. Superintendent Alpha deemed these changes necessary to move the district in a positive direction and toward increased student achievement as measured by the Texas Accountability System. Principals also said Superintendent Alpha was an effective communicator, although he was seen as somewhat abrasive.

On the other hand, Superintendent Beta was perceived as neither adept at managing change nor at coping with the complexity of this large urban district. Principals perceived him to be an ineffective communicator who supported himself rather than the principals. He was also seen as more likely to please the board members than lead the district. One reason for these perceptions may be the length of his tenure. His short 18-month tenure was due to board elections, which caused a major shift in the board membership and changed the balance of the majority and minority factions on the board.

The literature states that it is much more difficult to educate students who are minority and economically disadvantaged than those who are not. Mirel

(1993) stated that academic underachievement is high among students representing minority groups. Koschoreck (2001) added that limited research has been conducted regarding the effects of district leadership on the academic outcomes of low income children and children of color.

Skrla and Scheurich (2001) stated there have been no examples of school districts that have been successful in educating poor and minority children. An even larger void is the study of the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on student achievement. This case study highlighted one school district with predominantly high percentages of minority and economically disadvantaged children who attained unprecedented achievement as measured by the state accountability system. How, then, were the schools in this district, with high percentages of economically disadvantaged and minority children, able to transform themselves from mediocre, and in some instances, to stellar academic performance?

The superintendent's support for the principals' work and the empowerment provided to the principals was critical to this district's success. Principals also need to be given credit for their extensive role in leadership at the campus level and for keeping their efforts focused on their school, not on the relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

Even though AASA and NASB state that critical factors for a school district are effective communications systems, building trust through collaboration and support, and constant focus on student achievement, this was

not the case in this particular school district. This case study showed that the school board/superintendent relationship did not affect student achievement. In fact, as indicated by the data over the seven year period, student achievement continued to rise each year in spite of any disruptions at the school board/superintendent level. Principals asserted their leadership at the campus level and ensured teachers were shielded from the turmoil at the school board level. It was the principals' leadership that kept the district focused on students as long as they had the superintendent's support. The principals' role in implementing the district's belief system, establishing expectations, focusing on students, and creating a greater sense of purpose kept their schools achievement, and thus the district's, on an upward trend.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on the academic achievement in one Texas school district that served high-poverty, majority-minority students. According to the respondents participating in this study, several themes emerged that were cross-referenced in several areas. Analysis of the data resulted in the following conclusions.

- 1. The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship tend to be centered on politics and political power.*

The Bacharach and Lawler (1998) study, which found the politics of school board/superintendent relationships was as much about what issues are discussed as those which are not, is congruent with these findings. Furthermore, this study also supports Hoyle's (1986) belief that politics and political power are oriented to special interests, coalitions, and influence rather than goals, authority, and strategies for school improvement. Additionally, this study also corroborates Blumberg's (1985) three facets of the superintendent's political life: the politics of local decision making, the politics of being a non-elected executive, and the politics of survival.

2. *Effective communication, trust, collaboration, support and a constant focus on student achievement are the essential building blocks of an effective school board/superintendent relationship that impact student achievement.*

This research verifies the findings in *Team Leadership for Student Achievement*. Henderson, et al. (2001) found that district-wide leadership is the job of both the school board and the superintendent. The essential ingredients are: to perform the job effectively, engender trust and respect, promote shared values and increase knowledge and understanding of the roles of each.

3. *The changing balances of the majority and minority factions on school boards may lead to instability in the superintendent position.*

The most important responsibility of a school board is selecting, working with, and evaluating the superintendent (AASA, 2000). However, when board

members compete for informal power or respond to special interests or pressure groups, school boards tend to be divided, and the superintendent becomes the expendable pawn.

4. Principals' focus on instruction fosters continued school success regardless of school board/superintendent dynamics.

Datnow and Castellano (2001) led a study of principals' influence on school reform and student achievement. The findings of this study confirm that a focus on teaching and learning, commitment to ongoing instructional improvement, accountability for learning, and improvement and consistency in direction and policies were the catalysts for improved student performance at the individual school level.

5. There is no immediate effect of the school board/superintendent relationship on the principals' performance as they sought to enhance student achievement.

The findings in this study substantiated that school improvement showed better results when there was greater control at the school level, as noted in the 1995 Grubb yearbook. Leadership at the school level was critical to student achievement. It was the leadership at the school level that previous research has directly linked to improved student achievement.

6. The dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship does not have an immediate influence on the academic achievement of the students.

The findings of this study indicated that a school system with high percentages of low-income and minority students had positive student academic achievement, even though there was limited research on this topic. There have been no examples of school districts being successful in educating poor and minority children (Skrla and Scheurich, 2001). Additionally, the research that has been conducted has focused on school board relationships and politics, not student achievement. Although there was no immediate impact of the dynamics of the school board/superintendent relationship on student achievement, it can be expected that the improvement in student achievement would decline.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on academic achievement in one urban Texas district that served high-poverty and majority-minority students. This research study proved there was at least one Texas school district that attained high student achievement without a strong school board/superintendent relationship. The fact that this district served children who were poor and minority along with attaining high levels of student achievement was even rarer.

