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# A Correlational Study of the Georgia School Board Association's Board Recognition Program and Student Achievement

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A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF THE GEORGIA SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION'S  
BOARD RECOGNITION PROGRAM AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

by

HOLLY E. RUTLEDGE

(Under the Direction of Paul Brinson, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

The role of school boards in American public education has been intensely debated for well over a century (Johnson, 2013). A broad variety of research on school boards exists, ranging from the topic of school board elections, to board member leadership styles, and to decision making processes. Much less research exists, however, on the impact of school boards on student achievement, even though school boards are increasingly targeted as one of the main reasons for poor student achievement (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014). Johnson (2013) contends there is a growing body of evidence that indicates school boards play a critical role in the development and sustainability of conditions that are supportive of academic achievement. Similarly, Weiler (2015) maintains school boards must unify their efforts to improve the school district they serve to have a positive impact on student achievement. School board members, with their tremendous amount of power in governing all aspects of an entire school system, impact students in a variety of ways.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is any correlation between the Georgia School Board Association's Board Recognition Program (GSBA BRP) and student achievement. This study utilized student achievement data from English language arts and mathematics in grades three, five, and eight from the Georgia Department of Education, as well

as demographic data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, for each of the school districts that received or maintained a level of distinction from the GSBA BRP from 2013-2016. Results from regression analyses showed a negative correlation between the GSBA BRP and student achievement. The findings of this study are of greatest importance to local and state school boards, as well as state school board associations who wish to improve or implement a board recognition program.

**INDEX WORDS:** School boards, Student achievement, Board recognition, Board governance, Board leadership

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## DEDICATION

I am so very thankful for my parents, and I know I am truly blessed to have been raised in such a loving home where we were taught to always try our best, to work hard for the things we want, to take pride in everything we do, and to never say “I can’t”. For all the sacrifices you have made so that we would have everything we needed and wanted, for the time, effort, and financial resources you put into raising two very demanding, and independent children, I am eternally grateful. In everything I do, my greatest desire has always been, and continues to be, to make you both very proud. For these reasons, and many, many more, I dedicate my doctoral degree to the two of you, with the utmost love and respect.

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I am so thankful for the tremendous favor God continuously bestows upon me; “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 107:1).

Many thanks to my husband for always encouraging me, for making me laugh when I really needed to (and even when I didn’t), for always having a positive attitude, and for putting up with my *occasional* stubbornness. Much love and gratitude.

Many thanks to my committee, Dr. Paul Brinson, Jr., Dr. Antonio Gutierrez de Blume, and Dr. Marylynn Griffin, for their time, effort, and expertise. Special thanks to Dr. Gutierrez de Blume for sharing such vast knowledge of methodology and statistics. I am very appreciative of each of you.

I am so thankful to live in in such a great Nation; each and every day, I am very proud to be an American, and I am so appreciative of the sacrifices our armed forces and law enforcement make on a daily basis to ensure our freedom and keep us safe. God Bless the United States of America!



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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Georgia School Board Association Board Recognition Program (GSBA BRP) was developed to recognize school boards that engage in highly skilled leadership practices. Currently, the GSBA BRP includes three levels of distinction that can be awarded to any Georgia school board that submits an application and meets the requirements for a specific level of distinction. The levels of distinction are Quality Board, Distinguished Board, and Exemplary Board. Each level of distinction requires specific criteria to be met regarding strategic planning, board self-assessment and/or external assessment, superintendent evaluation, training requirements for board members, accreditation, as well as other criteria. The problem is that it is unclear whether or not the levels of distinction have any correlation to student achievement data. If they do not, then the levels of distinction may lead community members to develop an unwarranted impression of the effectiveness of their local school board and/or school system. The intended research methodology that will be used to investigate this issue is correlational research design. The purpose of this correlational study was to determine if there is a correlation between each of the three GSBA board recognition levels of distinction and student achievement in the school districts which have earned each level distinction.

