School board member and superintendent dispositions relating to student achievement

Connie Jean Maxson
Iowa State University

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School board member and superintendent dispositions relating to student achievement

by

Connie Jean Maxson

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:
Daniel C. Robinson, Major Professor
Larry H. Ebbers
Steven A. Freeman
James R. Scharff
Mack C. Shelley II

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2006
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For the Major Program
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine whether local school board members who have been subjected to more of a specific type of training focused on student achievement create and support conditions in their systems that enable students to achieve at high levels. Of specific interest was the change in disposition of the board members and superintendents as a result of the training.

Educational research has endorsed the idea that school districts cannot effectively raise student achievement without strong leadership and teamwork from the school board and the superintendent. Results from this study indicated that board members who participated in more intensive training related to topics around leadership and student achievement consistently identified this training as having an influence on the disposition of the board and the behaviors they exhibited at board meetings. This was demonstrated by the systematic approach to their work with less micromanaging, the use of data in their decisions, a district focus on reading comprehension, and by an “all really does mean all students” attitude when making decisions related to student achievement.

Iowa schools continue to face the challenge of improving student achievement. Schools and school leaders are being asked by policy makers to ensure that all students reach a level of proficiency or face risks and consequences of failure. Past research has focused on the policy development of boards of education rather than on the training and support that board members received. This study concluded that, if board members are going to lead districts in student learning efforts, training for the board members does matter. Among the recommendations were regular self-assessment, and mandated development and training to
improve the governance performance of local boards. This training should include a focus on developing a shared vision focused on student learning. Additionally, the training should include devising strategies to develop skills in demonstrating shared decision-making, supporting regular school-wide staff development, using data and information on student needs to make decisions, and developing a close connection among the schools, parents, and community.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Among the most important challenges faced by many school boards in the United States is raising student achievement (Bracey & Resnick, 1998). This assumption was made eight years ago, yet raising student achievement remains foremost on the list of challenges for American schools today. The declining capability of students to demonstrate an achievement of high quality and satisfactory literacy was identified more than two decades ago. The report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, presents a portrait of an educational system in trouble. Speer (1988) suggested that the National Commission’s report casts doubt on the ability of the United States to compete in a global marketplace because the continuous degradation of the nation’s quality education is seen as something that makes the U.S. less and less competitive.

The mediocre quality of U.S. education seems apparent in a wide variety of measures conducted to assess student performance. U.S. junior and high school students perform poorly in international rankings of student knowledge and achievement. Although these measures are not perfect, many of them point in a similar direction. It was hoped that the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) would serve as a wake-up call concerning the plummeting literacy rate and achievement of students in schools, whereby actions by the education authorities would provide solutions to the problem. The report, in fact, did serve as a wake-up call because different education organizations, committees, and task forces were established to improve the quality of education. Today, one question among many others, remains significant. After more than two decades since *A Nation at Risk* caught the nation’s attention, has the quality of education in today’s U.S. institutions improved? In a review of
the status of U.S. education as a follow-up evaluation two decades after *A Nation at Risk*, Ravitch (2003) disclosed the following:

Two decades later, *A Nation at Risk* remains significant in terms of setting the debate and ushering in an era of reform in education, but its goals have not yet been realized. The changes wrought by twenty years of task forces, committees, and study groups have not produced the hoped-for improvement in student achievement. Few of the commissions’ recommendations were properly implemented, and many of those that were proved too timid to bring about effective education reform. (p. 1-2)

While the challenge is clear, the dilemma of how to improve our public schools perplexes most Americans (Rothstein, 1998). A recent synthesis of the findings of 16 longitudinal studies led to the conclusion that efforts to reform education and improve student achievement have been largely unsuccessful (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). The crisis is especially severe for urban minority youth; schools do not produce graduates with skills necessary for the 21st century economy; and American youth cannot compete with youths from other nations (Rothstein, 1998). With every indictment of public education, the credibility of local public school governance seems to diminish and criticism of local school boards prevails (Danzberger, Kirst, & Usdan, 1992; Smoley, 1999; Speer, 1998).

Schools are resilient institutions and, even with considerable pressure, they change very slowly. The current unprecedented level of dissatisfaction with schools and the public’s insistence that schools do a better job of preparing students suggest that change is inevitable (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). One problem that has occurred, caused by lack of focus on the possible results of a solution, was apparent in the class-size reduction (CSR) that was initiated by the state of California. When evaluating the impact of California’s CSR initiative from 1996-2000, Mitchell and Mitchell (2001) reported that it was difficult to do so, particularly because it was initiated together with many other reforms. Thus, it was
impossible to assess which among the changes have been the positive factors in student gains. Because of this, it was recommended that any action aiming for improvement in the education system must be mandated in the state’s education data system, so that the effects of the reform can be carefully investigated and future reform efforts evaluated meaningfully (Mitchell & Mitchell, 2001).

Public dissatisfaction with school boards, which started building in the 1970s and 1980s (Alsbury, 2001), is now evidenced by calls for improved standards and accountability measures (Danzberger et al., 1992; Sewall, 1996). Durrett (2002) indicated the failure of many schools to provide quality education to students:

During the past 20 years, segments of the American public have expressed growing dissatisfaction with public education. The belief that education is failing many of our children has lead to an exhaustive array of initiatives, movements, and mandates designed to improve educational offerings. All of these initiatives have taken place within the context of the traditional public school structure operated by federal, state, and local governing bodies. (p. 1)

Role of School Boards in Reform Efforts

Since the 1980s, as the credibility of local school boards has increasingly come into question, school boards have also been experiencing an erosion of power. State and federal regulations have begun to usurp school board authority, and state governments have become more and more directive (Danzberger et al., 1987; The Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Todras, 1993) under the belief that the role of local boards is unclear, the board members are ill-prepared for their roles, and very few boards have a process for evaluating or monitoring their work (Danzberger et al., 1987). In other words, just as the public is pointing to local school boards as crucial agents for school improvement, local boards are losing their authority to take action. Then, the question becomes: “Is it right that the local school boards
lose their authority completely in administering their schools?" Frustrations have been a
result of the decreasing lack of power of local school boards. Chubb and Moe (1990) stated:

Many frustrated teachers, parents, and other stakeholders believe that
government is not in a position to provide solutions to improve education
because the traditional government structures and mandates are, they believe,
a large part of the problem. A real solution, they offer, is to reinvent the
system by which we provide and run public education—a reinvented system
of choice, flexibility, and accountability that includes the creation of charter
schools. Communities are invited to create new public schools with high
levels of autonomy to be innovative in ways that may or may not embrace
traditional educational structures. These schools are invited to take new and
uncharted paths, but also are held responsible for ensuring that these paths
lead to educational success for students. (p. 2)

Traditionally, school boards have neither sought nor been encouraged to play an
active role in the various facets of student achievement. Generally, both boards and
superintendents feel more comfortable leaving instructionally related matters solely in the
hands of professional staff (Normore, 2004). However, the increasing public demand for
accountability regarding student learning places greater emphasis on the responsibility of the
board, as a governing body, to create the vision and direction for student learning, set
policies, provide resources, and then monitor the results of student achievement initiatives
(Henderson, Henry, Saks, & Wright, 2001).

Unfortunately, the issue of district quality is rarely the focus of discussions regarding
how to improve public education. The focus consistently has been on the classroom as the
unit of change rather than the district for which the school board is responsible (Elmore,
2000). With the focus of reform primarily on classrooms rather than districts, "local school
governance has largely been ignored by these reform efforts" (The Education Policy and
Leadership Center, 2004 p. 5). District level personnel are hired and retained based largely
on their capacity to buffer teachers from outside interference, and their capacity to support
the prevailing logic of confidence between a school system and its constituencies (Elmore, 2000). This loose coupling explains the nervous, febrile, and unstable condition of politics and leadership around most school systems of any size (Elmore, 2000).

The current status of achievement in public schools, the public cry for accountability, the traditional lack of board involvement in issues related to student achievement, the diminished credibility of school governance, and the educators' lack of confidence in their school governance creates an urgent need to understand clearly the role of the board as it relates to improving student learning. Policy, at least in theory, should reach directly into the instructional core of schools, making what actually gets taught a matter of public policy and open political discourse (Elmore, 2000). For example, school boards have an important role in improving student achievement, based on the Lighthouse research studies conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards' (IASB) research arm, the Iowa School Boards Foundation. The IASB defined that role through Leadership for Learning Standards. School boards must master their role in:

1. Building clarity and commitment for high expectations in student learning: includes the board’s role in developing mission, vision and beliefs; setting student learning expectations and improvement goals; communicating the moral imperative of improvement; and celebrating a success and progress in improvement.

2. Ensuring adequate supports and resources to improve student learning: covers prioritizing funding and human resources around student learning goals; ensuring that staff have the training and tools to be successful in improvement initiatives; and engaging legislators and the community to ensure adequate supports and commitment for improvement.
3. Holding the system accountable, not accepting less than high achievement for all students: Includes identifying indicators the board will accept as evidence of progress or success in improvement initiatives; monitoring the implementation, impact and cost of improvement initiatives; ensuring public accountability; and holding the superintendent accountable for improvement in student learning.

4. Embedding capacity for change in policy, planning, and practice covers aligning policy, planning and practice to support instructional improvement; developing leadership throughout the school and community; and maintaining the focus on improvement over time, dealing with barriers as they arise.

5. Nurturing the board/superintendent team as leaders for improved learning includes committing board learning and agenda time to understanding school improvement; regularly evaluating the board around fulfilling its leadership and governance roles; and developing an interdependent leadership between the board and superintendent.

6. Understanding the instructional improvement core of district work that ensures student learning: While boards do not do this work, they must understand the roles of the superintendent and staff in instructional improvement. The board can’t perform its other roles of setting goals, providing supports or accountability without an understanding how effective schools operate. This “instructional core” work of staff includes distributed leadership; curriculum, instruction and assessment; instructional strategies; professional development; tracking implementation and results for students; and other work.

The current knowledgebase in many schools offers little help to meet this need. To date, there do not appear to be clear and distinct research studies regarding the practice of
school boards or the governance actions that have the greatest impact on behaviors of educators within the school system related to their efforts to improve achievement. The literature on school boards offers theoretical considerations about the purposes, characteristics, limitations, and problems of school boards, as well as countless "how-to" manuals filled with advice for effective boardsmanship; nevertheless, school boards seldom have been the focus of empirical research related to their role for improving student achievement (Bracy & Resnick, 1998; Henderson et al., 2001; Land, 2002; Resnick 1999; Smoley, 1999; Speer, 1998).

A few researchers have examined relationships between boards and their superintendents, but they have not examined relationships between boards and their various publics or how those relationships translate into actions for improved achievement (Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman, 1997; Horn, 1996). School boards are increasingly concerned with questions regarding student achievement (Hess, 2002; Iowa Association of School Boards, 2003). A recent study by Hess (2002) indicated that concerns with achievement have risen substantially in the last few years, yet the school boards are reluctant to organize initiatives for school improvement. What they can do, however, is protect the school improvement work from fragmentation, and guide the actions of educators within the system by clearly communicating district priorities—the "primary and essential goals that should stand as measures of success" (Glickman, 1993, p. 112). A better understanding is critically needed regarding how board members establish effective district priorities, how district priorities are influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of board members, and what board actions are most likely to result in shared commitment to district priorities for student learning. Education leaders are no better equipped than the organizations they lead to meet
the challenges posed by the reform efforts currently expected by policymakers (Price, 2001). Large-scale instructional improvement can rebuild confidence in public education. However, it will take dramatic changes in the way public schools define and practice leadership.

A series of disposition and behavioral changes, as shown in Figure 1, occur in schools as school board members, administrators, and staff work to improve student achievement. In the current study, one of the presumptions was the idea that, as an individual’s disposition changes away from managerial focus toward instructional improvement and student with

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Series of disposition and behavioral changes occurring in schools
colleagues, and data analysis may expect to see learning communities emerge focused on improved learning for all students (Dufour, & Eaker, 1998). Achievement gains, behavioral changes toward those ends will follow. For example, school board members who have previously focused on discussing and developing policies toward facilities or extra-curricular activities but change their disposition to focus upon instructional improvements may be expected to adopt policies that better develop and assess the instructional goals of the district. One may argue that this change in policy would lead to some re-focusing on instructional practice by the superintendent.

Superintendents who change their disposition to focus on an emphasis of clear district expectations for all students may expect to see more defined expectations for student improvement from principals. Principals who have focused previously on discipline issues and developed only their management skills but then change their dispositions to focus on classroom and school practices may expect to see teachers concerned with learning new strategies to reach all students (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2004). Teachers who previously have focused only on covering the material in an isolated classroom but then change their disposition to focus on scientifically based strategies, collaboration with colleagues and data analysis may expect to see learning communities emerge focused on improved learning for all students (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Other researchers have confirmed a similar sequence of events leading to improved student achievement. One traditional way is described in a model suggested by Kerr (1964). While his research was done in the context of performance and attitudes of board members, Kerr suggested that the school district’ policies are legitimated by the board to the community, rather than boards representing the community to the school administration:
1. Superintendent recommends policy to school board
2. School board adopts policy
3. Superintendent shares policy with principals and other administrative team
4. Principals share policy with teaching staff
5. School implements policy and shares with community as it effects students

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) theory for improving student achievement is described as follows:

1. Superintendent/board team develops a plan
2. Public engagement and community mobilization occurs
3. Principal/teacher teams review data and share with board/superintendent team
4. New teaching strategies are determined
5. Teachers participate in staff development
6. Others in the district receive training as needed
7. Strategies implemented and evaluated to determine if improved student achievement occurred

Purpose of the Study

While the entire change of events should be studied, the purpose of this study was to examine whether specific training for board members, focused on instructional improvement, changes the disposition of those board members and the superintendent, and whether those changes have an influence on student achievement. This study could contribute to answering the question regarding where leadership comes from in a school district to support increased student achievement. It also may help board members understand their role in school renewal and student achievement.
Because additional funding does not appear to make a significant difference in student achievement, one must look elsewhere. Much has been written about the effect of leadership on student achievement as evidenced by a meta-analysis conducted by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) to examine the effects of leadership practices on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004).

Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) considered that an important dimension in the attempt to improve student achievement in public schools has overlooked school district leadership, governance, and teamwork. They contended strong collaborative leadership by local school boards and superintendents is a cornerstone of the foundation for high student achievement, and this leadership is essential in creating a community vision for children, writing long-range goals and plans for improving achievement for all students, improving professional development, and ensuring that resources and support needed for success are in place.

In a comprehensive nationwide study of school boards and superintendent collaboration for high student achievement by the New England School Development Council (2000), which was based on the work by Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997), recommendations were made based on the idea that school districts cannot effectively raise student achievement without strong leadership and team work from the school board and superintendent. Six key strategies were made for this to occur:

1. A redefinition of student achievement to include a broad array of educational goals;
2. Strong, unified leadership and governance at the school district level, with the overriding goal of providing quality education for all children;
3. New state laws of school district governance to support the unified school board/superintendent leadership team, mobilizing communities and staff to focus on high student achievement;

4. A new approach to preparing and training school boards and superintendents that will support their coming together as unified leadership teams;

5. Public consciousness-raising for high student achievement; and

6. Establishment of a National Center for Board/Superintendent Leadership, which will be responsible for advocating and implementing these strategies and for carrying out research to support continuous improvement in the leadership of local school systems.

Confusion about the roles and responsibilities of governing bodies for improving student learning most likely influences how board members do their job and how they relate to their executive officer. Increased understanding about the perceptions in each group can serve as a first step in generating a dialogue between the governing bodies about their respective roles and responsibilities in relation to student learning that can ultimately help boards and their executive officers serve the students in their district and elevate the achievement of all students in the state.

**Statement of the Problem**

Iowa schools continue to face the challenge of improving student achievement. Schools and school leaders are being asked by policy makers to ensure that all students reach a level of proficiency or face the risks and consequences of failure.

In light of the current literature on the relationship of leadership practices and the improvement of student learning, the study problem was whether certain kinds of training for
board members, focused on instructional improvement, change the disposition of those board members and the superintendents, and whether those changes have an influence on student achievement when controlling for major substantive variations in principal, teacher, and student demographics, and turnover.

**Rationale and Research Question**

Some believe that the lack of change in the educational outcomes of public schools and the public outcry for accountability for student learning establishes the need for new understandings about the role of the governing boards as well as the leadership it will take to enable all students to learn well. It has been established that a key leadership function for productive change is the ability to engage the school community around a commonly-shared purpose based on the ideals and priorities of the organization. However, little is known about the specific actions of board members in school districts that have been able to create a clear focus and direction for the system, and even less is known about how these actions contribute to beliefs and actions of the school district personnel as they fulfill their responsibilities throughout the year.

Elmore (2000, p. 2) found uneven district performance of school boards. He concluded that districts typically did not coordinate policies to influence what happened in the classroom; their efforts were scattered, piecemeal, and, for the most part, weak in influencing teaching. Nonetheless, Elmore was able to cite studies suggesting that active district involvement could stimulate reform activity at the school level.

In 2000, the National School Board Association (NSBA) published *Key Works of School Boards* (Gemberling, Smith, & Villani, 2000), a national initiative that focuses on
helping school boards create a vision and structure for the district and engaging the community to improve student achievement. The IASB Lighthouse study (2001) paralleled this work and identified seven conditions for school renewal:

1. Shared Leadership-A focus on student learning through a shared clear vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership among all levels.

2. Continuous Improvement-A continuous focus on improving education with high levels of involvement and shared decision-making.

3. Ability to Create and Sustain Initiatives-An understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort.

4. Supportive Workplace for Staff-A supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles.

5. Staff Development-Regular school-wide staff development that is focused on studying teaching and learning.

6. Support for School Sites through Data and Information-Using data and information on student needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level.

7. Community Involvement-A close connection between the school, parents, and community.

The goal of the IASB Lighthouse study (2001) was to identify links between the roles of school boards and the achievement of students in schools. The IASB research team studied school board/superintendent teams in districts where schools had generated unusually high achievement over a period of several years, and compared those teams to ones in district where schools consistently had generated unusually low levels of achievement. The six
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districts studied were from Georgia, and anonymity was guaranteed to both the districts and the participants. The IASB study found that the understanding and beliefs of school boards in high-achieving districts were markedly different from those of boards in low-achieving districts. While the research team could not say the board caused high achievement or low achievement to happen, the board’s understanding and beliefs appeared to be part of a district-wide culture focused on improvement in student learning. The IASB currently is working with five sites in Iowa to provide intensive training and support based on the findings of their previous research to create a district-wide culture focused on improving student achievement in these districts.