Although the current literature and professional organization position papers state school board/superintendent relationships need to be collaborative in order to attain high levels of student achievement, the results of this research indicated that the influence of the school board/superintendent relationship on

student achievement remains in question. Further research is needed in order to confirm that positive, collaborative school board/superintendent relationships are necessary for high levels of student achievement, as claimed by professional organizations such as AASA and NSBA.

The researcher found that when the superintendent was given full authority to manage the district, the superintendent focused his or her efforts on working with principals to establish and promote a belief system which ultimately improved achievement, rather than focusing on surviving the politics of the school board/superintendent relationship. The school board should treat the superintendent as its only employee and hold him or her accountable for the progress of the district. The current political nature of school boards forces superintendents to focus on school board relationships and their own survival within the system rather than on students, their needs and academic achievement.

This case study focused on one urban school district with a high-poverty, high-minority student population. This district consistently improved student performance through the years of the study even during times when the relationship between the school board and superintendent was not very good. During the time period of the study, the district's performance ran counter to the findings of previous research. Previous studies found that without positive school board/superintendent relationships serving as a cornerstone for the attainment of high academic achievement, school districts were unlikely to raise student achievement. This single case study proved otherwise.

Implications for the Future

Although this research was one case study, the findings have implications for both practice and research.

Practical Use:

1. This study illustrated that superintendents need to make focused efforts to build and sustain trust with all school board members.
2. School boards need to hire a superintendent in whom they will all have trust and confidence, and then give him or her full authority to ensure the district meets the needs of all students.
3. The principals in this study overwhelmingly agreed that support and empowerment for the superintendents as campus leaders was critical to the district's success.
4. School board members from single-member districts need to make a concerted effort to represent the entire district, not just the geographical area from which they were elected.

Further Research:

1. This study focused on an urban district whose student population was majority-minority and economically disadvantaged. Further research is needed on districts with a more diverse student population and a focus on how the school board/superintendent relationship affects student achievement in that environment.

2. Future research may want to include the perception of teachers, an important group which was not included in this study.
3. The district central office staff was not included in this study. They may lend an important perspective to change, politics and political power, as well as roles and responsibilities, which are all major themes in this study.
4. The respective roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and the school board is an area of conflict. The roles and responsibilities of the school board members and the superintendent need additional research that focuses on practice, not simply theoretical and philosophical positions.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

BOARD/SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP IN A SELECTED URBAN DISTRICT SERVING HIGH-POVERTY MAJORITY-MINORITY STUDENT POPULATION

You are invited to participate in a study of superintendent- school board relationships and their perceived effect on student performance. My name is Linda G. Mora and I am a graduate student at The University of Texas at Austin. This study is being done as my dissertation research project. You are being asked to participate in the study because you have experience in the district and knowledge of district operations, programs and procedures. If you participate, you will be one of approximately 30 people in the study.

If you decide to participate, I will conduct interviews with all participants. The interviews will consist of a standard set of questions; you do not have to answer every question. The interview will be audio taped. The interview will be conducted in the least intrusive manner, and will be scheduled at a convenient time for both of us. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. The audio-tapes will be transcribed for ease of use in the analysis of data. While the dissertation is being completed, all audio-tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. When the dissertation is completed, the audio-tapes and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your responses will not be linked to your name in any written or verbal report of this research project. There are minor potential risks associated with this study, but every effort will be made to keep the information confidential; there are no associated benefits to the individuals involved.

Your decision to participate or to decide not to participate will not affect your present or future relationship with The University of Texas at Austin.

If you have any questions about the study, please ask me. If you have any questions later, please call me at 210-493-7538 or 210-706-8635 or you may call my dissertation chair, Dr. Martha Ovando at 512-471-4551. If you have any questions or concerns, at any time, about your treatment as a research participant in this study, call Professor Clarke Burnham, Chair of the University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants at 512-2321- 4383.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate in the study. If you later decide that you do not want to participate in the study, simply tell me. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

For School Board Members:

Tell me about your background prior to being elected to the school board.

1. What was/is your purpose for serving on the school board?
2. How would you characterize your relationship with the superintendent?
3. What are your personal expectations of the superintendent?
4. How do you communicate with the superintendent?
5. How does, or did, the superintendent communicate with you?
6. What is your perception of how you influence the academic achievement of students?

For Superintendent Participants:

Tell me about your professional background and your personal educational experience. Also tell me the circumstances under which you came to this district and how long you have been here.

1. How would you characterize your relationship with the board?
2. How do you communicate with the board?
3. How do the board members communicate with you?
4. Describe the process used to communicate with your immediate subordinates?

For Principal Participants:

Tell me about your professional background and your personal educational experience. Also tell me how long you have been in this district.

1. How do you perceive the school board/superintendent relationship as you go about improving student achievement on your school?
2. How are decisions made at the board level communicated to you?
3. What is the communication mechanism employed by the superintendent and the principals?
4. What is your perception of the relationship between the board and the superintendent?

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