#### **Background**

The role of school boards in American public education has been intensely debated for well over a century (Johnson, 2013). A broad variety of research on school boards exists, ranging from the topic of school board elections, to board member leadership styles, and to decision making processes. Much less research exists, however, on the impact of school boards on student achievement, even though school boards are increasingly targeted as one of the main

reasons for poor student achievement (Jacobsen & Linkow, 2014). Johnson (2013) contends there is a growing body of evidence that indicates school boards play a critical role in the development and sustainability of conditions that are supportive of academic achievement. Similarly, Weiler (2015) maintains school boards must unify their efforts to improve the school district they serve in order to have a positive impact on student achievement. School board members, with their tremendous amount of power in governing all aspects of an entire school system, impact students in a variety of ways. Gaining a deeper understanding of the school board election process, board member knowledge and skills, insight into the working relationships of board members, as well as their decision-making processes will hopefully provide a clearer picture of how school boards ultimately impact student achievement.

An initial step toward gaining an understanding of how school boards impact student achievement is to seek out knowledge about school board members themselves and the board member election process. Gaining insight about the qualifications of potential school board candidates, as well as how they are selected to serve on school boards, will shed light on their knowledge and skills related to improving student achievement. According to Diem, Frankenberg, and Cleary (2015), 96% of all school board members in the United States are elected; however, appointed school boards are becoming more common, especially in urban areas. In a study by Garn and Copeland (2014), the motivation to vote and the candidate selection method among citizens in school board elections was studied. In this study, the researchers explored seven theories that may explain how voters select school board candidates. An etic approach was used to identify general topics that crossed multiple theories and a questionnaire was then developed that was aligned to multiple theories as well as none of the theories. Focus groups of 26 random voters from Oklahoma were surveyed using the

questionnaire. The focus group discussions yielded one main finding that is relevant to this study: voters were most interested in the candidates' character. In each focus group, participants agreed that a candidate without a personal agenda, and who was considered competent, were key in judging character. Candidates who met the character criteria were thought to most likely act in the best interest of students in the school district they would represent.

How school boards make decisions about school governance is one of the more common school board topics studied. In a qualitative study by Galway et al., (2013), the role of Canadian school board members and superintendents in school governance was explored through nine focus group meetings, each consisting of six to twelve participants. Meeting participants were interviewed using questions developed as a result of an extensive review of school board governance research. By reviewing participant answers, the researchers found the roles and responsibilities of superintendents and school board members continuously changed as new accountability policies were implemented and as changes occurred in local governments. In addition, the researchers speculated that political and ideological interests of local governments may run counter to the democratic mandates of school boards. Diem, Frankenberg, and Cleary (2015) maintained that interest groups can have a tremendous impact on the decisions that board members make because they must be responsive to the desires of the stakeholders they serve.

In another qualitative study related to the decision-making process of school boards, Asen et al. (2012) reviewed recorded school board meetings from three school districts in Wisconsin, transcribed them, and coded the transcripts to identify when board members referenced research during policy deliberations. From this study, it was concluded that research is more likely to be referenced in school board deliberations when board members see a specific connection between research and local policy issues. In addition, the researchers revealed a

contradiction between the linear model of policy making implied by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the way school board deliberations lead to policy development. Similarly, Crum and Hellman (2014) conducted a study using a mixed methods approach to determine if the characteristics surrounding school board decision making are influenced by NCLB. Answers to seven research questions were generated using a content analysis of a Virginia school board's previously recorded meetings that occurred over the course of one year. Descriptive statistics were generated from the content analysis and chi-square testing was used to test for significance. Results of the study indicated school board decision making was influenced by NCLB but with little or no mention of the actual law. Trujillo (2012) examined the relationship between an urban school board in California and the democratic governance processes that were either hindered or advanced under high-stakes accountability conditions in another qualitative study related to school board decision making. To examine the relationship, meeting observations and interviews were conducted, and district documents were reviewed, including emails, meeting agendas, and newsletters. Findings from the study indicated board members set goals and promoted centrally determined practices that were aligned to and grounded in high-stakes policies rather than local education policy.