Most criticisms of boards focus on the reality that too many school board members micromanage, they spend too much time on issues such as worrying about whether the buses are on schedule and members pay too little attention to education issues related to student achievement (Usdan, 2005). The current study examined the perceived influence of the school board on student achievement by asking the following research question:

- Do boards that have been subjected to more of a specific type of training focused on student achievement create and support conditions in their systems that enable students to achieve at high levels?

### Research Methods

This study used qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2003). The study used a constant comparative analysis of emergent themes with a multiple case study of four purposively selected districts in Iowa. Two of the districts selected were concurrently participating in the Iowa Association of School Board’s Lighthouse study which involved
monthly training with the board and superintendent, and they also attended additional IASB-sponsored board development activities. The other two districts had each participated in less than 10 IASB-sponsored board activities during the past three years. Interviews were conducted with board members and superintendents who were asked open-ended questions to elicit information on dispositional and behavioral changes of board members, administrators, and school staff, as well as demographic changes that may have influenced student achievement changes. The questions are included in Appendix A.

The findings were validated using triangulation by comparing board responses to superintendent responses to questions on disposition and behavioral changes, observing the board meetings for these changes, and reviewing district and building-level documents that might indicate policy or behavioral changes. By triangulating with multiple data sources, observers, methods, and/or theories, researchers can make substantial strides in overcoming the skepticism that greets singular methods, lone analysts, and single-perspective interpretations (Patton, 2002).

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the study may extend the Distributed Leadership model (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) by contributing to the knowledge base on the role of the school board in student achievement. Distributed leadership in school reform efforts has included several concepts. While distributed leadership has roots in earlier concepts such as “shared decision-making” it is more far-reaching (Spillane et al., 2001). School leadership today encompasses a wealth of social interactions and shared tools, and views learning as a
social rather than an individual activity. Leadership is distributed not by delegating but by weaving together people, materials, and organizational structures.

Elmore (2000) argued that the principal’s day-to-day instructional decision making typically has been detached from organizational policymaking, but standards-based reform has challenged this structure. Since essential knowledge is distributed across many individuals, it makes sense for leadership to be distributed as well.

Chirichello (2003) suggested one of the biggest barriers to distributed leadership is the entrenched notion that there has to be a single leader. Sharing leadership at the top may be a viable solution to the challenge of improving student achievement.

Copland (2003) studied the concepts embedded in distributed leadership by studying the findings from the work of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). He found extensive staff involvement and a variety of leadership structures. Regardless of the structure, however, formal leaders played a crucial role in encouraging and modeling nontraditional forms of leadership. Currently, the theory of distributed leadership has not addressed the role and involvement of the board of education. This researcher has extended the theory of distributed leadership by including board members.

Substantively, the study provides additional data from the state of Iowa regarding the perception of board members role in a school district. This is the first comparative case study in Iowa of multiple districts looking at the board’s perception of their role in improving student achievement. No studies have examined the training of board members. Finally, this is the first study in this area conducted since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind federal legislation of 2001.
Practically, the study shows local board members and superintendents that board involvement and training, indeed, may be used support the work of a district as it continues to improve methods to raise student achievement. The superintendent ought to include board members in school improvement training and subsequent study of implementation data. Further, the current research tells state policymakers that they should require school board members to participate in training regarding issues of instructional improvement. Another practical significance is that this study demonstrates a specific type of training and whether or not it makes a difference in student achievement in the school district.

Limitations

This study was limited to including only 4 out of 367 school districts from the 2004-2005 school year in Iowa. Thus, research conclusions must be generalized with caution for districts outside of Iowa. States vary in their degree of expectations and opportunity for board training. The 4 districts were selected on the basis of their participation in IASB’s training opportunities using IASB data.

Another limitation was the inability to adequately identify contravening variables such as the turnover of board membership, curriculum changes, socioeconomic status, or change in minority student population that might affect change in student achievement. Although this research asked respondents to identify these variables, and the analysis controlled for these variables qualitatively, causality is not possible in studies of this type.

The study was limited further because the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer. The purpose of interviewing is to allow the researcher to enter into the other person’s perspective. One interviews to find out what is
in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories. Perceptual data are in the eye of the beholder (Patton, 2002). However, triangulated data that were collected to verify results should help support the accuracy.

**Conceptual and Operational Definitions**

The following definitions were used for the purpose of the study:

*Area Education Agency:* Regional service agencies, which provide school improvement services for students, families, teachers, administrators, and their communities.

*Board of Education:* The elected group of community members authorized to develop policy for the local education agency.

*Board Policies:* The governing documents of a local education agency.

*Local Education Agencies:* Prekindergarten through grade 12 school districts, responsible for providing an education program to all students who reside within predetermined boundaries.

*School Board Member:* An elected person holding a seat on a local board of education.

*Superintendent:* The chief executive officer of a local education agency responsible for overseeing the administration of the elementary and secondary program for students attending the specific district.

**Summary**

With the continued decline of trust in the American education system and the growing emphasis on student achievement, school boards face a daunting challenge of how to develop policy that reaches into the core of the instructional process to make what actually gets taught a matter of public discourse.
This chapter provided an introduction to the study. It described the research problems and purpose of the research, and the research methodology employed.

The remainder of the study is composed of four chapters. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature covering a history of school boards, school spending, cross-sectional studies, education value, criticisms of public schools, the board’s role in student achievement, ethos, the superintendent and board relationship, leadership models, and the challenges faced by school boards.

Chapter 3 presents the research methods and procedures. This includes a review of the population of the study, the design and procedures of the data collection, and data analysis methods.

Chapter 4 presents the data and the results of the data analysis. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a summary, conclusions of the study, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

From the beginning, the essential value of the public school in a democracy has been to “ensure an educated citizenry capable of participating in discussions, debates, and decisions to further the wellness of the larger community and protect the individual right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Glickman, 1993, p. 8). An educated citizenry and a democracy were one and the same, the lack of one would imperil the other (Glickman, 1993, p. 9). Barber (2001) explained that education is the enabler of a democracy. Aristocrats condemn democracy because they believe it subjects the wise to the rule of the foolish; but the aim of democratic education is, in fact, to subject the foolish to wisdom so they may both govern themselves and govern wisely. Public education is education for citizenship. In aristocratic nations or in elitist regimes education may appear as a luxury, but in democracies education is the indispensable concomitant of citizenship. Honoring the treaty between the public and their schools, and delivering on this promise of public education requires consistent evidence of high and equitable achievement among the students in public schools.

History of School Boards

In what has become an American tradition, school boards comprised of elected officials are the guardians of, and policymakers for, our nation’s schools and are responsible for delivering on the promise of public education. Local school boards have been an integral part of the history of American public education. Across the nation, there are approximately 15,000 local school boards, and 95,000 local school board members, of which approximately 96% are elected by their communities (Resnick, 1999). These local school boards provide the means by which all segments of each community have a representative voice in how schools
will educate their children. As elected officials, school board members view their accountability and responsiveness to the community in a manner that the local staff cannot do. The perspective of the citizen school board member adds a dimension of stewardship to the system. In principle, school boards provide public credibility, stewardship, and direction to local education. The ultimate issue, however, is whether school boards in practice are effective bodies for leading local education improvement for improved student learning (Resnick, 1999).

According to the Twentieth Century Fund/Danforth Foundation (1992), local public school boards have been “the distinctive hallmark of American education for more than one hundred fifty years” (p. 17). In recent decades, however, school boards have been the target of criticism by those who perceive them as outdated and incapable of effectively leading educational reforms to improve students’ academic achievement, particularly in urban areas (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud, et al., 1986; Danzberger et al., 1987, 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund/Danforth Foundation, 1992). Despite the longstanding presence of local school boards in public education, there are very few data-driven studies of their effectiveness that can inform the discussion of what role school boards should have in school improvement for improved student learning. Opinion-based writings on the overall role of the school board, as well as the role of the board in relation to student achievement, prescribe general categories of board behavior for effective board membership.

**Cross-sectional studies**

Evidence from cross-sectional studies is not much more encouraging than the time-series evidence, however. One of the earliest and, certainly, one of the best-known of the
cross-sectional studies is *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, prepared by James Coleman and collaborators. This 1966 report was based on a massive data collection effort, which assembled information on detailed characteristics of schools, teachers, and students that might help explain individual student performance. The report was prepared in response to a mandate of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. An original goal of the study was to document differences in the quality of education available to different groups in the population, especially racial minorities. The authors went beyond this mission and attempted to show how differences in student performance on standardized tests were connected to differences in socioeconomic background characteristics and school resources.

The Coleman report reached two surprising conclusions. First, the difference in educational resources available to black and white youngsters was far smaller than commonly supposed (Coleman, 1988). Some differences actually favored black children, who, for example, were more likely to attend schools that offered free textbooks, a full-time librarian, and free school lunches. Second, the report found very small and uncertain effects of school resources on student achievement (Coleman). The authors concluded that the measurable characteristics of teachers and schools played only a negligible role in determining student outcomes. Socioeconomic background variables and the composition of the student body played a more important role in determining student success, but most of the variation in student test scores could not be explained by factors measured in the study (Beaton, Hilton, & Schrader, 1977).

*Equality of Educational Opportunity* sparked fierce controversy among educators and social scientists. It would be hard to show, however, that the two main conclusions of the study have been overturned convincingly. The strong criticism leveled at Coleman’s report
had the ironic effect of drawing attention to its conclusions and increasing their influence. It is difficult to believe that a 740-page government report would have earned such a durable place in policymaking or social science without the publicity generated by its passionate critics (Coleman, 1988).

Rumberger and Palardy (2005) suggested the notion of an alternative view of school effectiveness. Schools that are effective in promoting student learning are not necessarily effective in reducing dropout and transfer rates. Schools have relatively small effects on student learning in comparison with student background characteristics, supporting one of the original conclusions of the Coleman report. Differences in the background characteristics of students account for more than half of the variability on school dropout rates, but only about a third of the variability in student learning and attrition rates and almost none of the variability in transfer rates. While there was little variability across schools in dropout rates, schools seemed to have considerable control in regard to improving these rates. Only two variables had significant effects on all four performance measures, and both represented aspects of student composition: proportion of students from nontraditional families and mean achievement of students in the eighth grade.

The Rumberger and Palardy (2005) study has several implications for education policy. One is that school accountability systems relying solely on test scores provide an incomplete indication of school performance. Another implication is that policies designed to promote school performance in one area may not promote performance or even can lead to worse performance in another area. Finally, the results of their study have implications for school choice policies. To the extent that support for school choice is based on the belief that private schools are more effective than public schools (Levin, 1988) their study does not
support school choice. In short, the results of this study suggest that test scores alone are insufficient for measuring school performance. Failure to use other complementary measures of school performance in addition to test scores could lead to erroneous conclusions about which schools are effective and what characteristics promote school effectiveness.

**School spending**

It is not obvious how academic performance can be improved. However, the simplest suggestion—to spend more money—is attractive to educators, but does not guarantee to yield improved results. If better performance automatically followed higher spending, the deterioration in average achievement would not have occurred in the first place. Calculations by Chubb and Hanushek (1990) showed that average U.S. spending per student, controlling for the effect of inflation, rose more than 60% between 1966 and 1980, when most of the test score decline occurred. Since 1960, spending per pupil has tripled, the student-teacher ratio has fallen more than a third, and teachers’ salaries have risen by half. Increased spending on school inputs has not led to notable gains in school performance (Hanushek, 1994). It is possible, of course, that past increases in school inputs have helped offset what would have been even larger achievement declines in the absence of higher spending.

The effectiveness of school spending has been hotly debated for at least the past quarter century. Beginning with the Coleman (1966) report, evidence has accumulated to suggest that simple views of what determines student achievement are invalid. Some studies suggest that student achievement seems unrelated to standard measures of the resources going into schools while others suggested that increased funding works. Interest in this research and the conclusions emanating from it derives from its direct implications for
policy, thus elevating the subject from an arcane research discussion to a public debate.

Rothstein and Miles (1995) suggested that there is an assumption that all school spending aims for a single outcome improved academic achievement of regular students. Schools actually seek a variety of additional outcomes as well such as training of the disabled, student health and nutrition, vocational education, assimilation of the non-English speaking, etc. Evaluation of schools’ effectiveness should match the growth of spending “inputs” in clearly distinguished school programs to the outcomes each of these programs is attempting to improve.

The interest in schooling from a policy perspective comes from several sources. First, schooling is perceived as an important determinant of individual productivity and earnings. Thus it becomes an instrument for affecting both the national economy and the distribution of individual income and earnings. Second, while not often subjected to much analysis, schooling is assumed to generate various externalities, ranging from its effect on economic growth to its value for a well-functioning democracy, thus justifying an important component of public intervention. Third, school spending is itself significant, amounting to over 4% of gross domestic product and represents the largest expenditure in most state and local budgets. Combined, these factors point to a natural policy focus on the effectiveness of the national expenditure on schools.

The policy perspective related to how school resources affect student performance is straightforward. Can we deal with performance problems in schools by supplying them with extra funds? Or, if uncertain about that, can we specify concrete ways of spending additional money so we can be reasonably assured of improvements? Such questions are seldom asked about the auto industry, the computer industry, or other competitive industries. These
questions arise in education because schools are typically publicly operated, because information about performance is difficult to come by and, where available, frequently hard to interpret, and because a general distrust has developed of schools' abilities to produce sensible policies. Moreover, if schools are not performing effectively, ways of obtaining improvements are not entirely obvious. Put the other way around, confirmation that schools use resources effectively would provide considerable relief to policymakers and to the public. An easy and effective set of policy prescriptions therefore follows: decide how much to spend on schools and then turn the money over to them. Or, if schools generally cannot be counted on to spend money effectively, knowledge of the production function for schools will enable central decision makers to direct resources in productive ways.

**Educational value**

Whatever controversies the accountability movement has generated, a decade of standards-based reform has created consensus on at least one point: Student achievement is the ultimate measure of educational value. Teachers, administrators, and policymakers now routinely preface their action plans with the reminder that success is defined in terms of what students learn (Hanushek, 1994).

For school boards, this mandate presents some challenging questions. In the current reform model, standards are set at the state level and translated into instruction at the school level, leaving an ill-defined mediating role for the district. Moreover, boards historically have taken a low-key, hands-off approach to student learning, reasoning that instructional decisions should be made by professional educators. How can they reconcile this longstanding practice with the demand for aggressive leadership to improve student learning?
Some critics have answered that question pessimistically, concluding that boards are not up to the challenge and should be replaced by other forms of governance. However, some board leaders have begun to stake out a leadership role by capitalizing on their traditional responsibility as local policymakers. This digest describes the nature and potential of those efforts (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979).

**Can boards influence student achievement?**

Although the current accountability movement has not prescribed a robust role for local districts, Elmore (1993) noted they can provide checks and balances to the state and federal actions, adapt state reforms to local conditions, mobilize local support, and serve as a source of creativity and innovation.

Elmore’s (1993) review of research found uneven district performance. He concluded that districts typically did not coordinate policies to influence what happened in the classroom; their efforts were scattered, piecemeal, and for the most part weak in influencing teaching. Nonetheless, Elmore was able to cite studies suggesting that active district involvement could stimulate reform activity at the school level.

When McCarthy and Celio (2001) interviewed educators in Washington schools that had failed to make progress on state standards, they found that district-level passivity was a common theme. Principals and teachers felt little performance pressure, and boards seemed disengaged.

More positively, a study commissioned by the IASB (2001) found that certain board attitudes and behaviors were correlated with student achievement. Board members in high-achieving districts believed that all students had the capacity to achieve, whereas their
counterparts in low-achieving districts tended to accept student limitations as unchangeable. Boards in high-achieving districts were knowledgeable about key reform elements such as shared leadership, continuous improvement, staff development, and data-based decision making, and both they and the professional staff could provide specific examples of how those concepts were being applied in their districts. Conversely, the study found that when the board was not focused on school renewal, teachers and administrators were equally diffident (IASB).

What is the board’s policy role?

Boards can support reform in a number of ways, such as mobilizing public support, providing adequate resources, and hiring qualified superintendents, but recent discussion has focused on re-energizing the board’s traditional policy setting role. (Chambers, 1995). Most board members and administrators readily accept the axiom that the board sets policy and the superintendent implements policy but consistent application of this principle has never been easy. Several studies have found that boards actually spend only a small part of their meeting time on policies (Land, 2002), while some school board associations have conceded that board policymaking is too often reactive rather than proactive (Illinois Association of School Boards, 1998).

Carver (1997) has called attention to the ironic combination of micromanagement and rubber stamping. That is, boards not only infringe on administrative prerogatives, they abdicate their legitimate policy-setting role to superintendents.

The best-known model of systematic policy governance is built on the assumption that boards do not exist to run schools but to govern those who do run the schools (Carver,
In this corporate model, boards have operational responsibility only for their own activities, such as setting agendas and running meetings. Beyond that, they govern by developing policies that specify desired ends and determine acceptable means of reaching those goals.

Carver (1997) recommended that the means be stated as executive limitations. That is, the board should identify any methods or behaviors that are unacceptable. Within those boundaries, superintendents are free to take whatever steps seem advisable to reach the desired ends, without further permission from the board.

Once policies are established, boards confine themselves to evaluating the superintendent’s performance in light of the policy. The board holds the superintendent accountable by asking two questions: (a) Were the ends achieved? (b) Were any procedural limits violated? This define-and-demand control replaces the more typical poke-and-probe style in which boards continually assign new tasks or set new expectations for the CEO.

**Board/Superintendent Relations**

To maintain momentum in the new millennium, the roles of the board and superintendent must be clear. The board, for example, involves the community in setting a vision for the schools and supports that vision at all times. The superintendent, for example, leads strategic planning initiatives and proposes policies for increasing student achievement. It is when those roles become confused that the board and superintendent can become distracted from the true mission of the school enterprise.

Success comes with leadership, communication, hard work, teamwork, and putting aside personal needs and previous bad habits. Every person who assumes a leadership
position as a board member or superintendent has both the opportunity and the responsibility to work as part of a team to create a successful school district. Our clients, the American public, have made it clear they will tolerate nothing less (Corwin, 1970).