The relationship and perceptions among and between school board members, school board presidents, and superintendents is another area of research that is relatively common. Marino (2011) conducted a quantitative study related to the school board decision making process as well as the perceptions of school board presidents. In this study, the degree to which school boards implemented Continuous Improvement Practices (CIP) as perceived by school board presidents was investigated. After surveying Illinois school board presidents using Likert scale questions focused around implementation of CIP among board members, survey results

were analyzed statistically using t-tests, Pearson moment correlations, and analysis of variance. Results indicated school board presidents perceived the degree to which board members were implementing CIP to be 4.91 on a six-point scale, meaning the implementation frequency was relatively high. Another study revolving around school board presidents was conducted by Thompson in 2014 to explore the perceptions of Texas school board presidents and superintendents regarding their working relationships as a functioning group. Self-assessment questionnaires were administered to school board presidents and superintendents, and results were analyzed using descriptive as well as inferential statistics. Analysis of results indicated a difference in school board and superintendents' perceptions regarding the school board-superintendent working relationship, as well as a difference in the perception of the school board president and the superintendent in functioning as a group or team. Specifically, the differences were in the areas of inconsistent actions of the board with district values, public disagreement, and lack of discussion on values. In another study of board member relationships, Grissom (2012) used a qualitative approach to determine whether or not conflicts among board members in California negatively affected their governing ability. Completed board member questionnaires that included items focused on their attitudes, time use, background, and decision making were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results of the analysis revealed conflicts among a school board's members impaired board and organizational performance.

Another area of school board research that is less frequently studied is the specific relationship of school boards to student achievement. According to Weiler (2015), school boards are the key to the governance process of school districts, and if they are effective in their duties then the school district and students they serve will flourish. In 2011, Roberts and Sampson conducted a qualitative study on the effectiveness of board member professional development on

student achievement. To gather data, the director of each state's school board association was surveyed using an unidentified survey instrument. Survey results were then compared to *Education Weeks's* 2009 overall state education rating to draw conclusions. Specifics regarding how the results were compared were not divulged. The comparison showed states that required professional development for board members received an overall rating of B or C, while those that did not require professional development received a rating of C or D. However, in regard to student achievement, there appeared to be no effect. Also seeking to discover how student achievement is influenced by school boards, Johnson (2013) sought to establish the content, construct, and predictive validity of the Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey (EBLPS), which was developed to measure school board members' leadership practices that support student achievement. The survey was administered to board members in Ohio who were identified as their board-appointed student achievement liaison. Survey construct validity was determined by a factor analysis, reliability of the survey was determined using Cronbach's alpha, and predictive validity was established using a two-tailed independent t-test. In addition, survey results showed a significant difference in leadership practices between low and high-performing districts.

In summary, the research cited in this review shows school board actions are informed by policy, often high-stakes policy informing decisions more than local policy. It also indicated board member perceptions and working relationships do indeed impact board performance. In addition, the sociological basis for citizens' board member voting choices was revealed along with their focus on a board member's character to inform their voting choice. Regarding the connection between school boards and student achievement, professional learning was identified as having a correlation to student achievement as well as board member leadership practices.



Through research a great deal of knowledge about school boards has been gained. Studies have investigated how school boards make decisions; how local, state, and national policies affect their decision-making processes, how their working relationships influence their effectiveness, how voters select candidates; how participation in professional learning correlates to overall district performance; and that certain leadership practices are common to high performing districts. What has not been investigated, however, is how these pieces of information ultimately interact to influence student achievement. The body of research available on school boards has become vaster in recent years, and much insight into the way school boards function has been gained. However, there is still a great need for deeper understanding of the overarching role of school boards in the school district governing process especially as it relates to their impact on student achievement.

### **Problem Statement and Purpose**

Currently, it is unclear whether or not there is a relationship between each of the three GSBA board recognition levels of distinction and student achievement in the school districts that have earned each level distinction. This is problematic because many school boards throughout Georgia have earned one of the three levels of distinction from the GSBA which could give the public an unwarranted impression of the adequacy and performance of their local school board and school system.

The purpose of this correlational study was to determine if a relationship exists between each GSBA BRP level of distinction and student achievement. A board recognition program that is not positively correlated to student achievement may lead community members to develop an unwarranted impression of the effectiveness of their local school board. Evidence exists that indicates key players/stakeholders from each Georgia school board that has received a level of

distinction from the GSBA BRP have a shared vision for improving school board leadership, as the submission of an application for a GSBA Board Recognition level of distinction indicates the desire to improve. In addition, the effectiveness of a school system is based heavily on student achievement data in the Georgia Department of Education's school and school system accountability, school improvement, and stakeholder communication platform, the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI). The availability of a Board Recognition Program itself also provides evidence that the GSBA is strongly committed to supporting continuous improvement among school boards.

### **Research Hypothesis**

One hypothesis will be tested in this study:

H<sub>1</sub>: It is predicted that school district recognition level will not significantly predict district-wide student achievement across the four years for either English language arts or mathematics.

### **Research Question**

One research question will also be addressed in this study:

What is the predictive effect of school district recognition level on district-level student achievement in English language arts and mathematics (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) for the 2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 academic years, while controlling for gender (female as referent), socioeconomic status (economically disadvantaged as referent), disability status (students with disability as referent), race (minority, non-white as referent) and English language proficiency (limited English proficiency as referent)?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant it contributes to the research base regarding the impact of school boards on student achievement by providing an analysis of empirical data from state

standardized assessments for the year(s) Georgia school boards were recognized by the GSBA BRP as Quality, Distinguished, or Exemplary. This is important because the objective of the GSBA is to have all school boards in Georgia achieve and maintain the GSBA Quality Board recognition level of the GSBA BRP. To achieve this goal, the GSBA claims they will work to develop processes and programs to help the organization and local school boards to continuously improve and use data effectively. A finding of a positive correlation between student and GSBA BRP level indicates the objective of the GSBA will have been met. However, a finding of a negative correlation between student achievement and GSBA BRP level indicates otherwise, and the strategies the GSBA uses to try to meet the objective, as well as the criteria used to award this level of recognition will need to be reconsidered.

### **Procedures**

The conceptual framework that will drive this proposal plan is correlational research design. In correlational research, the relationship of two or more variables is studied without any attempt to influence them. In this study, correlational design was used to determine if any correlation exists between student achievement scores and each of three levels of distinction in the GSBA BRP.

To test the hypothesis and answer the research question, a list of school districts that have earned each BRP level of distinction was obtained from the GSBA, as well as student achievement data from each of the listed school districts. Specifically, student achievement data were obtained from the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS) End of Grade (EOG) assessment in grades three, five, and eight, in English-Language Arts and Mathematics for the year each district received their initial designation from the GSBA BRP. Student achievement data for the year(s) each

subsequent level of distinction was earned or maintained were also obtained. In addition, demographic data (i.e. socioeconomic status; gender; ethnicity; English proficiency; and disability status) for each district were obtained for each year a recognition level was awarded or maintained. It should be noted that all data used in this study are publicly available data that can be accessed through the GA DOE and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) websites.

The GSBA BRP was first implemented in 2013, so student achievement data from the 2012-13 academic year through the 2015-16 academic year were analyzed. Once all the data were obtained, data were coded such that it could be input into statistical analysis software (SPSS). A correlational analysis was then conducted to determine if student achievement is correlated to the level of distinction by analyzing the student achievement data of all school districts that have received the same level of distinction. Specifically, strength and direction of correlation was determined for each separate level of distinction (i.e., student achievement in districts with the level of distinction of *Quality* compared to districts with the distinction of *Distinguished*). A regression analysis was used to determine if the GSBA BRP is a predictor of student achievement in districts that have earned each level of distinction. Student achievement data, as well as basic demographic data for each district (i.e., student population and demographics) were included in the regression analysis. Results of the statistical analyses were reported in a data table that will identifies each level of distinction and its correlation to student achievement. After completing the statistical analyses, criteria descriptions for each of the GSBA BRP levels of distinction were examined to determine which, if any, components focus on student achievement, and which, if any, components were in need of revision to more effectively represent student achievement as an indicator for each level of distinction.