The effectiveness of the U.S. educational system has been called into question in recent years. Various commissions and studies have declared our nation to be at risk of losing its comparative advantage in education, and consequently its intellectual and productive edge, to other nations. A recent evaluation of American industrial productivity by a commission sponsored by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology found a disturbing deterioration in student achievement levels (Dertouzos, Lester, & Solow, 1989). It cited recent studies that place U.S. 10-year-olds 8 out of 15 countries in science achievement, and even lower in mathematics skills.

Much of the blame for the U.S. slippage among the ranks of developed countries has fallen on public schools. Opponents criticize public schools for a monopoly position that, in their view, insulates schools from being fully accountable to taxpayers, students, and parents, especially in larger school districts. It is argued that the lack of competition among schools promotes inefficient use of resources and a general decline in quality of the entire educational system. The alleged inability of our educational system to respond to market pressures for improved education quality is particularly troubling as the nation continues to face mounting demands for greater global competition.

In the districts studied in Pennsylvania (McAdams & Cressman, 1997), it was found that the new role of the superintendent is one of creating an environment in which district personnel can establish and achieve a shared vision. This finding is consistent with reports in the literature which suggests that, of paramount importance in the reform movement, is the
need for the leadership to take on a new role. This new role appears to be one of developing an organizational structure that allows participatory decision-making and stakeholder involvement in governance of the district (McAdams & Cressman, 1997). Consistent with this line of thinking, in each of the 13 districts in Pennsylvania, a shared vision had been created, and the district had a single focus. The top-down, superintendent-directive approach had given way to a highly inclusive decision-making process that came as a result of planned training in an identified model of collaboration. Using this approach, fear was removed from the workplace, enabling people to take risks and be creative. It was evident, in each instance, that the leadership style of the superintendent was a key factor in this process. As one superintendent reported, it is not a matter of delegating, rather a matter of trust. In this district, trusting relationships have been built by implementing programs that promote collaboration, enhance the general climate and empower teachers.

A second change in the role of the superintendent was in the area of communication, which has to be open to the extent that everyone feels they are participating in a learning community. Again, this finding supported previous findings reported in the literature by Schlechty (1990) and Conley (1997). It was evident in these districts that open communication enabled different individuals and role groups in the organization to understand how others feel about issues and how they view solutions to those issues. Through open communication, superintendents gave up control, shared power, and allowed the involvement of all stakeholders. The change in the disposition of the superintendent appeared to foster a change in the culture of the organization. One might conclude that, before structural change can occur in the organization, such a cultural change is necessary as it affects the beliefs, values, and knowledge of individuals functioning in the organization.
The role of the board of education is not to run the schools, but to see that they are run well. As the community’s elected or appointed representatives, board members are in the best position to interpret the community’s wishes for its children and schools. The public expects its board to focus on quality education, setting overall direction and being advocates for children and a bridge between educators and the community. Boards do this by setting overall long-range goals and short-term objectives geared to meeting those goals (Goodman et al., 1997).

The most effective superintendents serve as educational role models for their entire communities and give top priority to student achievement. They are educational leaders in every sense of the term. This includes recommending high standards for achievement for all students and staff, and providing political leadership as well (Elmore, 2000; Goodman et al., 1997).

The increasingly complex demands and challenges confronting principals (Blackmore, 2004; Cranston, Ehrich, & Billot, 2003) have combined to create what a recent Education Week article labeled an “impossible job” (Archer, 2004). One way to make a seemingly impossible job more manageable is to achieve clarity on what is essential as well as what is important. Such clarity can help principals prioritize the demands of the job by helping them focus first on the responsibilities and practices correlated with student achievement (Waters et al., 2004). Principals need to develop strategies for fulfilling essential leadership responsibilities. One way to approach this is distributing leadership responsibilities to others (Elmore, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001).

Teachers’ roles and responsibilities can be reconstructed around a vibrant core purpose of improving student learning and ensuring that all students achieve academic
success (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2003). Getting to this vibrant core requires the thoughtful distribution of leadership responsibilities to others in the school. Then follow-up by building administrators and teachers can determine whether teachers are teaching what they are expected to teach and whether students can demonstrate what they are expected to learn (Elmore, 2000).

Education is not solely the responsibility of schools. The effort individual students devote to their schooling is obviously an important ingredient. Parental attitudes about the value of education, and the direct educational inputs of parents and siblings also influence individual students’ academic performance. Hanusek (1994) suggested that incentives should be developed to encourage students and parents to participate more actively in education. Many students do not directly see the value of higher achievement, particularly if it takes additional effort. Today’s high school reform efforts are placing a high value on the relationships that students have while they are in school so that the value of the education for future success in the work place are realized better (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2002, p. 31).

Recent proposals for reforming the educational system have called for increased parental and student choice, introducing elements of the private market system into public education. In this view, increased freedom by parents and students to choose the school that best meets their educational needs would provide a better match of supply with demand, and would discipline teachers and administrators to be more responsive to the needs of students and, thus, provide a more efficient and effective educational program.

Beginning in 2001, the National School Boards Association, in collaboration with American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has been exploring the key roles of
the board and the superintendent. Districts have been provided the tools, publications, and training by the two organizations to help boards and superintendents develop what they call the leadership team. The most recent result is a book, *Team leadership for student achievement*, which defines these roles and offers a guide on how to create a leadership team (Henderson et al., 2001).

**Effects of training on role perceptions**

Boards and superintendents have different roles, but they must act as a complete unit. They must focus on how they can complement each other. It is important to look at the superintendent as the chief executive officer who provides the board with important data and the critical perspective of a professional educator. Probably the most important role the board has is to select and strategize with the superintendent.

*Team leadership for student achievement* (Henderson et al., 2001) outlines how the board and the superintendent should go about working together in setting a vision for the schools, establishing standards and identifying the assessment process to be used to measure student success. Together they must recognize that this work forms the accountability system for the board to assess the superintendent and for the superintendent to assess the principals and teachers, and for the community to assess the board (Henderson et al., 2001).

It is also essential for the leadership team to create the right climate for schools, provide an exciting, thriving learning environment for both teachers and students, and develop a collaborative relationship within the community. In recent years, the number of board superintendent teams making a positive difference in the quality of education in their districts has grown substantially. One good example is the Fort Worth, Texas, Independent
School District (Cooper, 1988). To address the countless challenges the school system faced, the board and superintendent began building a culture and a system for change that, after several years of hard work, has resulted in high levels of student achievement.

In the mid-1990s, the Fort Worth schools were in trouble, but by developing team building skills, displaying mutual respect and cooperation, and staying clearly focused on the needs of the district as a whole, the board superintendent team turned the school system around. The district developed a 5-year strategic plan and initiated an array of new programs to increase student achievement by meeting with a wide variety of business and civic leaders as well as with parents and employees. The district understood the need for broad public support and developed alliances with business, the faith community, organizations representing minorities, and neighborhood associations.

The school board and superintendent of Fort Worth, along with those in Owensboro, Kentucky, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Omaha, Nebraska, and a host of other school districts, exemplify the new leadership team of the 21st century. Their work is part of the transformation in school leadership taking place across the country (Cooper, 1988). This new story of successful board-superintendent teams needs to become the standard rather than the oft-repeated wailing about micromanagement.

In 2000, the NSBA published *Key works of school boards*, a national initiative that focuses on helping school boards create a vision and structure for the district and engaging the community to improve student achievement. The IASB Lighthouse study (2001) parallels this work and identifies seven conditions for school renewal:

1. Shared Leadership – A focus on student learning through a shared clear vision, high expectations, and dynamic leadership among all levels.
2. Continuous Improvement – A continuous focus on improving education with high levels of involvement and shared decision making.

3. Ability to Create and Sustain Initiatives – An understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort.

4. Supportive Workplace for Staff – A supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles.

5. Staff Development – Regular school-wide staff development that is focused on studying teaching and learning.

6. Support for School Sites through Data and Information – Using data and information on student needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level.

7. Community Involvement – A close connection between the school, parents, and community.

Leadership roles of boards and superintendent

Historically, local school boards believed their role to be supportive in nature, approving the budget, dealing with constituents, generating revenue, and keeping the public “at bay” around politically sensitive issues. While these are still typical functions, the challenge of improving student achievement suggests the need for a more dynamic leadership role for local school boards. A joint publication of the IASB and the Iowa State Board of Education (1994) suggested a leadership model for school boards based on 4 main functions:

1. Vision
2. Structure
3. Accountability

4. Advocacy

In a report on effective school governance, Resnick (1999) extended upon these functions and identified 10 fundamentals of good board operations:

1. Setting the vision
2. Focusing on student achievement
3. Providing a structure for success
4. Advocating for education
5. Involving the community
6. Accounting for results
7. Empowering the staff
8. Setting policy
9. Collaborating with other agencies
10. Committing to continuous improvement

These fundamental operations are consistent with other models that have attempted to describe school board functions for more effective board leadership (Danzberger et al., 1992; Goodman et al., 1997; Henderson et al., 2001; Horn, 1996; Land, 2002; Resnick, 1999; Smoley, 1999). However, even though there are many proposals for school board reforms based on their role and responsibilities of school boards, school board operations have remained stable and the outcomes of schooling (student achievement results) have not improved (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000).
Values and beliefs of board members

Sergiovanni (1999) added a new dimension to previous theories about the role and responsibilities of school leadership that has important implications for school boards. His focus on servant leadership states that the most important responsibility of leadership is to give a sense of direction to establish an overarching purpose. To be successful in providing purpose requires the trust of others. To trust, the led must have confidence in the leaders’ competence and values. They must have confidence that the leaders make judgments on the basis of competence and values, rather than self-interest (p. 58). Based on Sergiovanni’s work, school board members as servant leaders must be constantly engaging in “purposing” or inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organization’s basic purposes which are value-based. The eye of the target whether the target is “student learning” or something else, reflects the core values and beliefs of the school leaders.

These core values and beliefs constitute what some authors refer to as a school district “ethos”, which is defined by Coleman and LaRocque (1990) as consisting of educational values and attitudes held in common amongst educators in a school district (norms). Ethos in action consists of a set of characteristic ways in which important tasks are attended to in the school district (practices). These norms and practices together constitute a district ethos. Further, the norms and practices, the ethos, are shaped largely by the beliefs and actions of the leaders. This focus on the importance of district ethos, and the significant role of the school leaders in influencing the norms and practices of the organization was also discussed by Elmore (1996) in a classic article on scaling-up good educational practice. Elmore stated that moving beyond pockets of excellence to reach a much greater proportion of students will
depend upon developing strong normative structures for practice as well as formal and informal ways of communicating norms of good practice.

A few studies have observed a relationship between the district ethos and student achievement. Working with a group of schools in a socially disadvantaged area of London, (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979) have shown that there are significant differences between these schools in their impact on the lives of students, and the differences are not related to such cost factors as building quality or class size, but they are related to the characteristics of the schools as social institutions. These characteristics, such as academic emphasis, teacher actions in classrooms, incentives, and pupil self-reliance, constitute ethos—a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that are characteristic of the school as a whole (p. 179). The Rutter team found that school ethos is positively associated with pupil behavior, attendance, retention in school and achievement, but negatively with delinquency rates.

**Challenges faced by school boards**

School boards face traditional challenges such as serving and allocating adequate resources, and recruiting and maintaining talented staff. New issues, such as state and federal-level interference, greater public apathy toward the public schools and lack of confidence in both the schools and their governing boards, a more diverse student population, and more controversial and pervasive social problems make governance more difficult and complex (Carol et al, 1986, Land, 2002).

Webber (1995) surveyed 136 school board members in Canada regarding their perceptions of the education issues that would be of highest priority in the future. The top priorities identified were: finance, student behavior, quality assurance, and employment
preparation for students. A second analysis of the surveys identified nine themes from the predicted concerns of the school board members: educational governance, accountability to the public, program delivery models, societal change, school security, educational welfare, educational finance, teacher development, and curriculum content. The identified priorities and the nine themes were used to infer a generalized belief structure that may form the basis for future board decisions. Webber concluded that board members acting on these beliefs would be ill-equipped to deal with the demands being placed on them and education, in general, but would be reluctant to see their power in education diminished. Given the bleak financial picture facing most school boards, this would most likely lead to school boards becoming increasingly politicized. Webber recognized that the inferences drawn may not actually play out as suggested. However, he emphasized the importance of understanding the beliefs and values that influence decision-makers.

LaRocque and Coleman (1993) examined the role of school boards in the implementation of policy and the development of a positive ethos in nine school districts in British Columbia. A positive district ethos was associated with higher than expected student achievement and lower than expected costs over a 5-year period. The more successful school boards were found to be considerably more knowledgeable about district programs and practices, had a clearer sense of what they wanted to accomplish based on a set of clear values and beliefs, and were engaged in activities that provided them with opportunities to articulate and discuss these values and beliefs with educators in the district.

The IASB conducted an ethnographic study of school districts with a history of exceptionally high and exceptionally low student achievement (Joyce, Delagardelle, & Wolf, 2001). Even though the districts were similar in many ways (socioeconomic level of the
students, education level of the staff, region of the staff, board/superintendent relationships, etc.), they were profoundly different related to student outcomes, the beliefs and attitudes of the school board and staff, and the presence of seven conditions for productive change. A more recent IASB survey asked a random sample of Iowa school board members to respond to questions about their values and beliefs related to student achievement (IASB, 2002). One of the most interesting findings from the survey indicated that only 15% of Iowa school board members believe that 90% or more of their students can be expected to master grade-level material despite convincing evidence that only 2-4% of U.S. students have intractable learning difficulties that would keep them from learning to read and write successfully.

In a more recent journal article prepared for and supported by the Albert Shanker Institute, Elmore (2000) suggested that the stakes are high for the future of public education and the students who attend public schools. Large-scale, sustained, and continuous improvement is the path out of these problems. It will require changes in the values and norms that shape how teachers and principals think about the purposes of their work, changes in how the educators and the public think about who leaders are, where they are, and what they do, and changes in the knowledge and skill requirements of work in schools (Elmore, 2000). This shift will require a redefinition of leadership, away from role-based conceptions and toward a distributive view and a clearer set of design principles to guide large-scale improvement. According to Elmore, distributed leadership requires concerted action among people with different areas of expertise and a mutual respect that stems from an appreciation of the knowledge and skill requirements of different roles. The design principles derive from the fact that large-scale improvement processes run directly against the grain of the existing institutional structure of public education. The challenge will be for school leaders to find
ways to construct orderly ways for people to engage in activities that have as their consequence the learning of new ways to think about and do their jobs, and how to put these activities in the context of reward structures that stimulate them to do more of what leads to large scale improvement and less of what reinforces the existing structure.

Reeves (2003) reinforced the need for a dramatically different approach to leadership that supports comprehensive involvement of all staff, including transportation, food services and administrative personnel, and others including the board, to ensure improved student achievement.

The idea of coordinating board policy to support student learning is a plausible reform strategy that seems to mesh well with the traditional board role but some scholars are skeptical, pointing out that recent governance trends have shifted power from the local level to states and the federal government. Boards now find their authority squeezed by state and federal mandates that dictate learning goals and restrict operational flexibility. Conley (2003) concluded that boards are not the drivers of improvement-related policies, nor do they or will they operate with broad discretion to determine which policies will be used to improve their schools.

Some commentators have also claimed that governing by policy is not as easy as Carver’s (1997) model suggests. Price (2001) argued that clear role separation may not be realistic. Board members frequently are under heavy political pressure to intervene in management decisions, and superintendents increasingly are being trained as leaders rather than managers. Price suggested that boards and superintendents may have to engage in continual negotiation over who is responsible for what.
Unfortunately, there is little empirical evidence on how board policy affects student learning (Land, 2002). Much of the available literature consists of policy recommendations and opinion rather than empirical research. Answers may be slow in coming because of the multitude of variables that have to be untangled. By their nature, boards do not create learning; rather, they work through others by creating conditions that promote learning (IASB, 2002).

Thus, as boards gear up for a suddenly intensified reform environment, they can view coordinating board policy to support student learning as a best practice. Thoughtful, systematic policymaking is not a guaranteed recipe for successful school renewal, but it is associated with success (Henderson et al., 2001).

Summary

Locally elected school board members are a traditional part of the U.S. education experience. They provide a means by which community members have a representative voice in how schools will educate the children in their districts. School boards today face a number of challenges. Not only do they face the traditional challenges of allocating resources and recruiting and maintaining talented staff but also, as stakes are increased for student accountability, changes are occurring in how educators and the public think about school leaders and what they do to guide large-scale improvement in student learning.

Chapter 2 has provided a review of the relevant literature surrounding public schools and their boards of education in particular. The chapter also provided a review of the various issues facing public schools regarding student achievement, including spending, value, influence, climate, ethos, board superintendent relationship, leadership models and policy.
Existing literature does not specifically investigate board training; thus, the current study provided new insight on whether training, focused on instructional improvement, influences the disposition and behavior of school board members.

Chapter 3 will provide a description of the research methods and procedures used in this study. It includes a restatement of the study purposes and a discussion of the research design, describes the population of the study, the design and implementation methods used in the data collection, and the methods used for data analyses in this study.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine whether specific training for board members focused on instructional improvement leads to a change in the disposition of those board members and superintendents when controlling for major substantive variations such as board member turnover, superintendent turnover, economic changes, or significant student demographic shift. Qualitative research methods were selected which included a constant comparative analysis of emergent themes with multiple case studies. An advantage of the case study method is that it preserves the context and affords a holistic view of the process under consideration (Gummesson, 1991). Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select four districts for personal interviews with their board members and superintendents. These districts were selected based on their involvement in training activities with the IASB. The primary source for the data was a series of semi-structured interviews, supplemented with document analysis and personal observations at a school board meeting.

Population

School district size

According to the Condition of Education Report, published by the Iowa Department of Education (2005), Iowa schools served 519,496 students in 367 public school districts and 194 accredited nonpublic schools in 2004-05. Of the 367 school districts, 160 (43.6 %) had less than 600 students in 2004-05. The Iowa Department of Education uses seven distribution categories for enrollments in Iowa schools. The numbers of districts included in each category for 2004-05 are included in Table 1. Two of the 4 districts in this study are in the 3rd category of size (400-599), 1 of the 4 districts is in the 4th category of
Table 1. Iowa Department of Education enrollment distribution categories for K-12 Iowa schools in 2004-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment span</th>
<th>No. of Districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 250</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250-399</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-599</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-999</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000-2,499</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,400-7,499</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7,500 +</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

size (600-999), and 1 of the districts is in the 5th category for size (1000-2499). These four districts are representative of the majority of districts in Iowa. Categories 3,4, and 5 represent 60% of the Iowa districts.