It was hypothesized that no alignment exists between the GSBA BRP levels of distinction and student achievement as measured by student achievement data from the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and Georgia Milestones Assessment System End of Grade (GMAS EOG) assessment in grades three, five, and eight from school districts who have received each level of distinction. The results of this study may lead to clarity about whether or not the GSBA BRP has any merit in regard to student achievement. This, in turn, could lead to recommendations for changes to the program so that the distinction levels will include criteria related to student achievement.

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions**

The main limitation of this study was the limited amount of research available in the area of school boards and student achievement, and no research being available regarding school board recognition programs and student achievement, so there was difficulty linking this correlational study to much of the current research. Delimitations of this study were the use of state assessment data that are common to all school districts in Georgia, as well as the specific school districts for which the data are obtained; they are all school districts with a specific level of distinction from the GSBA BRP. As a result of implementing this study, information has been revealed about the connection between the GSBA BRP levels of distinction and student achievement. Ultimately, changes could be made to the GSBA BRP as a result of the study so that the Program is more closely tied to student achievement, and thus recognition levels will provide a more accurate depiction of actual school board performance as it relates to improving student achievement.

If this correlational study leads to the GSBA revising their BRP criteria to emphasize student achievement, it may have a positive impact on student achievement through the GSBA

making recommendations to Board members if their district's student achievement data begins to decline. In addition, the GSBA could revoke their Recognition of a district that fails to make needed improvements. In order for this to be done, however, it will require the GSBA to continuously monitor student achievement data in districts that have earned each level of distinction.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

GA DOE – Georgia Department of Education

GSBA – Georgia School Boards Association

GOSA – Governor's Office of Student Achievement

BRP – Board Recognition Program

NCLB – No Child Left Behind Act

GMAS – Georgia Milestones Assessment System

EOG – End of Grade

### **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Currently, the GSBA BRP includes three levels of distinction that can be awarded to any Georgia school board who submits an application and meets the requirements for a specific level of distinction. Each level of distinction requires specific criteria to be met regarding strategic planning, board self-assessment and/or external assessment, superintendent evaluation, training requirements for board members, accreditation, as well as other criteria. The problem is that it is unclear whether or not the levels of distinction have any correlation to student achievement data. A board recognition program that is not positively correlated to student achievement may lead community members to develop an unwarranted impression of the effectiveness of their local school board. The research methodology used to investigate this issue is correlational research

design. The purpose of this correlational study was to determine if there is a correlation between each of the three GSBA board recognition levels of distinction and student achievement in the school districts who have earned each level distinction, and to determine if the GSBA BRP levels of distinction serve as predictors of student achievement.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A review of the existing research examining the impact of principal leadership on student achievement will be discussed. Board leadership practices that influence principal leadership and school governance will also be examined. Further investigation into the characteristics of high functioning school boards will be addressed. This overview of the existing research will conclude by investigating the relationship between school boards and student achievement. Within this study, further emphasis will be placed on the Georgia School Board Association's Board Recognition Program and its relationship to student achievement.