School board member facts

According to data from the IASB, during the 2004-05 school year, about 2,100 males and females served on local public school boards in Iowa. School board members are elected by their local communities in an election held the second Tuesday of each September. They serve 3-year terms, with part of the board elected each year to maintain continuity and experience. Local boards may have 5 or 7 members. They may be elected at large, from director districts or in several combinations of at-large and districts, depending on the system adopted locally. About 70% of Iowa’s 367 public K-12 school boards have five members and 30% of the boards have seven members. School board members receive no pay. As shown in Table 2, three of the four districts in this study have five board members whereas one has seven board members.
The board of directors of a school district operates as a corporate body. Individual school board members have no authority to act independently and cannot commit or bind the board by their individual actions; therefore, the board as a whole must exercise the duties of the board. This concept of “acting as a whole” was identified as a very important concept during a majority of the interviews with board members.

**Sample**

Four Iowa school districts were selected purposively for the interviews. The selection criteria were based on the school district’s potential to add to the understanding of the concept of training and how it affects the dispositions of board members as they conduct their work at the board table. Therefore, two districts that had experienced specialized training as part of the Iowa Lighthouse Project, and two districts with traditional board training were selected. In schools today, many factors can cause a change in student achievement. While it is impossible to control all of the variables in a school district, this
researcher noted substantive variables in the districts selected for this study that may be among potential causes of changes in student achievement. These variables include: superintendent turnover, board member turnover, changing English Language Learners (ELL) populations, economic changes or building level administrative changes. The time period for the data for this study spanned school years 2002-03 – 2004-05.

Districts A and B, described in the next two subsections, had been participating in the Iowa Association of School Boards Lighthouse Project. This 5-year project began in 2002, with five Iowa districts to provide training for local board members to consider what they can do to create a focus on student learning and positively influence beliefs, engage staff in creation of the seven conditions for productive change, and improve student achievement. The seven conditions included: building a human organization, understanding how education gets better, creating support around personnel, understanding the role of staff development, supporting the renewal, generating community involvement, and building integrated leadership.

Board members from the four districts indicated their participation in the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) Academy of Board Learning Experiences (ABLE). These comprehensive learning experiences are designed for school board members to provide them with the knowledge and skills to be a leader in education. These training sessions are structured to include real-life case studies and participatory experiences, giving the board members an opportunity to explore issues together and learn from each other.
School district A

School district A is in a community with a population of 18,388. The school district services the community and surrounding rural area, including two small towns with an approximate student population of 2,364 students in kindergarten through 12th grade. There were 167 teachers in the district.

As shown in Table 2, nearly one-third (31.1%) of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. The minority student population was 12%. Black and Hispanic students comprised the largest share of the minority student population. There has been little change in the mobility of the student population.

The district has five buildings, including three elementary buildings with grades K-5, a middle school building with grades 6-8, and a high school building with grades 9-12. A full-time principal was assigned to each building and there is a district superintendent of schools. There are also three district administrators assigned to curriculum and student services.

There were seven school board members, elected at large for alternating 3-year terms. The board of education included 3 females and 4 males who came from a variety of backgrounds that included: medicine, business and industry, the correctional system, and education. The longevity of the board members ranged from a 1st-year board member to a 6-year veteran. Five of the seven current board members were on the board when the district decided to become a part of the IASB Lighthouse Project in 2002. This training involved monthly work sessions for the board with an outside trainer, usually an IASB staff member. Two new board members were elected during the 3-year period studied.
In addition to Lighthouse Project training, the seven board members in District A participated in 29 different IASB-sponsored training events since the 2003-04 school year. A new superintendent was hired in this district at the end of the 2004-05 school year, however, building-level administration has been stable during the 3-year period of this study.

**School district B**

School district B is located in a small community with a total district population of 7,935. The school district services the community and surrounding rural area, with an approximate student population of 970 in kindergarten through 12th grade. There are 65 teachers. A large percentage of the eligible school students in this community attend a non-public school in the area.

As shown in Table 2, 28.1% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. This number has been growing yearly. The minority student population was 14.3%. Hispanic students comprised the largest share of the minority student population, which has also been growing rapidly.

The district has three buildings that include an elementary building with grades K-4, a middle school building with grades 5-8, and a high school building with grades 9-12. There is a full-time principal assigned to each building and a district superintendent of schools.

There were five school board members, elected at large for alternating 3-year terms. There were two females and three males on the board who came from a variety of backgrounds that included: agriculture, banking, medicine, education, and buildings and trades. The longevity of the board ranged from a 1st-year board member to a member
completing a 9th year on the board. Four of the five current board members were on the board when they decided to become a part of the IASB Lighthouse Project in 2002. Board membership has been stable, with only one new member elected to the board in the 3-year period of this study.

The district involvement in the Lighthouse Project included monthly board work sessions with an outside trainer, usually from the IASB staff. The five members in District B participated in 14 IASB-sponsored training events since 2003-04.

Districts C and D, described in the next two subsections, did not participate in any type of external training. While their superintendents expressed interest in having the board be more involved in various training opportunities, a total board commitment to such an activity had not been expressed by the members.

School district C

School district C is comprised of several small, rural communities and surrounding areas with a total population of 3,119. The school district services an approximate student population of 434, with students in kindergarten through 12th grade instructed by 39 teachers. As shown in Table 2, over one-third (37.15%) of the students was eligible for free and reduced lunch. The minority student population was less than 1%. Student enrollment in this district has been declining since 1996; however, there was a slight increase in the last two years.

The district has two buildings: an elementary building for grades PreK-6, and a secondary building that includes grades 7-12. There were five school board members, elected by director district for alternating 3-year terms. The board of education included two females
and thee males. The longevity of the board member’s ranged from a 1\textsuperscript{st}-year board member to a member completing a 6\textsuperscript{th} year on the board. The members came from a variety of backgrounds, including agriculture, government, and business. Board membership has been stable, with one new member elected to the board during the 3-year period of this study.

The five members in district C had participated in two IASB training events, since 2003-04. This district was not involved in any special training initiatives.

**School district D**

School district D is in a small, rural community with a population of 3,073. The school district services the community and surrounding area, with an approximate student population of 553 students in kindergarten through 12\textsuperscript{th} grade instructed by 36 teachers. Student enrollment had been declining, but experienced a slight increase during the 2005-06 school year.

As shown in Table 2, 28\% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. The minority student population comprised less than 1\% and which was stable during the period of this study. Nevertheless, there was an expectation that, due to increased industry in the area, the minority student population may grow in the future.

The district has three buildings: a primary center, an elementary building with grades 3-5, and a secondary school building with grades 6-12. There is a district superintendent of schools, and a principal assigned to each building—both whom also teach part-time.

As shown in Table 2, there were five members of the school board, elected at large for alternating 3-year terms. There were two females and three males on the board of education, who came from a variety of backgrounds, including real estate, agriculture, and
labor. The longevity of the board ranged from a 1st-year board member to a member completing 15 years on the board. Board membership has been stable, with two new members elected to the board during the 3 years of this study.

The five board members participated in nine IASB training events since 2003-04. This district was not involved in any special training initiatives. At the end of the 2003-04 school year, the district replaced both the elementary and the secondary principal.

Geographic proximity of the districts was not a consideration for this study nor was size of the district. It was determined that it was more important to focus on the training involvement of the board members, rather than the size or the geographic location of the districts.

Organizational structure

Complexity of district leadership can influence the involvement of board members in the issue of student achievement. Maguire (1989) divided districts into eight organization structure categories (see Table 3). Because the administrative structures in the four districts in this study remained consistent with Maguire’s findings, these organization structures were used as a way to assess the complexity of the districts. Analyzing the complexity has helped indicate how far the students are removed from the board of directors. The first district in this study was in the OS-500 category. The district had a superintendent, and an elementary and secondary principal, both of whom taught part-time. The second district in this study was in the OS-750 category. This district had a superintendent, and an elementary and secondary principal. The third district was in the OS-1000 category. This district had a superintendent and three principals, one in each building. The fourth district was in the OS-4000 category.
Table 3. Maguire’s organization structure (1989, p. 71)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OS-250</td>
<td>Teaching superintendent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| OS-500   | 1 superintendent  
  1 principal |
| OS-750   | 1 superintendent  
  1 elementary principal  
  1 secondary principal who may teach part time |
| OS-1000  | 1 superintendent  
  1 principal in each building with no classroom teaching |
| OS-2000  | 1 superintendent  
  1 assistant superintendent  
  1 principal at each school  
  Asst principals at MS & HS |
| OS-4000  | 1 superintendent  
  3 assistant superintendents  
  Each building has principal and assistant principals |
| OS-10,000| 1 superintendent  
  2 assistance superintendents  
  8-9 directors  
  - Each building has a principal and assistant principals  
  - Multiple high schools |
| OS-10,000+| 1 superintendent  
  1-4 assistant superintendents  
  8-20 executive directors  
  - Multiple high schools |

OS=Organizational Structure.

This district was larger than the other three and more complex in its administrative support. It had a superintendent, several support staff in the central office, a high school principal, activities director, middle school principal, and a principal in each of the elementary buildings.

All superintendents and a majority of school board members in each of the four districts were interviewed for this study. The district data from the 2004-05 district year-end
reports are summarized in Table 2. Interviews of board members and superintendents were conducted during the 2005-06 school year.

**Data Collection**

Several methodological strategies for data collection are employed in qualitative research. A major strategy applied in this study was the use of informal conversation interview, which was conducted by this researcher. The original intent of the study was to interview all 22 district board members, and each superintendent in the four school districts. However, due to conflicts in schedules, 13 board members and four superintendents were interviewed.

Face-to-face interviews of the board members and superintendents were conducted at each district’s administration office, in most instances. Due to the location of the board member’s home or place of employment, two interviews were conducted at restaurants near these respondents’ work site. Face-to-face interviews were the preferred process; however, in two instances, a telephone interview was conducted due to scheduling issues. Through this process, the investigator was able to establish an understanding of how the respondents’ viewed themselves and others within the context of their organizational reality.

A decision was made as the project progressed as to whether to interview any other key informants based upon identification by the previously noted respondents. Key informants are people who are particularly knowledgeable about the inquiry setting and articulate about their knowledge, and their insights can be helpful in assisting an observer understand what is happening and why (Patton, 2002). In this study, a principal in one of the districts was particularly helpful. In addition to his duties as a principal, he was also the
district school improvement specialist and worked closely with the board and IASB. While conducting interviews with the board members in this district, he was identified as a key player in their work.

The interview structure was a conversational format, with the same opening questions used for all respondents. All interviews were audio-recorded. If key areas of interest were not shared as a result of the opening questions, the researcher used probing and follow-up questions depending on how the individual responded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A general interview guide—comprised of a set of issues the researcher desires to discuss with the respondent (Patton, 2002)—was developed before the interview. The interview guide (Appendix A) was used to keep the interviewer on track and to ensure that important topics were covered. In the course of the interview, however, there was considerable opportunity for respondents to go beyond the bounds of the questions. Flexibility was maintained to allow for in-depth follow-up questions and full explication of developing themes or topics.

The content of the opening questions and follow-up questions included Patton’s (2002) categories: (a) experience and behavior questions that elicit what respondents do or have done; (b) opinion and value questions that elicit how respondents think about behaviors and experience; (c) feeling questions eliciting how respondents react emotionally to or feel about their experiences and opinions; (d) knowledge questions that elicit what respondents know about their world; (e) sensory questions that involve what and how they see, hear, touch, taste and smell the world around them; and (f) background and demographic questions that elicit respondents descriptions of themselves and their school district. Questions in this study focused on the experience, knowledge, sensory, and background areas of Patton’s categories.
The questions used were based on matters that are most closely related to the main topic of this research—the school board’s impact on student achievement (Appendix A). The articles, research studies, and other forms of literature used in this research served as sources to develop the questions that helped to determine if training for school board members impacted their disposition and, subsequently, student achievement.

As respondents shared information, the researcher mentally or manually checked to ensure that the areas of interest had been covered using the interview guide (Appendix A). If a respondent did not describe an area in enough detail, the interviewer asked follow-up questions or probes until she was satisfied that the topic had been covered adequately. Probes were conversational and fit naturally into the conversation, so as not to appear as dissatisfaction with a previous answer or as leading to an anticipated answer. Probes consisted of *detail-oriented* questions, *elaboration* probes, *clarification* probes, and *contrast* probes (Patton, 2002).

Detail-oriented questions were the basic questions that filled in the blank spaces of a response. They were the basic “who,” “where,” “what,” “when,” and “how” questions that were used to obtain a complete and detailed picture of some activity or experience. Elaboration probes included the nonverbal cue of gently nodding the head as a positive reinforcement. Elaboration probes were also verbal, such as “could you say something more about that”? A clarification probe was useful when something had been said that was ambiguous or an apparent non sequitur. The contrast probe was used to give the respondents something to push off against by asking, “How does x compare to y?” These probes were not written in advance; rather, they were used orally to help the interviewer gather as much information as possible from the respondents.
The researcher continually reinforced what the respondent shared by providing feedback. This was done by relating the importance of and interest in what was being shared, as well as appreciation for the respondent’s general willingness to participate in the questioning.

The researcher rephrased a question, using different words, when the respondent did not answer the question asked. In addition, similar to respondents who gave especially short or shallow responses needed prompting, respondents who veered from the topic were also prompted.

Each section of the interview questions concluded by asking if the respondent had anything to add or share that the interviewer had not asked. The probes and follow-up questions were an important component of the interviews because they helped to deepen the responses to a question and increase the richness and depth of the responses.

Signed consent forms were obtained from each of the respondents (Appendix B). All of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Summaries were written of all the interviews and calls were made to clarify comments when needed.

**Role of the Researcher**

One of the important distinctions between qualitative research and quantitative research involves the role of the researcher. The ideal in quantitative research is an experimental design in which researcher biases and values have no impact on the outcome. Since the researcher in a qualitative study is the measurement instrument through which the data are gathered, qualitative research assumes that the researcher’s bias and values will impact the outcome of the study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1994; Merriam, 1998).
To enable the audience in qualitative studies to evaluate the validity of the conclusions, researchers should neutralize or bracket their biases by stating them explicitly to the extent possible as part of the study (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). This helps the reader to make a critical evaluation of the researcher’s conclusions. While it is not possible to give a full accounting of one’s own biases, I have attempted to outline the experiences that would clearly influence my interpretation of school board dispositions.

The most important dimension of my background that affects my view of this study is my work as a superintendent in two Iowa school districts. Each of these experiences enabled me to work with board members and participate with them in training opportunities provided by the IASB and other entities, including Area Education Agency (AEA) board training. In both of these districts, a majority of the board members participated in outside training and believed it was a part of their purpose as boards to keep informed of Iowa education initiatives.

I am currently serving as the administrator of an intermediate service agency (AEA) that supports the work of 20 public school districts. Part of my work involves conducting workshops with local school district boards and their administrative teams. This work has given me the opportunity to be a provider as well as a recipient of training.

In addition to professional experiences, personal background may influence my approach to this study. My personal background is somewhat parochial. I have spent my entire life in the Midwest within a few hundred miles of where I was born. My family’s rural background emphasized the importance of education and being a life-long learner. This may influence my work because I do not have first-hand knowledge of how other state organizations, such as school board associations, support their local schools through training
opportunities. However, I have traveled and visited schools in other states and attended numerous professional meetings in other parts of the country. I do not believe my lack of experience working in other parts of the country has kept me from learning about how schools are structured and boards of education operate in other locations.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (2000) introduced the concept of “trustworthiness” in qualitative research. Four criteria are used to establish trustworthiness within the naturalistic paradigm: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These criteria are analogous to the four criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and dependability used to establish rigor within the positivist paradigm. For each of these criteria, Lincoln and Guba developed techniques and measures that increase the probability that these criteria will be met to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggested several measures increasing the likelihood that a study will produce credible results. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are related. Prolonged engagement is the practice of spending sufficient time in the field to be able to detect distortions that might creep into the data collected and to build trust with the participants. Persistent observation refers to spending sufficient time observing important themes or dimensions of the research to understand or account for them fully. The researcher visited each of the districts to observe, conduct interviews, and obtain and review documents. Prior experience in school district leadership helped in understanding the leadership context more quickly and made it easier to establish rapport and trust.
Triangulation enhances credibility through the use of multiple methods and sources. The researcher collected and reviewed district policy and procedural documents, written minutes and data from board meetings, and other documents identified as relevant by the respondents. The purpose of document review and observation was to triangulate among data collected in observations, interviews, and documents. This was critical for validation in this qualitative study design. According to Patton (2002), triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identified four basic types of triangulation. Since the purpose of this study was to determine whether additional board member training, which focused on instructional improvement, allowed for changes in their disposition, two of the four types were used extensively. Data triangulation was ensured by interviewing board members and observing board meetings. In addition, methodological triangulation, or applying multiple methods to study the subject, was used.

The policies in which the greatest focus was placed were related to professional development, support for scientifically-based research strategies for instruction, and financial support for improving student achievement. While attending board meetings and reviewing minutes from the meetings, I listened and read to reveal topics of conversation related to goal-setting, data review and analysis, and professional development.

**Transferability**

To ensure transferability to other settings with similar contexts, this study provides a description of each aspect of the research, including the setting in which the inquiry takes place and the processes observed in the setting. This will enable readers to assess whether the results of this study are transferable.
Dependability and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (2000) proposed that the inquiry audit method will increase both dependability and confirmability. Similar to a financial audit, the inquiry audit looks at both process and product. Examination of the research process increases dependability whereas examination of the research product increases confirmability. An audit record for this study was maintained that includes raw data, data reduction and analysis, notes, schedules, observation formats, and questions.

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

The opening script (Appendix C) was designed to cover critical ethical protection for the respondents, therefore, the researcher read the instructions verbatim to ensure that the respondent understood the information. In addition, a letter was provided to each respondent describing the study, its purpose, intended use of the data, and ethical and confidentiality procedures intended to protect the respondent. The researcher procured a signature indicating an understanding and approval of the interview prior to beginning the interview.

Internal Instrument Validation and Pre-contact

Prior to the district visit, the introduction to the study was emailed to the superintendent. This document can be found in Appendix D. The superintendent provided feedback on the procedures, names and addresses of board members, and information regarding the schedule of board meetings.

Human Subjects Procedures and Confidentiality

Approval to conduct the interviews was obtained from the Office of Research Assurances (ORA) at Iowa State University (see Appendix E). Each interviewee was invited
to participate, to sign an informed consent/release form to be interviewed, and to allow the use of his or her recorded statements for research purposes.

Data Management and Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is a process of making meaning. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In a similar vein, Yin (1984) stated that data analysis consists of “examining, categorizing, tabulating, and otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of the study” (p. 105). In this study, data analysis was begun in the field so that clarifying questions could be asked when necessary.

The tape-recorded statements from each interviewee were transcribed into Microsoft Word. The method for analyzing the data began by asking, “What were the lessons learned?” After reviewing the data, the statements then were coded with regard to their specific content and overall emergent themes. Each time a specific theme was identified, a simple 3-digit code number was assigned to the passage. Then the passages were copied from the transcripts to a separate document. The new document was identified with that theme and, as additional supporting material was discovered, each was also copied into the new document. The new document identified with this theme could then be analyzed, and a revised document was created by selecting and copying passages to another “new” document. In this way, coding and categorizing could be accomplished in a relatively straightforward manner.

Summary

This chapter described the methods and procedures that were used for participant selection, data gathering, and data analysis. The following chapter presents the findings of
the study, including descriptions of the context for the four case studies and the results of the interviews with respondents.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The study examined the perceived influence of the school board on student achievement by asking the following research question: Do boards that have been subjected to more of a specific type of training focused on student achievement create and support conditions in their systems that enable students to achieve at high levels? This chapter presents the data and provides a summary analysis.

The results for each of the four school districts studied are presented in this section. A description of the district and the board members is provided to develop the context for each case. Results of the interviews with the board members are presented next, followed by the results of the interviews with the superintendents and any key informants. Then an analysis of themes that emerged from the respondent interviews is presented. In *Writing up qualitative research*, Wolcott (2001) considered the study’s description as, [the] “most important contribution made” (p. 31). Wolcott asserted that a good descriptive account enables others to theorize. Finally, a summary of the documents reviewed is provided.

To maintain anonymity, names of the respondents and districts were replaced with a letter and/or number designation that reflects each district that was visited. For example, among the districts visited, district A was the first district visited, and each board member was referred to as board member A1, A2, etc. Use of the letter and number designations helped maintain neutrality. All data presented were official school data from the 2004-05 school year, which was the most recent year audited.

Two of the districts studied had participated in the Lighthouse Project sponsored by IASB. The project’s emphasis is to help boards identify, develop, and implement strategies at
the board table that may help to improve student achievement in their districts. These strategies include developing shared leadership with a vision that has a focus on student learning, high expectations and dynamic leadership among all levels, demonstrating a continuous focus on improving education with high levels of involvement and shared decision-making, developing an understanding of how to organize the people and the school environment to start and sustain an improvement effort, offering a supportive workplace that enables all staff to succeed in their roles, supporting regular school-wide staff development focused on studying teaching and learning, using data and information on student needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level, and developing a close connection between the school, parents, and the community.

Board members from all four districts indicated their participation in the IASB’s Academy of Board Learning Experiences (ABLE). These comprehensive learning experiences are designed to provide members with the knowledge and skills to be a leader in education. The training sessions are structured to include real-life case studies and participatory experiences, giving the board members an opportunity to explore issues together and learn from each other.

**School District A**

**Board members and training**

All seven board members in district A were active participants in the Lighthouse Project training and attend the monthly work sessions in the district. During the 3-year period studied, 36 work sessions were held relating to the Lighthouse Project training. The seven board members also participated in a total of 29 additional IASB training sessions during the
past 3 years, including state conventions, delegate assemblies, district meetings, leadership academies, and ABLE sessions regarding legislative advocacy, finance, accountability, orientation to the board, and structure. Three board members and the superintendent were interviewed for this study. Following are the results from interviews with each member.

**Board member A1**

Board member A1 had been a board member for three years. She had attended two IASB sponsored ABLE workshops since being elected to the board. Her interview was conducted at her place of employment. She indicated that student achievement was changing in the district as a result of No Child Left Behind legislation as well as an emphasis on curriculum by the district.

She further identified that the board has had a role in that change because now they are giving some direction to the staff and administration regarding their expectations. The board has a focus on reading comprehension and monitors student achievement regularly. The Lighthouse Project training has been very important to this member because of improved communication in the district and the focus on student achievement. It has improved the board’s skills in using data to develop the goals and mission of the district.

Board member A1 believes the board training has influenced the superintendent and principals because they have focused on student achievement and the work that needs to be done in order to improve it. It has “directed their path a lot of times for what they are doing or should be doing.” The board training has also influenced the staff indirectly because they are the ones who ultimately execute the board’s expectations. This has influenced student test scores positively. The board has been monitoring these data for the past couple of years.
The disposition of the board was influenced by the training, as demonstrated by the conversations at the board table. The board has improved: listening to each other, taking each other’s points of view into consideration, and then acting as a group. “We go deeper into those things that help improve student achievement such as professional development for staff.”

**Board member A2**

Board member A2 had served as a board member for four years and was the current vice president. She had attended 22 additional IASB-sponsored training sessions in the past 3 years. Her interview was conducted at the district office. She indicated that student achievement was progressing in the district because their number-one goal was to improve student achievement, and everybody knew the goal and was working toward it. Other influences included the professional development focus on reading skills. In the past, every teacher “did their own thing,” but now there was a focus across all grade levels. The district was also working to better understand the influence poverty has on student learning. The board had influenced student achievement by hiring a new superintendent and setting more time aside for professional development—from all-day sessions to more frequent half-days sessions.

This board member was influenced by training, including the Lighthouse Project training, IASB-sponsored ABLE training, and state conventions. In addition, training influenced the board by focusing their work. It was also a big help when hiring the new superintendent. The entire board was involved in the interview—they knew the goals and they knew what they needed to hear.
Board training influenced the superintendent and principals in setting a direction for the district. It also focused their work in professional development regarding reading, and helped the members set the expectation for communication with the board and parents.

Board member A2 believed that training influenced the staff because there was an expectation for professional development participation and results. Principals were in the classrooms more, reporting the strategies and holding people accountable. As a result, student test scores were improving.

This board member also believed that the disposition of the board had changed as a result of the training they received because they now considered what they needed to talk about as a board, such as have board committees work on finance, policy, facilities, calendar and negotiations, and use data regularly.

**Board member A3**

Board member A3 was completing his second year. He had attended 18 IASB-sponsored training sessions in the past two years. His interview was conducted at the district office.

He indicated that student achievement was improving in the district. The influences for that improvement included: No Child Left Behind pressures a good teaching staff. He revealed the board had an important role in this change by asking for more accountability, placing an emphasis on curriculum and professional development, providing resources for textbooks, and supporting the superintendent. He also indicated a concern that NCLB had forced districts to put too much pressure on areas that were being tested and not enough work in the areas of social studies, history, and social skills.
Training influenced this board member by helping him to make more informed decisions. He indicated that, as a whole, the Lighthouse Project training helped the board to reflect on what they felt was important and how it might affect student learning. In addition, they looked at data to help guide their decisions.

Board member A3 believed: "our training is influencing the superintendent because he is new to the state and doesn't yet understand how the IASB ABLE training works." He also revealed the training had influenced the principals because of the expectation that they should come to the board to discuss how professional development was working. The influence on the staff was similar—in indirect, but as an expectation.

Student achievement was also influenced by board training as revealed by the way the board was supporting the staff. In addition, staff professional development expectations focused on reading comprehension.

The disposition and the beliefs of the board were impacted greatly by the training the board received. This was evidenced by conversations at the board table relating to student achievement, development of a reading focus, and expectations and support for professional development.

Superintendent

The superintendent for district A was completing his first year. In addition to his first year in the district, it was also his first year in the position of superintendent and his first year in the state of Iowa. His most recent administrative experience was as a high school principal in another state. The board of education in District A made it clear when they hired him that the Lighthouse Project was a priority for their district. He had spent time this year attending
all board work sessions and IASB-sponsored training sessions with his board when they attended. During this first year in the district he had also attended 14 different IASB training activities or meetings.

The superintendent identified the high poverty rate, decline in student enrollment, and the loss of businesses in the community as influences on student achievement. However, he also noted the very dedicated administrators and staff as positive influences.

The superintendent indicated he was participating in the Lighthouse Project training with the board and had attended other IASB-sponsored sessions with the board. He believed this training had influenced the board by creating a new perspective regarding how they looked at themselves: “They really take a look at what they’re doing and why they are doing it and they argue very professionally. They agree to disagree, they talk among themselves and they talk outside the boardroom. They really understand why micromanaging is the wrong thing to do.”

He also believed this training has had an influence on his role as superintendent because the board was supportive of any action that would improve student achievement and enable the superintendent to be strong. He did not see a direct influence on principals or staff, but believed the training has had a big influence on the disposition of the board. Their meetings were focused on student achievement. He mentioned the principals came to meetings to talk about professional development and how the professional development was working, and students also came to make presentations about what they were doing.

Board policies focused on professional development, support for research-based strategies, and financial support for improving student achievement. This researcher attended a board meeting in this district that included a review of student achievement data, and plans
and strategies for professional development to support the district’s focus on reading comprehension.

School District B

Board members and training

All five board members in this district were involved in the Lighthouse Project training work sessions held monthly and were also active participants in them. During the 3-year period of this study, there were 36 board work sessions. The five board members had attended a total of 14 additional IASB training sessions during the past 3 years, which included: state conventions, delegate assemblies, district meetings, and ABLE sessions looking at advocacy, orientation, accountability, and leadership.

Board member B1

Board member B1 had been a board member for nine years and was the current board president. She had attended six different IASB training sessions in the past 3 years. Due to her busy schedule, her interview was conducted over the telephone. She identified the board’s involvement in the Lighthouse Project as a systemic change in the district.

She believed student achievement was changing in the district for the better, yet challenges included the socio-economic disparity and increased ELL (English Language Learners) learners needing support. Influences from the change included a very supportive community and parents, support from the local college, and a more cohesive leadership team than in the past. The board had influenced the change by being seen as learners, themselves, and becoming more knowledgeable through their participation in the Lighthouse Project.
In addition to Lighthouse Project training, this board member had attended state and national school board conventions, IASB ABLE training, the leadership academy, and financial training. These activities had influenced her work as a board member by making her more knowledgeable and aware of the work of the district.

The training had also influenced the superintendent because he came to the district at the same time the board committed to the Lighthouse project. She thought the collective training had helped the superintendent’s decision-making skills. Influences on the principals had been more of a “trickle down” process. The staff were influenced by a strong administrative team. In addition, data reviews by the board made an impact on expectations.

She also revealed that board training had influenced their disposition regarding the factors they considered important. They used to deal with bricks and mortar but now they looked at achievement data and it reinforced their purpose. They also added a work session once a month and dedicated it to learning as a board. In addition, their decisions impacted the district and future boards.

**Board member B2**

Board member B2 had served as a board member for 6 years and currently served as the vice president. His interview was conducted at the district office. In addition to Lighthouse Project training, he had attended eight additional IASB training sessions in the past 3 years, including the state school board convention and ABLE workshops. He expressed the desire to run again for the board because he had learned so much and a new person would have to start at the beginning. He had a daughter in school and asked for her opinion of his being on the board. He shared her response: “Dad, if you enjoy it, keep going
in it. I like you being in it." The systemic changes identified by this board member included the addition of a new board member who brought forth a new view, the Lighthouse Project, and a growing ELL population.

He revealed that student achievement was changing in the district. He felt the change was influenced by the board’s questioning about student achievement data, the expectation that all principals must have action plans directed at improving student achievement, and the district’s focus on reading comprehension.

This board member believed that the participatory style of the training had influenced the board. It also influenced the superintendent because the board was modeling the importance of continuous learning and was asking appropriate types of questions.

Principals were influenced by the interest and commitment of the board to learning at all levels, which also influenced the staff because the board members were interested in the student achievement data the principals brought to the board. This district had an advisory committee comprised of staff and community members, and the data they studied at the meetings informed the staff that the board knew what is going on within the district.

Board member B2 believed: “students are influenced because we have supported specific training for teachers that helps to improve student learning. These include Second Chance Reading at the secondary level and sustained silent reading (SSR) for everyone. We also support students that are struggling by providing extra help for them.” Reading comprehension was an area in which this board member had struggled, and he wanted to be sure that students today did not struggle as he did.

In addition, he mentioned the disposition of the board had been influenced because: “we think outside the box more than we used to. We think and talk about bigger things. We
also support hiring the best teachers. We also survey the community and try to always think about all of the students."

**Board member B3**

Board member B3 was completing his first year. He had attended two IASB training sessions this year in addition to the Lighthouse Project training. His interview was conducted at the district office.

This board member identified the hiring of the current superintendent 4 years ago as an important change. Other important changes were the increased community population in general, and the rise in the Hispanic population in particular.

As a new board member, he was aware student achievement was the focus but was not sure the focus had changed. He believed student achievement was influenced by the work of the board in the Lighthouse Project and commitment by the administrative staff. He mentioned the board reviewed and monitored achievement data. He perceived that students influenced each other to perform better, and there was an observable commitment in the community to the youth. The board was committed to the Lighthouse Project when the current superintendent was hired so they asked him for a commitment as well.

Principals were influenced by the board though the development of student achievement goals and the expectation for each building to have similar goals. He noted that student achievement was increasing because the entire district was committed to the goals.

This board member was surprised to observe meetings devoted totally to work sessions, with the board learning and studying. In his opinion, the disposition of the board was influenced by the training and development of the number-one objective—student
achievement. He indicated that he had gained a huge appreciation for the board members because of their commitment to the youth, staff, and administration.

**Board member B4**

Board member B4 had been on the board for 8 years. He attended two additional IASB training sessions during his tenure on the board. Due to scheduling conflicts, his interview was conducted over the telephone. He did not identify any systemic changes in the district during the past 3 years.

He mentioned student achievement was changing in the district, in part due to the emphasis being placed on it. This board member viewed the district’s reading focus as an influence on the change in student achievement. He believed that some staff had a hard time buying into the reading focus but was pleased that everyone is, at least, giving it a try. He also identified the administrative team as a positive influence. The board role in changing student achievement was in hiring a superintendent, holding him accountable, and then supporting that person.

This board member identified the intense training of the Lighthouse Project as having an influence on the board. The training had recharged him and changed the way he thought. He believed the key purpose of public education is student achievement and ensuring students are prepared to be contributing members of society.

Board training influenced the superintendent to set the tone for the district. The board was clear when they hired him that they expected the superintendent to lead them through the Lighthouse Project.
Two of the principals had been experiencing burnout, however, the Lighthouse Project training helped them remember why they became involved in education initially. The training also influenced staff due to the fact that the board had not wavered from this endeavor. The board supported professional development and expected full participation. He was not sure whether board training had influenced students. Nevertheless, the disposition of the board definitely had been affected. “We still have to conduct business like usual, but we don’t spend the time on it like we used to and we don’t do as much micromanaging.”

**Board member B5**

Board member B5 had been a board member for 4 years. She attended three IASB training sessions during the past 3 years, in addition to the Lighthouse training. These sessions included the state IASB board convention and ABLE meetings. Her interview was conducted at a local restaurant during her noontime lunch break. She identified the biggest change in the district as the influx of Hispanic students.

She mentioned student achievement was changing in the district, and one of the influences was looking at individual students and their abilities to read. “We look at those student statistics and it makes a difference. We also mean all students when we say all students. The Lighthouse Project training has made a difference because the board is demanding student success from everyone, including the community.”

She noted the training had influenced her as well as the board because the board made reading the focus across the district. It has influenced the superintendent because he is held accountable and he has been willing to commit the time that it takes.
She mentioned a new principal had been a great addition to the district. "I don't know if we would have gone as far without him. Just because of his training and his ties with the state and how he helped us moved ahead". He helped each staff member, and the training had influenced them as well.

In some ways, the training influences the staff because the board filters down what they expect because of what is being learned. The board was not backing down and they envisioned the board being trained as well. This board focused well on the achievement of subgroups in the district, which indicated a different way of looking at achievement. It also influenced the students because they were aware of their test scores and how important it was to do their best.

Board member B5 believed the disposition of the board had definitely changed. "My father was on the board and I remember they talked about teachers' salaries and this or that but never about kids and scoring. Plus, we're excited about it. Also, the board members choose to run for reelection."

Superintendent

The superintendent of district B was completing his 4th year in the district. District B was the first district in which he has served as superintendent. The board had already been committed to participate in the IASB Lighthouse Project when the superintendent was hired. They made it clear to him that this participation was a priority for the board and he attended all the monthly work sessions. He also attended the IASB-sponsored training sessions with his board. During the past 3 years, he attended 18 additional IASB training sessions and meetings. His interview was conducted in his office. The greatest systemic change in the
district was the Lighthouse Project participation, and the changes it was creating in the district. In addition, the community was progressive. He cited as an example that they did not understand the word “no.” For example, they had a joint partnership with the local college and the city, and a $9,000,000 all-season center that was unusual for a community of this size.

The superintendent believed that student achievement was changing in the district, and stressed it was continually evolving. The district focus was on reading and their professional development activities revolve around reading. They have identified barriers to subgroup achievement and they are working on those.

The board’s influence came from the fact that they were committed and sent this message to the staff, not in a negative way but, rather, stating that it was important. The board members also protected their own learning time. “They will not let me sneak in a couple of action items during their work sessions which are devoted to learning. The board also sent the message to the staff that they are willing to support their work with resources, time and money.”

The principals had been influenced in a positive way by the board’s involvement in training. The board gave them focus. The staff was influenced by the board’s expectations and this, in turn, influenced the students. The turning point for the board in their work was when they had to decide if all really meant all when it came to student achievement. It seemed like a simple question, but the principals had an honest discussion about it.
Key informant

This person was identified by three of the five board members as having an important influence on the work of the board, administrative team, and the staff. He had been with the district for 4 years and was involved in the Lighthouse Training project. He identified the increasing Hispanic population as a major systemic change in the district. The district was also beginning to recognize this change.

Student achievement was changing in the district, but not based on the Iowa tests. The change was clearly visible the district’s assessments. The district used the Gates McGinty and Scholastic Reading Inventories in the middle school. The changes were basically due to the cultural change within the school, leadership from the board, a focus on reading comprehension for all students, and the teacher study teams. Another influence was the professional development which was interspersed throughout the year rather than solely at the beginning of the year.