#### **Leadership and Student Achievement Research**

Instructional practices of teachers have long been recognized as having the most significant school-level impact on student achievement (Jacobson, 2011; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), however the quality of principal leadership that teachers are exposed to in their schools is also of immense importance (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Walstrom, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Sergiovanni, 2001). Principal leadership, as determined by a large body of research, can have a significant impact on student achievement, although indirect in nature (Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rows, 2008; Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). The effects of high-quality school leadership are especially important in schools with large populations of at-risk students (Jacobson, 2011). As early as the 1970's, research on effective schools began revealing differences in leadership practices in schools that made improvements in student achievement compared to those that did not, resulting in "instructional leadership" being recognized as the linchpin between principal practices and student achievement (Jacobson, 2011). A large body of more recent research has verified the existence of a relationship between



school improvement and instructional leadership practices by principals (Hallinger, 2011; Supovitz, Sirindes, & May, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). This body of research emphasized principal instructional leadership is an essential component for improving student achievement, which leads to overall school improvement. Similarly, Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded that principal leadership “is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning” (p. 5).

### **Qualities of Principals Associated with Student Achievement**

Although a variety of variables exist which impact student achievement, school principals are in a unique position that allows them to identify the variables and put into place conditions for allowing them to ultimately have a positive influence on student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2011). In order for principals to do this, they must not only be familiar with the latest educational research and trends, but they must also have a sound understanding of teaching and learning theory (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

To determine which characteristics of first-year and early-career principals are associated with changes in student achievement, Bastain and Henry (2014), reviewed several years of student achievement data from North Carolina schools that had a first-year or early career principal and compared the data to that from the principals who preceded them, as well as statewide scores. In addition, demographic and principal preparation data were collected from each of the 981 principals included in the study. Results of the study indicated gender, type of principal training, and National Board Certification were not associated with improvements in student achievement, but race and educational background were associated with positive changes in student achievement with lower student achievement gains in schools where the principal was a minority race and higher student achievement gains in schools where the principal obtained a

Master's degree at an in-state public institution rather than a private institution (Bastain & Henry, 2014). Regarding student achievement gains and principal experience, a modest, inconsistent relationship was found to exist between the two variables, however it was confirmed that academic outcomes improved with principal tenure at a school (Bastain & Henry, 2014).

Similarly, Brockmeier, Starr, Green, Pate, & Leech, (2013) investigated whether or not principal tenure, stability, and educational experience were predictors of elementary school student achievement in 1023 Georgia elementary schools. Although they found educational experience of principals was not a significant predictor of student performance, tenure and stability were found to be significant predictors of student achievement in grades three and five, with student achievement scores on state standardized tests increasing as the length of the principal's tenure at a school increased (Brockmeier et al., 2013).

In a study conducted by Bloom and Owens (2011) that compared and contrasted principal influence on curriculum, student discipline, and staffing in low-performing and high-performing urban high schools across the United States, it was found that principals in higher performing schools had a positive perception of their influence over curriculum issues, course offerings, and staffing while principals of lower-achieving felt they did not have a significant influence on these factors. In regard to student discipline, principals from both high and low-performing schools felt they had much influence over discipline issues at their own schools (Bloom & Owens, 2011).

In another study that focused on principals of high and low-performing schools, teachers were interviewed from three of the lowest performing elementary schools in Chicago to determine which principal leadership qualities were most impactful in low-performing schools that were able to turn around. The interviews revealed that in turn around schools, principals developed and communicated a clear vision for their school, they developed relational trust

within their school, they were viewed as effective managers, without micromanaging staff, and they were viewed as providing consistency to their school's instructional program (Finnigan, 2012). Similar findings were obtained by Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Slegers (2012), through a study of the means by which principals impact student achievement. Through the use of structural equation modeling, a mediated effects model for school leadership was tested using secondary school data from 97 schools in the Netherlands (Bruggencate et al., 2012). Findings showed principal behavior had both direct and indirect effects on student outcomes, and that school leaders have a strong influence on the development orientation of teachers in the schools they lead (Bruggencate et al., 2012). Open systems behavior and rational goals had the greatest impact on student outcomes, followed by relationships with staff and internal processes and management (Bruggencate et al., 2012).

### **Principal Instructional Leadership**

The instructional leadership skills of principals can have a tremendous impact on the teachers they supervise. In a study conducted by Valentine and Prater (2011), Missouri high school teachers were administered the Audit of Principal Effectiveness (APE) to determine their perceptions of principal managerial and instructional leadership. Their findings indicated higher student achievement was consistently found in high schools where the principal was perceived to be more competent by teachers. Specifically, they found principals who were considered to be effective instructional leaders were able to improve teacher performance, as well as morale, through encouragement and support, thereby leading to improvements in student achievement as assessed by the teachers who rated the principals as effective (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

In another study that focused on instructional leadership of principals, Lee, Walker, and Chui (2012) surveyed school staff in Hong Kong whose principals were identified as having an

important role in their school's improvement. These key staff members rated their principals' leadership practices related to instructional management and direct supervision of instruction using six-point Likert scale survey items developed specifically for the study. The results of the study revealed instructional management of principals that included encouragement to seek out innovative instructional designs, value new ideas, and promotion of professional growth, led teachers to have a positive perception of their principals' instructional leadership, and were thereby more highly motivated to reflect on their teaching and seek out new approaches to instruction (Lee et al., 2012). In addition, it was found that principals whose instructional leadership practices emphasized direct supervision of classroom instruction had a negative effect on student achievement by creating negative pressures on teachers (Lee et al., 2012).

Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) used the framework of essential supports, developed by Bark, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton in 2010, to gain insight into principal leadership practices that can function as the mediating variables between student learning and principal leadership. The ability of the principal to work with stakeholders to improve student achievement is crucial:

[Principals] reach out to parents and community to connect the schools to the children, families, and communities that they serve. Simultaneously they work to enhance the professional capacity of the school through a deliberate focus on staff quality, strengthening faculty learning and teachers' capacity to work together to align the curriculum and strengthen overall instruction. (Sebastain & Allensworth, 2012, p. 64)

Sebastain and Allensworth (2012) measured teacher perception of their principal as an instructional leader through the use of a biennial survey administered by the Consortium on

Chicago School Research (CCSR) of Chicago Public Schools high school teachers. The survey results indicated schools that have a strong learning climate are more likely to have strong instructional practices in place, with the strongest relationship coming through program quality (Sebastain & Allensworth, 2012).

Improving the learning environment and developing the skills of staff were also deemed as essential principal instructional leadership practices by Jacobson (2011), who studied the effects of principal leadership on student achievement in high-poverty schools. Specifically, it was found that high-quality professional development that engages teachers in becoming communities of practice and which provides a context for collaboration can yield sustained improvement (Jacobson, 2011; Bezzina, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2000). The importance of the principal as an instructional leader in high-poverty schools was also emphasized by Bloom and Owens (2011). After studying principal influence in high-performing and low-performing schools, Bloom and Owens (2011) concluded “Instructional leadership must become a core skill for future principals, especially in urban and poor school districts” (p. 227).

### **Principal Transformational Leadership**

In the era of increased school-level accountability, transformational leadership has been the focus of much research related to improving student achievement in schools. Transformational leadership, initially described by Burns in 1978, emphasizes a focus on uniting the organization and encouraging commitment to organizational goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2007). Critical to improving student achievement, transformational leadership has also been linked to teachers’ perceptions of their school climate, their level of commitment to school improvement, and student learning outcomes (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). Sebastian and Allensworth (2012) found that teachers who perceive

their overall school climate is good are more likely to have classroom instructional environments that are better than their peers who have a negative view of overall school climate. Similarly, development of school climate by transformational leadership practices of principals was found to have an indirect, positive impact on classroom and student achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Tschannen-Moran, & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

In the same study that Valentine and Prater found higher student achievement in schools with more competent principals, they also found three transformational leadership characteristics most frequently explain variances in student achievement scores through the use of the Principal Leadership Questionnaire (PLQ). The transformational leadership characteristics they identified are fostering group goals, the identification and articulation of a vision, and providing a model of expected staff behaviors (Valentine & Prater, 2011). These factors were noted as critical to leading staff to improvement due to several reasons:

These three transformational factors include behaviors by the principal that set an example for staff members to follow consistent with the values the leader espouses, inspiring others with his or her vision of the future, and fostering a group set of goals that transcend personal ambitions. (Valentine & Prater, 2011, p. 20)

Additionally, Valentine and Prater (2011) found all other factors included in the PLQ, which include interactive managerial processes, instructional and curricular improvement, providing support and stimulation, as well as high expectations, was associated with student achievement to some extent.