This educator believed that board training had influenced the superintendent. Lighthouse was a priority for the board, and they made that clear when he was hired. In addition, the board supported his role in district leadership.

In this district, the principals were influenced because they now had a role in policy development. In addition, they participated in training to enhance their growth, and they were involved in the development of reading strategies that work in the classroom.

The staff were influenced because the board had focused on the same objective for four years—reading comprehension. They monitored and analyzed the data, and they asked questions. Students were influenced due to everyone else’s focus.
The board changed the way they thought. It was evident each time they got together. It was the language they spoke. They made statements such as “this kind of connects with what we are doing.” They had monthly work sessions and they looked forward to this time together as time for learning. They had a passion for learning and were student-focused. They also have supported the continuation of the Lighthouse Project locally. “It is good to be a part of something like this.”

Board policies were found that focused on professional development, support for scientifically-based research strategies and financial support for improving student achievement. The researcher attended a work session in this district that included a review of a survey instrument the district intended to send to the community. Minutes from previous meetings contained student achievement data, and plans and strategies for professional development to support the district focus on reading comprehension.

School District C

Board members and training

The five board members in this district attended a total of three IASB training sessions during the past 3 years. These were ABLE sessions on advocacy and orientation for board members. They had not been involved in additional training projects. Interviews were conducted with two of the five board members.

Board member C1

Board member C1 had been on the board for 5 years and was in her second year as board president. She attended two IASB-sponsored ABLE training sessions. One was an orientation for the board and the other one was on legislation. She indicated that she would
like to attend more training sessions as well as the state convention, but her work as an office manager did not enable her to get away very often. Her interview was conducted in the elementary building prior to a music concert. This board member noted no recent systemic changes but did say that there had been some administrative changes four years ago, when they hired the superintendent. She also mentioned there had been some longevity on the board but that had changed in the past several years as well. Recently, there was a small increase in the student population after several years of decline. However, the board had to eliminate positions in the early 2000s.

She believed that student achievement was improving and attributed it to the elementary principal. He brought in a new and different perspective that embraced positive morale and some successful programs. However, there had been turnover in the high school principalship, and she mentioned that such changes create inconsistency.

She mentioned the board’s only involvement in this change was accountability. The board attempted to take an interest in student achievement and test results. This, at least, has made the board aware. Training helped this board member to understand her role as a board member better.

Board member C1 believed board training had influenced the superintendent because, as board president, she was better prepared for her job and, thus, was able to assist the superintendent. Principals are probably influenced by the superintendent who bridges the gap between the staff, the board, and the administration. Staff sometimes present information to the board.

She believed that the board had some influence on student achievement and test scores. She added that everything seemed to trickle down and, hopefully, they were
providing a positive environment, attempting to have good communication, and letting staff, students and the administration know that they really cared about the students and what was occurring in the district.

**Board member C2**

Board member C2 had been on the board for 4 years, and had attended one IASB sponsored ABLE training session. This was a session about the do’s and don’ts of board members. His interview was conducted in the district cafeteria after he had finished work for the day.

Board member C2 identified the passage of the 1-cent sales tax as a systemic change in the district. This enabled the board to make some needed facilities upgrades, including the bus barn, the back parking lot, bleachers, and lights on the softball field as well as on the visitors side of the field.

Student achievement was changing in the district as evidenced by increased graduation requirements, good teachers, and caring parents. The 8-period day at the high school had also impacted student achievement. The board’s role in the change has been through the additional expectations for graduation requirements as well as adding another reading class in junior high.

Board member C2 was unsure if board training had an influence on the administrators, staff, or students. He did not indicate any changes in the disposition or behaviors of board members as a result of training.
Superintendent

The superintendent of district C was completing his 4th year in that position. He had previously served 15 years as an Iowa superintendent in another district. He had attended five IASB-sponsored training sessions or meetings during the past 3 years. He mentioned he would like the board to attend the IASB annual convention and more of the ABLE meetings but recognized it was difficult to get away from their jobs to attend these functions. Since they did not attend many IASB training sessions, he mentioned he did some of the training himself. He especially tried to get the board members to the board orientation session.

He identified no systemic changes in the district during the past 4 years. He remarked the district was basically steady. Enrollment peaked in 1996, and had been declining until 2 years ago, when they experienced a slight increase.

He believed that student achievement was changing in the district as a result of the steadiness in the community, support for the students, and quality in the teaching staff. He remarked that, this year, the 8th-grade students had dropped in math and science scores, but they had not fully determined the cause. They hoped it was an anomaly. If the board had a role in student achievement it was an accountability role. He said the administrators always reported to the board about where they were and where they planned to go, and made sure they were involved in knowing what was being done regarding staff development.

Board policies were reviewed to ascertain a focus on professional development and research-based strategies for instruction and financial support to improve student achievement. None of these policies were found in this district. When reviewing agendas and school board meetings this researcher did find topics of conversations relating to goal setting, data review, and professional development but they were initiated by the administration.
School district D

Board members and training

The five board members in this district had attended a total of nine different IASB training sessions during the past 3 years. These included state conventions, delegate assemblies, and ABLE orientation and advocacy. This board had not been involved in any additional training sessions. Interviews were conducted with three of the five board members.

Board member D1

Board member D1 had been a board member for 13 years and was currently in his 4th year as board president. He had attended one IASB-sponsored training session in the past 3 years. His interview was conducted at a restaurant in a neighboring community during the dinner hour. He identified no systemic changes in the district during the past 4 years and believed student achievement was improving. The influences for this improvement included the use of the CCC computer system in the elementary building, continuity and collaboration between the board and administration, and an open-door policy by the administration. The board’s role in this change included being 110% supportive of the administration and funding the computer system.

This board member believed that the training was important because it enhanced the ability of each member to contribute. He added that one can learn from others who are in attendance at the meetings. In addition, the training was very specific and dealt with topics that were of concern to a board. Board training influenced the superintendent and principals when everyone saw that the superintendent and board got along with one another. As far as
influencing staff and students, he suggested that a happy school should provide a good environment for learning.

He believed that training influences the disposition of the board. He mentioned that ABLE guides one to be able to run a meeting, and added that every year something new is learned.

**Board member D2**

Board member D2 was in the process of completing her 1st year as a board member. Her interview was conducted in the interviewer’s office for mutual convenience. She had attended three IASB-sponsored training sessions since her election to the board. These sessions included the state school board convention and ABLE workshops on the topics of communication and finance. She said that she had an accounting background, and that school finance was “like none other she has ever seen.” The systemic changes identified by this board member related to the economic conditions in the district which greatly impacted the work of the district.

This board member stated that she had not seen much change in student achievement. The board received a monthly update from the principals about events occurring in the district including athletics, academics, and information from the classrooms. These are shared with the board and the audience. At one of her first board meetings the administration shared student achievement data. She expressed a concern that they were not following the same students when they reported data but, rather, they always seemed to use a different group of students. She was made aware by the superintendent that this was a requirement in
the reporting for No Child Left Behind, and that their own district will also report cohort data to the board.

She believed that she has a totally different perspective since joining the board than most of the other board members. She mentioned she was serving only for the students and, thus, was not concerned nor took part in any “politics” that may have happened. She stated that since they only had one meeting a month, it was hard to have communication among the board members because they had so much business to conduct.

At this time in her work as a board member she did not think the board had much influence directly on staff or student achievement. She was unaware whether board training had an influence on the disposition or beliefs of the board members.

**Board member D3**

Board member D3 was completing his 2nd year as a board member and had attended two IASB-sponsored training sessions since being elected to the board. These included attending the delegate assembly at the state school board convention and the new board member orientation. He indicated that he was very busy with two children in junior high and high school and did not have much time to attend meetings. The interview was conducted in the interviewer’s office at the request of the board member since the location was conveniently along his drive home from work.

This board member identified economic changes as impacting the district in the last 4 years. Several plants have closed and that impacted available jobs. However, they were prepared for a slight increase in student enrollment next year. Student achievement declined a little this year, which he attributed partially to an increase in special education students. He
stated that, as a board, they had not yet discussed the board’s role in student achievement because they always seemed to be dealing with controversy in the district which occupied the majority of the board’s time.

Board member D3 stated that the ABLE training he attended was like a work session where they put one through numerous “what ifs” and then everybody talked about them. He thought this was very helpful and he hoped to attend more of this type of training.

He indicated that he was unsure if board training impacted principals, staff or students but he was confident this district made every attempt to work with all students to ensure their success. They did not have a dropout problem at this time.

Superintendent

The superintendent in district D was completing his 4th year in the district. He had been a superintendent in three other Iowa districts. He had attended five IASB sponsored training sessions or meetings during the 3 years of this study. His interview was conducted in his office. He identified board turnover, state funding, and declining enrollment as three big issues in his district.

He mentioned that student achievement was better in math this year. He attributed this increase to the support classes that were required by the board, the training teachers had completed with the students “on what a test looks like and how to read it,” and professional development for teachers in reading as well as math. He identified the board’s role in this as resulting in the increased graduation requirements; next year they plan to do more positive recognition of students and staff when things go well.
Because the board had not attended much training, he mentioned that he invited IASB staff to work with the board regarding school finance and local impact. He believed that training impacts administrators by helping the board be aware of the work that administrators do. When the board learns that professional development is important for teachers, they are more supportive of the training. He stated that several of his board members attended a session on NCLB (No Child Left Behind) and data, and that this came back into the board’s discussion in a helpful way.

Board policies were reviewed to ascertain a focus on professional development and research-based strategies for instruction, and financial support for improving student achievement. None of these policies were found in this district. When reviewing agendas and school board meetings this researcher did find topics of conversations relating to goal setting, data review, and professional development, but these topics were initiated by administrators.

**Summary of Results**

The following represents a summary of the interviews with board members organized around the major question in the study. Do boards that have been subjected to more of a specific type of training focused on student achievement create and support conditions in their systems that enable students to achieve a high levels?

**Current board make-up and length of service**

The board members in three of the four districts were elected at large for rotating 3-year terms. The 4th district elected members from designated director districts for rotated 3-year terms. Membership was both male and female in all four districts. Length of service on the boards that had more training ranged from 1 year to 9 years, and from 1 to 13 years on
boards with less training. Neither board make-up nor length of service on the board appeared to have impacted the amount of training in which the board members had participated.

**Major systemic changes in the schools or community**

There was an increasing ELL student population in one of the districts with more board training. One of these districts also identified the hiring of a new superintendent as a major change for the district. Both districts with less board training had the same superintendent for the past 4 years, and the student population was generally declining but with a slight increase in the current school year. Both districts had experienced a change in building principals during the timeline for this study.

**Student achievement changes in the districts**

In the districts with more board training, student achievement was perceived to be increasing by the board members as evidenced by the data studies in which the board had been involved. In the districts with less board training, student achievement was perceived to be stable and, in some areas, declining. The administration had presented information to the board regarding student achievement.

**Influence on changes in student achievement**

The influence identified by board members with more training was the board focus on a reading goal. Both districts had identified reading comprehension as a board goal. These districts also placed an emphasis on teacher training relating to the goal, and supported professional development for the staff in that area. No Child Left Behind was also identified as having an influence on the work of the districts.
In the districts with less training, the influence identified that made an impact on student achievement was declining resources, because it became more difficult to support the work of staff when there were fewer resources. Teacher training was identified as an important influence in student achievement to enable teachers to have the necessary skills. No Child Left Behind was also identified as having an influence on the work of the districts.

**Board’s role in student achievement change**

Board members identified their role in the student achievement change in the districts with more training to be the board’s focus and consistency relating to the reading comprehension goal. The goal stated that the board members act as learners, and that modeling learning is important.

In the districts with less board training, the board’s role in student achievement was identified as supporting the administrative team.

**Board member training and influence**

In the districts with more board training, all board members had been involved in the monthly Lighthouse Project training since the inception of the project or for the length of time they had been on the board. These board members had also attended IASB-sponsored ABLE training often as a group and, in several cases, the state school board convention.

In the districts with less board training, very few members had attended any of the IASB-sponsored training sessions. Those who attended did so individually. Only one member in one of the districts had attended the state school board convention.
**Board members**

In the districts with more board training, the members identified the training as having a positive influence on their work as a board member. They cited the single focus on instructional improvement as a key influence. This training had influenced discussions at the board table in both districts. Those discussions were more directed at improvement of student learning, and less on bricks and mortar.

In the districts with less training, members could not identify how training may have an influence on the board. Those who attended a training session or sessions found the training to be a positive experience.

**Superintendent**

In the districts with more board training, members expressed expectations for the superintendent to be the educational leader and to fully support the Lighthouse Project training for the board. They also demonstrated their interest in and time commitment to learning.

In the districts with less board training, members viewed the influence only as it related to accountability for the superintendent.

**Principals**

In the districts with more board training, the members perceived they had some influence on the principals generally through the superintendent, and because the board expected them to look more closely at student achievement in their buildings. They also perceived that their commitment of time showed the principals they were willing to learn.
In the districts with less board training, the members did not perceive they had much influence. If they did, they believed it was for accountability, and that the board may be more supportive of their work as principals.

**Staff**

In the districts with more board training, the members believed that their training did have an influence on staff because of researched-based teaching strategies discussed at the board table, data review of student achievement, increased support for professional development, and the provision of more resources for classroom materials. They also identified the collective bargaining experience as influenced by board training.

In the districts with less board training, the members thought the influence was that the staff could follow the chain of command or, in most cases, they did not identify an influence.

**Student test scores**

In the districts with more board training, members perceived that they did have an influence on student test scores because of the district’s focus on reading comprehension, discussions at the board table on research based strategies, and the data reviews.

In the districts with less board training, members thought that they might have an influence but they were not sure.

**Disposition and behavior of board members**

In the districts with more board training, members perceived that training, most definitely had impacted their disposition and behavior. They cited conversations at the board
table, addition of a work session each month for the board, lower likelihood that they micromanaged, they always focused their decisions on the impact of student learning, and they often approached their work as more of a business. One district emphasized their discussion about all of the students, actually meaning all and not just 95% of them.

In the districts with less board training, the members perceived their training as influencing how they conducted a meeting and, in some cases, the question could not be answered.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the four case studies of school district board members and superintendents regarding the perceived influence of the school board on student achievement by examining whether boards that have been subjected to more of a specific type of training, focused on student achievement create and support conditions in their systems that enable students to achieve at high levels. Chapter 5 presents a cross-case analysis and answers to the interview questions. The research question directed the focus for the interview questions.
CHAPTER 5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the study, followed by a multi-case analysis that discusses the findings, with themes or patterns that emerged among the school districts studied in a side-by-side-comparison. Finally, a discussion of the problems encountered and limitations, and recommendations for further research are presented.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine whether specific training for board members, focused on instructional improvement, changes the disposition of those board members and the superintendent, and whether those changes have an influence on student achievement. The researcher also sought to learn how leadership is comprised in a school district to support increased student achievement and, perhaps, enable board members to understand their role in school renewal and student achievement. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to select the four school districts that were studied. School board members and superintendents were interviewed. In one school district, a key informant was interviewed as well. The research was supplemented with an analysis of relevant documents and with a visit to each school district.

The data were collected in the spring of 2006 at four school districts in Iowa. Eighteen formal interviews were conducted with typed transcripts generated from the interviews. Data analysis was conducted using emergent themes.
Multi-case Analysis

A multi-case, qualitative study attempts to identify themes and explanations that emerge across cases (Merriam, 1998). This section includes a cross-case analysis of influences on student achievement: the school board’s role in student achievement change; board member training influences on board members, superintendents, principals, staff, and student test scores; and board training influences on dispositions and behaviors of board members.

Findings and Implications

The findings in this study are based on the research question and interviews. Table 4 presents the research question and the related interview questions that were used to support each component of the research question.

The membership on the school boards in the four districts in this study mirrored the makeup of boards statewide. Both men and women served on these boards. Three of the districts had five board members, and one board had seven members. Three of the four board members were elected at large, with one using the director district method of election. Finally, all four districts had at least one 1st year board member, and each had members who were serving multiple terms.

Student enrollment was generally declining, at the same time that there has been substantial growth in the ELL population. Student achievement was stable to increasing slowly, with teacher training and NCLB noted in all of the districts as having an influence. Declining resources presented ongoing problems for the districts.
Table 4. Research question and related interview questions

**Research Question:** Do boards that have been subjected to more of a specific type of training focused on student achievement create and support conditions in their systems that enable students to achieve at high levels?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Related interview questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic information relating to board members</td>
<td>What is the current board make up?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How long have you served on the board?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have there been any major, systemic changes in the school or community during the past four years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific training for board members</td>
<td>What type of training have you as a board member or superintendent participated in during the past three years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on instructional improvement</td>
<td>Has this training influenced the staff? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has this training influenced the principals? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in disposition of board members</td>
<td>Has this training influenced you? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has this training influenced the disposition of the board? Has if affected their behaviors? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in disposition of superintendents</td>
<td>Has this training influenced the superintendent? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences on student achievement</td>
<td>Is student achievement changing in your district?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is influencing the change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What else has happed in the district that might influence student achievement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you see as the board’s role in the change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has this training influenced student test scores? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Board members who participated in Lighthouse Project training consistently identified the board goal, focused on reading comprehension as a major influence on student achievement, board members themselves, staff, and student test scores. By narrowing the focus of the district’s professional development activities, the board members perceived that improvements in student learning could occur.

They also consistently identified their training in both the Lighthouse Project and the IASB ABLE workshops focused on instructional improvement as influences on the board, superintendent, principals, staff, and student test scores. This was evidenced by the sense of urgency created by studying the student achievement data at monthly work sessions.

They further identified the training as having an influence on the disposition and behaviors of the board citing their approach to their work as being more systemic and less micromanaging, having a constant focus on how their decisions impact student learning, the expectation that data play an important role in their work, and that all really does mean all students and not just some of them.

Districts with more training had adopted a professional development policy for certified personnel that included a commitment to ongoing professional development focused on academic content, curriculum, and building teachers’ repertoire in the area of greatest student learning need. Also included in this policy was commitment by the board to provide adequate resources to support the district-wide professional development plan, commitment to review the policy annually to determine if board goals are being met and recognition of the role the superintendent plays for ensuring successful participation and implementation of the professional development plans. The policy in each district results—focused with the expectations that achievement is improving for all students, learning gaps among subgroups
are narrowing, students are integrating strategies into their own learning, and all educators are improving their instructional skills and strategies in the district-identified area for improving student learning. In addition, all educators have a clear understanding of what the expected performance of the instructional strategies and skills look like and frequently monitor their practice to determine implementation progress, and administrators are actively leading the instructional improvement of the teachers.

Board members who were involved in less training did not see themselves as learners but rather as supporters of the administration and the chain of command. While they identified the IASB ABLE training sessions as positive they could not acknowledge that the training had any influence on the board, only on them as individuals. They were not sure that their training had any influence on superintendents and principals. One member thought the board was more supportive now that he better understood the amount of work involved in monitoring student achievement.

School districts with less training had not adopted a professional development policy for the teaching and administrative staff. The only commitment to professional development was through approval of the annual school calendar, which specified an amount of time to be set aside for teacher development. For board members with less involvement in training, the question regarding the influences of board training on the disposition and behavior of board members generally could not be answered.

Table 5 presents a side-by-side comparison of the results of the interviews with board members in districts with more training and those with less training. By looking at this table, board members with more training perceived there was more communication among the members focused on student learning and the training influenced student achievement. It also
Table 5. Side-by-side comparison of emergent themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>districts with more training</th>
<th>districts with less training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>current board makeup and length of service</td>
<td>current board makeup and length of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed gender</td>
<td>mixed gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one year to 9 years on the board</td>
<td>one year to 13 years on the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>major systemic changes in school or community</td>
<td>major systemic changes in school or community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increasing ELL population in one district</td>
<td>decreasing student population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new superintendent in one district</td>
<td>stable superintendent position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stable student population</td>
<td>change in building principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student achievement changes in the districts</td>
<td>student achievement changes in the districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increasing student achievement</td>
<td>stable to slightly declining student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influences on student achievement change</td>
<td>influences on student achievement change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teacher training</td>
<td>teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>NCLB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board goal focus</td>
<td>declining resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board’s role in student achievement change</td>
<td>board’s role in student achievement change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board members are learners</td>
<td>support for administrative team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board member focus and consistency</td>
<td>board member focus and consistency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board setting direction for the district</td>
<td>board setting direction for the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board member training</td>
<td>board member training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>majority of board members have attended</td>
<td>single board members attend the IASB ABLE training, annual state convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IASB ABLE training, annual state convention</td>
<td>don’t attend things as much as superintendents would like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all board members involved in training through the IASB Lighthouse Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training influences on board members</td>
<td>training influences on board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training focused on instructional improvement</td>
<td>IASB training identified as positive by those who attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>single focus for instructional improvement</td>
<td>no knowledge that training has any influence on the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighthouse Project training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IASB training identified as positive by those who attended</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training has influenced the discussions at the board table</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opened up communication among members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use data more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board training influences on superintendent</td>
<td>board training influences on superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectations for the superintendent to be educational leader and to support Lighthouse Project training for the board fully</td>
<td>only as it relates to accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building goals are connected to district goals</td>
<td>they know they have support from the board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly updates on professional development activities</td>
<td>mostly couldn’t say for sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>principals involved in board policy discussions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>board training influences on principals</td>
<td>board training influences on principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indirectly through the superintendent</td>
<td>mostly couldn’t say for sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expected to look more specifically at student achievement influences</td>
<td>maybe from an accountability factor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>board may be more supportive of principal’s work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5. (Continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Board training influences on staff</th>
<th>Board training influences on student test scores</th>
<th>Board training influences on dispositions and behaviors of board members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IBB training influences collective bargaining</td>
<td>Know to follow the chain of command</td>
<td>Training taught us how to run a meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of research based strategies at board table</td>
<td>Mostly couldn’t answer the question</td>
<td>Mostly couldn’t answer the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data reviews of student achievement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing resources for classroom materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | Because of discussion of research-based strategies and data reviews | Board focus on reading comprehension |
| | | |
| | Maybe, but not sure | |

| Board now approaches their work as more of a business | Conversations at board table around achievement data | Two meetings a month with one being a work session |
| Board think more outside the box | Less inclined to micromanage | |
| Always focused on how decisions impact student learning | Turning point when had to decide if *all* really did mean *all* students and not just 90% or 95% |

indicates that the board members were willing to have an additional meeting each month to support their work.

If board members are going to lead districts in student learning efforts, training for the board members does matter. States differ in whether they require training for school board members. In a survey conducted by the NSBA (2004), 18 states indicated mandated training for local school board members, 8 states require training only for new school board members, and 10 require the training for both new and veteran members. The NSBA state affiliate organizations facilitated this training. Most often the training topics include roles and responsibilities of board members, school finance, board/superintendent relations, policy governance, and school law.
In some states the member organizations are so small they provide no training at all to their members. Their staff many include only the executive director and an office person. Consequently, the training for board members in the school districts they serve is a low priority. The IASB does as much or more training for Iowa school board members, which is impressive considering it is not a state requirement. The annual state convention, and regional ABLE workshops are well attended by local school district board members.

Regular self-assessment and substantive development and training are imperative to improve the governance performance of local boards. For this to occur in the immediate future, states will have to mandate and fund it through legislated appropriations. If states truly believe the performance of local governance is related to achieving structural reforms, then improvements in governance should be accorded equal importance with states’ efforts to reform curriculum, testing and teacher development.

Board training can take many forms, including in-house workshops or classes conducted by area or state school board associations. The most critical standard should be to provide consistent training by qualified instructors. Just as continuing education is expected for our teachers, board members also need ongoing training. Talk of raising standards and pushing for better results needs to start at the top. Everyone who is involved needs to be held accountable for our children’s education, and that means mandatory training for all school board members. Superintendents could take responsibility for board training, working through board leaders, to focus on the building blocks of good governance: board meeting agenda reviews, committees, and work sessions. This could be accomplished by working with the board leadership to schedule regular board work sessions to learn the strategies identified in the Lighthouse Project that include the identification, development, and
implementation of strategies that may help to improve student achievement in their districts. These sessions should focus on developing a shared vision focused on student learning, demonstrating shared decision-making, supporting regular school-wide staff development focused on teaching and learning, using data and information on student needs to make decisions, and developing a close connection among the schools, parents and community.

Development strategies and non-legislated board assessments must educate citizens to pay attention to the quality of governance. Local corporate and business investments could be made to help improve governance by providing support through its expertise in human resources.

This study showed that, while training such as the IASB ABLE training is important in all four districts, it is a particular kind of training that impacts the disposition and behavior of board members. The intensive, mentor-type relationship that is built during ongoing training, as implemented in the Iowa Lighthouse Project, clearly made a positive difference to the districts that committed to participate in that project. Through this study it became clear to this researcher that the quality and type of training for school board members is more important than just trying to find the time to conduct the training.

In this study, the extremes in training for school board members were studied. Two districts participated in the intensive training offered in the Lighthouse Project and two districts participated in little, if any, IASB-sponsored training. It became clear that these board members did not participate in training, not because they did not want to; rather, it was because they were volunteers, and their work and family responsibilities often came first when determining how they would spend their time.
Board members with children still in school clearly had the least amount of time to give for outside training opportunities. Yet, these board members often offer the most insight into what is the most important focus for the district because their children are currently in school and are able directly to show the board member how the work of the school is impacting student learning. Board members who are retired from their jobs and whose children are no longer in school often have more time to devote to the training opportunities once they are elected to the board. Their service to the district is very valuable, and the direct knowledge of how the work of the school is impacting student learning is a critical piece in the overall success of a school board.

**Problems Encountered and Limitations**

When this research was begun, three districts declined the invitation to participate in the interviews. The researcher communicated to the districts through their superintendents. In one of the districts, the superintendent was unwilling to take the request to the board members. In the other two districts, the superintendent stated that the request was shared with board members at a monthly meeting and the board members declined the invitation to participate. Although reasons for the declinations were not clear, the original districts selected had participated in no IASB outside training opportunities. Consequently, this researcher had to ponder if the lack of training experiences played any part in the districts decision to decline participating in the study.

Scheduling the interviews of each board member was a challenge, and in several cases could not be completed. At times, the date of district board meetings conflicted with the interviewer’s scheduled board meeting in her own agency during the timeline for this
research. In those cases, the researcher attended a work session in the same month or reviewed the minutes from the meeting missed and talked with the superintendent or board secretary regarding the meeting.

While the board members had similar backgrounds, the sample of board members and superintendents interviewed was small. A larger sample of board members from multiple districts may impact the direction of the findings. Thus, the findings of this research should be viewed with the understanding that they may not be generalizable to other districts, regions, or states.

Board members from all four districts felt the training they received from the IASB was a positive experience and wanted to participate. This type of training may be applicable to a wider population.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made for practice and future research based on the findings of the study.

**Recommendations for practice**

As school boards consider their impact on student achievement the question should be asked: Should school board training be required? This study suggests that training does make an impact on the work of the school board, and efforts to improve student achievement must include consideration of the quality and type of training for school board members. The political realities of mandatory training suggest that those serving as board members should be the group to advocate this training with their state policy makers.
The training should include a pre-election component that demonstrates the high levels of involvement and shared decision making, the process of using data and information on student needs to make decisions and modify actions at the district and building level, and ways to develop a close connection between the school, parents, and the community. Following election to the board, mandatory training should include: developing an understanding of how education is improved, creating support for personnel, clarifying the role of staff development, and setting a procedure for organizing people and establishing the school environment to sustain an improvement effort.

However, mandatory training may not be the only answer. In states where training is mandated, districts may still have board members who are not strong leaders. School board associations need to work with their communities to develop higher expectations in the community for their board members.

In some communities, fewer people are willing to run for the school board. Employers should be encouraged to offer incentives for their employees to serve on their local school boards, and districts should be allowed to offer their board members a financial incentive based on their training involvement and time spent on board activities. The growing role of the state and federal government in education underscores the need for a representative local body specifically charged with providing a sound academic grounding for every student.

The Department of Education should be the leader in bringing together the education stakeholders that include board members, administrators, teachers and communities to develop an integrated approach for the improvement of student learning. While state departments of education are often focused on compliance issues, raising the level of
expectations for a more integrated approach to governance could help move the role of the board from the volunteer mindset to one of indispensability.

It is important that the expectations for board training be aligned with the expectations for superintendent training. Developing a shared training system will enable the district to model behavior that emphasizes trust, teamwork and shared accountability. Preparation programs for superintendents also should include helping them to understand the roles and responsibilities of board members.

**Recommendations for future research**

Future research regarding school boards and the impact training has on their disposition and behavior should include ways of making the type of training involved in the Lighthouse Project available to a wider audience. A key component in training, identified by the board members who participated in it, was the monthly work/training sessions held by each board involving an IASB-trained facilitator. The facilitator was able to help draw the board members into different types of conversations and think about the district’s “bigger” issues regarding student achievement as opposed to the bricks and mortar issues that boards generally discuss. In fact, this person was identified as a personal mentor by board members. Can this level of training be attained without the one-on-one technical assistance provided in the Lighthouse Project?

It will be important for member organizations, such as IASB, to ascertain how to reconcile the requirements of training with volunteers who do not have much extra time to give to the boards they serve. It remains to be determined if moderate amounts of training can have an impact on the disposition and behavior of board members relating to student
achievement. One answer may be to consider a different type of delivery that would include on-line resources in which members could work at their own pace and their own schedule, and then process what they have learned at their regular meetings.

When this researcher asked a board member from one of the districts in this study why he did not participate in more of the training opportunities offered through IASB, he responded, "I have two girls, one in high school and one in junior high. They are in athletics and tonight is a vocal thing and you know Wednesday night is about my only free night and that's only because it is church night and she just finished up her confirmation, so now we've got a little free time coming up here for about three or four months." The statement was indicative of the comments from many of the board members who had children currently in school. These board members wanted to participate in the activities of their children as well as in the activities of the board. Finding an alternate way to deliver training will help these board members feel they can serve on the local school board without have to give up family time.

A future study might consider interviewing teachers and students to ascertain knowledge they may have regarding training in which the school board is participating, and determine the degree they perceive the training has an impact on the work in the classroom. Research is needed on whether integrated district leadership teams that include board members and school administrators have an impact on strengthening the conditions that can allow successful teaching and learning to occur throughout the system.

Finally, while this study examined whether specific training for board members, focused on instructional improvement, changes the disposition of those board members and the superintendent and whether those changes have an influence on student achievement,
future research in this area also should include a study of student test scores to see if there is a correlation between the type of training a board member receives and any changes in scores on the Iowa Tests or district assessments.

Board members who have been involved in the type of training presented in the Lighthouse Project are excited to monitor their work to see if it makes a difference for students. As one board member involved in the Lighthouse Project training stated, "When we look at the data, it isn't where we want it to be, but we're getting there. We've really been working at it and I think it's showing we're improving every time and in all the different subjects. It can be pretty complex but the administrators are making it so that we, as a board, can understand it. I never in my life dreamed it would be interesting to look at data. To be honest, it is fun because I can't wait to see how the students did at the end of the year as compared to how we did mid-year."
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is the current board make up?

2. How long have you served on the board?

3. Have there been any major, systemic changes in the school or community during the past four years? This might include board turnover, superintendent turnover, economic changes, changes in student population such as increasing ELL students?

4. Is student achievement changing in your district?

5. What is influencing the change?

6. What else has happened in the district that might influence student achievement?

7. What do you see as the board’s role in the change?

8. What type of training have you as a board member or superintendent participated in during the past three years?

9. Has this training influenced you? If so, how?

10. Has this training influenced the superintendent? If so, how?

11. Has this training influenced the principals? If so, how?

12. Has this training influenced the staff? If so, how?

13. Has this training influenced student test scores? If so, how?

14. Has this training influenced the disposition of the board? Has it affected their behaviors? If so, how?
APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: School Board Members and Superintendent Dispositions Relating to Student Achievement
Investigator: Connie Maxson

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine whether specific training for board members, focused on instructional improvement have a change in the disposition of those board members and superintendents. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a school board member or the superintendent.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately two months and will involve a taped interview that will be scheduled at your convenience (approximately 45 minutes in length), a potential observation of a regular board meeting, and potential follow-up phone calls to clarify any questions that arise during the analysis. The interview will be audio taped in addition to written notes taken during our conversation. You may feel free to “pass” and not answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. All audio tapes will be destroyed no later than December 1st (2006) and at no time will your name or school district be identified in the transcription or resulting report. You may be asked to review my notes to be sure I have interpreted your comments correctly and I will be happy to share the final paper upon request.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study. All names of the district, school, and participants will be stricken from any summary data that is shared with the school district and/or included in any subsequent publications. Pseudonyms will be used and demographic data masked so that participant responses cannot be identified.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be a direct benefit to you but the information may be valuable to the state by increasing our understanding of the role of the board in relation to improving student achievement.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any consequences to you.
CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: your name and the name of your school district will not be used on any documents or written reports resulting from the study. Personal identifiers will not be kept with the data. All records will be kept confidential on a personal computer and in personal files where others do not have access to them. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study you may feel free to contact me at any time at home (641) 782-7284 or at work (641) 782-8443 or by email cmaxson@aca14.k12.ia.us. For further information about the study contact Thomas Alsbury at 515-294-5785 or alsbury@iastate.edu.

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact Ginny Austin Eason, IRB Administrator, 1138 Pearson Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or Diane Ament, Director, Office of Research Assurances, 1138 Pearson Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject’s Name (printed) ________________________________

__________________________  __________________________
(Subject’s Signature)    (Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

__________________________  __________________________
(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)    (Date)
APPENDIX C. OPENING SCRIPT

School Board Member and Superintendent Dispositions Relating to Student Achievement

Interview Introduction

Hello (respondent's title and name). My name is Connie Maxson and I am affiliated with Iowa State University and I am doing a study to examine whether specific training for board members, focused on instructional improvement have a change in the disposition of those board members and superintendents.

Today I hoped we could get some ideas from you concerning your involvement with training experiences as a board member or superintendent. Any information you share will not be attributed to you or used to identify you or anyone else. You and your school district will remain anonymous in any ensuing presentations or publications that may come from this research. Consequently, there should be no risks for you personally or your school from participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue the interview at any time or choose to decline response on any individual questions. It is estimated that this interview will take 30 minutes to complete. In order to get all of your input and not slow down the interview I'd like to audio record the interview. The audio recording will only be heard by myself and one other person that will be transcribing the recording. It will be kept in a secure location, and destroyed when the project is completed. Will you agree to participate by signing the Informed Consent document? Are there any questions before we begin?

Interview Procedures

Reminder: The interviewer should ask the introductory open-ended question and let the respondent generate the agenda. Responses can be noted on the response sheet to help direct follow-up questions that are optional, depending on the initial response.
APPENDIX D. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Title of Study: School Board Members and Superintendent Dispositions Relating to Student Achievement

Investigator: Connie Maxson

I am currently the chief administrator at Green Valley AEA 14 in Creston, IA, and a PhD candidate at Iowa State University

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine whether specific training for board members, focused on instructional improvement have a change in the disposition of those board members and superintendents. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a school board member or the superintendent.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately two months and will involve a taped interview that will be scheduled at your convenience (approximately 30 minutes in length), a potential observation of a regular board meeting, and potential follow-up phone calls to clarify any questions that arise during the analysis. The interview will be audio taped in addition to written notes taken during our conversation. You may feel free to “pass” and not answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. All audiotapes will be destroyed no later than December 1, 2006 and at no time will your name or school district be identified in the transcription or resulting report. You may be asked to review my notes to be sure I have interpreted your comments correctly and I will be happy to share the final paper upon request.

Scheduling Interviews

I will plan to contact each board member by telephone to schedule the interview at a time convenient with each person. Interviews will be conducted at the school district central office or can be scheduled at a place more convenient to each individual. I can also communicate via email if that is more convenient.

Sample Questions

The questions below will be included in the interview. However, additional questions may be asked as follow-up.

1. What is the current board make up?
2. How long have you served on the board?
3. Have there been any major, systemic changes in the school or community during the past four years? This might include:
   a. Board turnover
   b. Superintendent turnover
   c. Economic changes
   d. Changes in student population such as increasing ELL students
4. Is student achievement changing in your district?
5. What is influencing the change?
6. What else has happened in the district that might influence student achievement?
7. What do you see as the board’s role in the change?
8. What type of training have you as a board member or superintendent participated in during the past three years?
9. Has this training influenced you? If so, how?
10. Has this training influenced the superintendent? If so, how?
11. Has this training influenced the principals? If so, how?
12. Has this training influenced the staff? If so, how?
13. Has this training influenced student test scores? If so, how?
14. Has this training influenced the disposition of the board? Has it affected their behaviors? If so, how?

Follow-up

I have talked with your superintendent and will continue to work through the district administrative office as I proceed with this project.

Thank you very much for your consideration to participate in this study. I look forward to meeting with you.
APPENDIX E. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

DATE: March 20, 2006
TO: Connie Maxson
FROM: Dianne Anderson, IRB Co-Chair
RE: IRB ID # 06-156
STUDY REVIEW DATE: March 20, 2006

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the project, "School Board Member and Superintendent Dispositions Relating to Student Achievement" requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2). The applicable exemption category is provided below for your information. Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

The IRB determination of exemption means that this project does not need to meet the requirements from the Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects, unless required by the IRB. We do, however, urge you to protect the rights of your participants in the same ways that you would if your project was required to follow the regulations. This includes providing relevant information about the research to the participants.

Because your project is exempt, you do not need to submit an application for continuing review. However, you must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or required by the IRB.

Any modification of this research must be submitted to the IRB on a Continuation and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

cc: ELPS
    Thomas Alsbury
    File
### APPENDIX F. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

1. What is the current board makeup?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District A (Ft M)</th>
<th>District B (SC)</th>
<th>District C (NM)</th>
<th>District D (EU)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1—7 members, president &amp; VP have been on the longest, 2 females</td>
<td>B1—5 members at large, 2 female, 3 males, 1 new in September, college maintenance, banker, dairy farmer, past teacher, medical practitioner</td>
<td>C1—5 bd. members 3 male and 2 female</td>
<td>D1—5, 4 men, 1 woman, 13, 2, 1, 3, years of experience 2 with MS kids, 2 w/out, 1 w/ little kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2—3 women, 4 men, various occupations</td>
<td>B2—5 members, various backgrounds, used to be 1 from farm and 2 from town and other 2 could be either</td>
<td>2 women, 3 men, 3 have kids in school, 2 don’t 5 director districts with 2 in town</td>
<td>D2—5 members, 4 gentlemen, diverse group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—7 man board</td>
<td>B3—5 individuals and 1 secretary, 3 men 2 women, number have served multiple terms</td>
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<td>D3—5 members, 4 male, 1 female, 2 principals, 1 super, 1 board secretary</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B4—Bd. President physicians asst., farmer—milker, lady former teacher, bank officer, first year and self</td>
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<td></td>
<td>B5—2 female, 1 male, dairy farmer, carpenter, banker, physicians asst., manager retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Super—7 members, 3 women, 4 men, 2 retired, 1 doctor, 1 retail manager, 1 administrator in a business</td>
<td>Super—3 men, 2 women, details about each one</td>
<td>Super—3 men, 2 women, all work 9-5, 3 with kids in school, 2 do not</td>
<td>Super—5 members 3 new, 2 experienced, 1 female</td>
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<td>K1—4 members on board while I’ve been here, 1 new this past fall</td>
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</table>
2. How long have you served on the board?

3. Have there been any major, systemic changes in the school or community during the past four years? This might include board turnover, superintendent turnover, economic changes, changes in student population such as increasing ELL students?

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<tr>
<th>District A</th>
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<tr>
<td>A1—(2003) end of my first term, so third year. Lots of industries closing, declining enrollment, new superintendent in first year</td>
<td>B1—9 yrs, community growing, more blend in culture, involvement in Lighthouse Project, new HS principal for 06-07</td>
<td>C1—5 years, 2nd year as president 1st female board member elected, four years ago hired new super, 06-07 there will be a new HS principal stable enrollment</td>
<td>D1—13 years, No systemic changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2—(2002) 4 yrs, new super, bd. turnover</td>
<td>B2—6 yrs, 2 board member turnover, new superintendent coming on board,</td>
<td>C2—4 years, 1 cent sales tax been a big help, 1 new board member</td>
<td>D2—1st year, economic changes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—(2004) 2 yrs, new super, new bd. Member, lost many jobs,</td>
<td>B3—1st year, new super, increasing general population increasing ELL students</td>
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<td>D3—2nd year, big change is board turnover, 2, super in 4th year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Super—1st yr, loss of students and businesses</td>
<td>Super—4 yrs, Lighthouse project driving force, the way we do business, progressive community</td>
<td>Super—4 years in district, peak in enrollment in 96—decline until last 2 yrs. with small increase in each of those years</td>
<td>Super—4 years in district No changes in school or community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KI—4 yrs, ELL population, added reading specialist, changing industry,</td>
<td></td>
<td>No systemic changes in school or community</td>
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</table>
4. Is student achievement changing in your district?
5. What is influencing the change?
6. What else has happened in the district that might influence student achievement?

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<tr>
<td>A1—I think so, NCLB has an influence, prior to that curr. Directors looking at research, 3 elementaries merge into one MS and then HS. Looking at transitions B1—yes, socioeconomic disparity, morr ELL learners, supportive community, more cohesive leadership team C1—yes, improving cycle, elementary principal brought in new program, concentrating on reading, at HS have had 3 principals since 1997 D1—yes, better, started CCC, articulated among teachers, collaboration, open door policy for adm.</td>
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<td>A2—yes, getting better, the #1 goal is improve student achievement and everyone knows the goal PD focus to improve reading skills, Understanding poverty B2—yes, data tells us, bd. now asks more details principals required to have action plans with goals for kids and ways to monitor, focus on reading comprehension, helping community better understand C2—yes, good teachers, parents care, increased graduation requirements, 8 period day at HS D2—no, about the same, money is shrinking, having to combine resources &amp; jobs</td>
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<td>A3—improving many things, bd. emphasis, very good staff, NCLB pressures, B3—no, not yet, Lighthouse training, bd. commitment to student achievement, pressure among students to achieve C3—yes, good teachers, parents care, increased graduation requirements, 8 period day at HS D3—yes, it's taken a nosedive Increase in special education,</td>
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<td>B4—more emphasis on it now, district emphasis on reading, adm team more focused B5—yes, board looking at data—shocked at how far behind some kids are and right combination of bd. members, kids proud of their scores, community support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Super—really good relative to Colorado, great people, dedicated adm, and teachers, strong union, focus on reading comp. for PD, PD days for teachers, hired curriculum director for 06-07, but helped out this year, Super—always changing, focus on reading, identified sub groups that need help, more support for staff Super—yes, 4th grade doing really well in R &amp; M, 8th grade took nose dive in all three areas Hope 8th grade was a fluke, staff experience, stable community Super—slowly increasing, dramatic change in math</td>
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<td>KI—no if only look at test scores, but if you look at district assessments then big changes Culture change, board leadership, focus by board on reading comprehension,</td>
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7. What do you see as the board’s role in the change?

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<tr>
<td>A1—Giving some direction, reports periodically on student achievement, monitoring but not micromanaging</td>
<td>B1—board needs to be learners, be knowledgeable, ask questions</td>
<td>C1—accountability, taking an interest in student achievement</td>
<td>D1—work as a team with administration, give 110%, funding it, no negative conversations</td>
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<td>A2—hiring the new super, setting more time for PD, bd. expectation for more focus at PD</td>
<td>B2—board can’t let up on drive, staying on task with expectations</td>
<td>C2—adding expectations, graduation requirements, another reading class in jr. high</td>
<td>D2—NCLB reporting doesn’t follow the same students, seems strange, staff reports but not much involvement by the board</td>
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<td>A3—emphasis on curriculum, PD for staff, $$ for tech, supporting the super</td>
<td>B3—Lighthouse project and training criteria and measurements expected from staff and we monitor it</td>
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<td>D3—not much, seems like we’re always dealing with—well you know what and it takes all of our time</td>
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<td>B4—hired a super that led change &amp; hold him accountable</td>
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<td>B5—board expectations</td>
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<td>Super—phenomenal, they support anything good for kids, have lunch regularly with them</td>
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<td>Super—send message to staff, PD expectations, bd. is learning along with them—work sessions dedicated to learning, no action items</td>
<td>Super—increased requirements for students, board policies, support of adm. and staff</td>
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<td>Super—accountability</td>
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<td>K1—changing PD expectations-2full days 5 half days focused on reading comprehension</td>
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8. What type of training have you as a board member or superintendent participated in during the past three years?

9. Has this training influenced you? If so, how?

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</table>
| A1—IASB ABLE training, one on HS, community support and new member orientation, local special meetings, Lighthouse project training  
Yes definitely, very positive, opened up lines of communication, keeps us on right track for student achievement thinking, the knowledge as far as laws and regulations, use a lot of data. |
| B1—ABLE mtgs. State & Natl. conventions, bd. president trng., leadership academies, fiduciary trng.  
More knowledge & awareness |
| C1—IASB ABLE training on legislation, orientation for board president, student achievement  
Definitely; understanding role as a board member, when to talk or not, not here to micromanage |
| D1—ABLE training  
State convention  
Yes, learn a lot at every meeting |
| A2—ABLE, state convention & workshops, lighthouse training  
Yes very much  
Knew what goals were when we hired new super |
| B2—ABLE mtgs., work sessions are important trng., State conventions  
Active learning opportunities, learn other perspectives |
| C2—IASB ABLE meetings, do & don’ts for board members, legislative information  
Learned a little bit, but would like more time to talk to other board members |
| D2—ABLE classes and state convention, good information in short time, finance was good and school finance is like no other finance I’ve ever been associated with, |
| A3—before I ran for bd. I attended bd. meetings, talked with adm.,  
Attend ABLE, state convention, IASB leadership academy  
Lighthouse project  
Bd. looks at things as whole, narrows things down, asks question what is important and does it affect student trng  
Look at data more and use it as a guide but need to look beyond it |
| B3—work sessions every month—looking at data,  
Given board guidelines, things we want to accomplish, look at myself |
| C3—one ABLE meeting and IASB delegate assembly  
ABLE good—work with others and they put you through things you deal with  
delegate assembly not helpful at all, need to go to convention |
| B4—IASB ABLE workshops, lighthouse project training,  
It’s recharging me, changed the way I think, helped focus on real purpose which is students |
| B5—ABLE programs, state convention  
Yes definitely, reinforced my philosophy about reading be important |
| Super—I go to everything, they open a door I show up, AEA |
| Super—PLC in KC, training with the bd.  
I attend when we bring in people, AEA |
| Super—some ABLE mtgs., state convention, and other IASB & SAI mtgs., AEA |
| Super—IASB and SAI meetings and training, state conventions, AEA |
| K1—Lighthouse project, PD with people like E. Calhoun and L. Bennet, PLC Institute in KC |
10. Has this training influenced the superintendent? If so, how?

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<tr>
<td>A1—yes, he is new to the state and attends with us</td>
<td>B1—yes, this is his first super</td>
<td>C1—I doubt it, but I’m more aware of things so he doesn’t have to do everything</td>
<td>D1—I’m not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2—yes, very much especially previous super, new one is learning about lighthouse training</td>
<td>B2—showed importance of training, he has to be prepared we throw questions at him</td>
<td>C2—not sure, don’t know</td>
<td>D2—I would think so but not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—new super doesn’t understand IASB training</td>
<td>B3—expected super to be involved with lighthouse project when we hired him</td>
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<td>D3—yes but not sure</td>
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<td>B4—bd. set tone for number 1 focus, when hired told him</td>
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<td>B5—accountability for him and more time for him</td>
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<td>Super—Lighthouse really affected board, look at what they’re doing and why they’re doing it, agree to disagree</td>
<td>Super—yes, it’s nice to know exactly what is expected, participate in their growth, knowing it’s what I take out to the buildings</td>
<td>Super—set the guidelines in where the district is heading</td>
<td>Super—their training helps them better understand things I tell them</td>
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<td>K1—yes, by all means, bd. made it very clear when came that Lighthouse was a priority, helping him see role of board and what they expect—asking how does this relate to our goal area</td>
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11. Has this training influenced the principals? If so, how?

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1—indirectly, they come to work sessions and meetings and report</td>
<td>B1—yes trickle down through super</td>
<td>C1—I don’t see it but principals know what more information</td>
<td>D1—they see how the super and bd. get along, they know they get support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2—yes, principals sending newsletter and reporting achievement to parents, PD connected to goals, bd. has been more directed Principals are in classroom more</td>
<td>B2—when they see board commitment they have to put 100% into it. Board is one key to get best out of principals</td>
<td>C2—not sure</td>
<td>D2—didn’t answer question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—yes, share what goes on in PD, in terms of what we ask the super and then he has them tell the board</td>
<td>B3—expected to report to the board, focused on the work, student achievement</td>
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<td>B4—yes, two have come back to life, were burned out, helped remind them why in education</td>
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<td>B5—yes, Matt super addition to adm team, he has experience with lighthouse and helped change others thinking</td>
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<td>Super—no, don’t see that</td>
<td>Super—elem. Principal ready to quit but now it gave him focus and that it’s about kids, better understands we’re a k-12 system and big turn around for him</td>
<td>Super—accountability</td>
<td>Super—yes, it helps board be more supportive of them</td>
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<td></td>
<td>KI—yes—the expectations and principals involved in bd. policy discussions,</td>
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12. Has this training influenced the staff? If so, how?

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<tr>
<td>A1—yes, they are ones ultimately execute the expectations</td>
<td>B1—yes, IBB training for bargaining, research based teaching strategies and data reviews</td>
<td>C1—yes, bridge gap between the groups, each board member visits staff and says thank you, They have more PD now, Monthly reports from the staff</td>
<td>D1—yes, very open bd., but follow chain of command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2—yes, PD expectations, reporting and accountable to strategies</td>
<td>B2—yes, meet with teachers and talk about data</td>
<td>C2—don’t know</td>
<td>D2—couldn’t answer question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—didn’t answer this part</td>
<td>B3—commitment to the board goals</td>
<td></td>
<td>D3—couldn’t answer question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4—yes, new wavered from this endeavor, new idea of PD, and now other option but to do it</td>
<td>B5—in some ways, know we have different expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Super—only in that it allows the super to be strong</td>
<td>Super—yes, expectations &amp; commitment from board</td>
<td>Super—accountability</td>
<td>Super—yes, more supportive of staff and understand importance of PD</td>
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<tr>
<td>KI—focus on reading, looking at data and sharing it</td>
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13. Has this training influenced student test scores? If so, how?

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<tr>
<td>A1—yes, we have research and data to prove that, we’ve been monitoring for a least of couple of years</td>
<td>B1—yes, especially researched based teaching strategies good for kids</td>
<td>C1—in some way it should impact, more positive environment and attitude of staff and accountability</td>
<td>D1—don’t know but try to have good environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2—yes, if PD is effective then student achievement should increase</td>
<td>B2—yes, reading has been focus &amp; putting things in place to help them</td>
<td>C2—don’t know</td>
<td>D2—couldn’t answer question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—because of NCLB and we’re supporting staff and PD focus</td>
<td>B3—yes, reading focus and scores appear to be getting better</td>
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<td>D3—couldn’t answer question</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B4—don’t know</td>
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<tr>
<td>B5—yes, data not where used to be, kids talk about it</td>
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<td>Super—didn’t answer this question</td>
<td>Super—yes, students aware of changes in staff but may not know it’s a result of board work</td>
<td>Super—accountability</td>
<td>Super—allowed bd. to better understand Federal level and to be supportive the work</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>KI—focus on reading</td>
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14. Has this training influenced the disposition of the board? Has it affected their behaviors? If so, how?

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<th>District B</th>
<th>District C</th>
<th>District D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1—yes, conversations by board members, gets us thinking as a group, come to common decisions or goals and we listen to each other. Keeps us focused on what we need to be</td>
<td>B1—yes, approach things more as a business, used to deal w/ bricks &amp; mortar, now look at data, now have a monthly work session</td>
<td>C1—made us more aware of things to look at and ask, we have mission statement on agenda each month to remind us why we are there. We want to be the best we can be</td>
<td>D1—yes, every year learn something new, ABLE tells you how to run bd meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2—yes, I think so but wasn’t on bd before the lighthouse project. Bd. thinks more about what they talk about, have committees and have work sessions to learn</td>
<td>B2—think outside the box more, nuts and bolts not our main object any more.</td>
<td>C2—don’t know</td>
<td>D2—couldn’t answer question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3—yes, more focused on big stuff</td>
<td>B3—yes, surprised when I came to board to see meeting devoted totally to work session, Students always first. Commitment to youth</td>
<td></td>
<td>D3—couldn’t answer question</td>
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<td>B4—definitely, don’t do the usual stuff or micromanage, focus on the student stuff. Had to develop a work session</td>
<td>B5—yes, questions are different, more excited about data, conversations about subgroups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Super—99% of the time they talk about student achievement. Always on focus, learning more about student achievement, and looking at data</td>
<td>Super—yes, turning point was when they had to decide did this mean ALL students in terms of achievement. Big honest discussion about it and it couldn’t mean 95% but ALL</td>
<td>Super—spend more time on academic issues during the year. Presentations by staff during the year. Board set goals based on achievement, do a five year plan—superintendent driven</td>
<td>Super—yes, have had some specific training on personnel issues, some have heard of NCLB and data and have come back and asked questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ML—yes definitely the language they speak, they see the connections in the learning with student achievement. Their desire to continue the Lighthouse project and asking about how much time they need. How does their work affect kids? Really student focused</td>
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</table>
REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to express heartfelt thanks to those who helped me with the various aspects of conducting research and the writing of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I am most grateful to my husband, W. Leon Maxson, and son, Larren, for their patience and support throughout my graduate studies, especially the writing of this dissertation.

I would also like to thank Dr. David VanHorn at Green Valley AEA14 for his willingness to take on responsibilities at work when I was involved in the doctoral program of study at ISU.

I would like to thank Dr. Tom Alsbury for his guidance throughout the initial stages of my graduate studies and the writing of this dissertation. I also appreciate the support of my major professor, Dr. Dan Robinson, who, following the departure of Dr. Alsbury, agreed to assist me to complete the program requirements and final defense of my research.

I am also grateful to my editor, Pat Hahn, and my committee members: Drs. Larry Ebbers, Steven Freeman, Jim Scharff, and Mack Shelley.

Finally, I would like to thank Mary Delagardelle for her unfailing support and persistence as we worked to accomplish our goals.