In a study conducted by Allen et al. (2015), elementary teachers from six schools in Texas completed the *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire* (MLQ-5X) to gather evidence of

transformational leadership behaviors as perceived by teachers. The same questionnaire was also used by principals of the same schools to self-assess their behaviors. The sample of teachers also completed the *School Climate Inventory – Revised* (SCI-R) to gather information about teachers' perceptions of school climate. Results of the study showed significant evidence of a positive relationship between the five factors of transformational leadership included in the MLQ-5X (idealized attributes and behaviors, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration), and the seven dimensions of school climate included in the SCI-R (order, leadership, environment, involvement, instruction, expectation, and collaboration) (Allen et al., 2015). Further analysis of data from this study revealed principal transformational leadership practices have only an indirect influence on student achievement, specifically in the areas of reading and mathematics (Allen et al., 2015).

### **District-Level Leadership**

Although the role of the principal is widely noted as second only to teachers when it comes to impacting student achievement, the importance of district-level support has recently been recognized as a crucial factor in creating and fostering the conditions necessary for success of its principals (Fink & Silverman, 2014). However, Fink and Silverman (2014), also identified three major challenges principals are faced with in regard to district-level expectations, including a lack of understanding by district-level staff in regard to the demand of daily duties of principals and how to support them with improving student achievement and strengthening relationships with staff and students, a lack of relevant professional development opportunities, and the high demands placed on them by district leadership.

The need for district leadership to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for principals was confirmed by Finnigan (2012) as the result of a study of low-

performing Chicago schools that found principal capacity in the areas of instructional leadership, developing principal-teacher relationships, and supporting change were very weak. Finnigan (2012) also pointed out “Ongoing PD of practicing principals – or even the removal of principals who do not exhibit these leadership behaviors – may be necessary to ensure that schools under sanction have the leaders they need” (p. 198). Consistent capacity-building opportunities through professional development focused on transformational leadership and mentoring for principals were also recommended by Finnigan (2012) as means to improve performance in low-performing schools. Bloom and Owens (2011) also noted the importance of district leadership clearly communicating expectations of principals, as well as teaching and mentoring principals to ensure their success.

Multiple studies have suggested the success of a principal is directly related to the quality of instruction occurring in their schools (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Cole-Henderson, 2000). According to Bloom and Owens (2011), “Teacher selection is perhaps the most crucial component in the efforts of making a successful school. Principals in high-achieving schools reported having more influence on faculty selection at their school” (p. 224). Giving effective principals autonomy in the hiring process is necessary for improving schools to sustain their success.

The hiring of effective principals is, of course, a precursor to principals hiring effective teachers. According to Brockmeier et al. (2013), “Schools must hire principals that are prepared to effectively lead schools” (p. 59). Hiring, as well as retaining principals are very important to significantly impacting student achievement (Brockmeier et al., 2013). In order for this to occur, it is imperative for district leadership to put procedures in place that will allow this to occur.



## **School Board Research**

While school boards began managing local schools throughout the United States in the mid-1600s (Alfen & Schmidt, 1997), the governance system utilized by the nation's public schools began developing well over 200 years ago in Massachusetts when local town leaders determined the burden of running both town administrative offices and schools was too demanding (Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger, Carol, Cunningham, Kirst, McCloud, & Usdan, 1987). Late 19<sup>th</sup> century reforms focused on keeping education out of the hands of politicians led to the current, most common form of school governance that involves a superintendent and a school board comprised of laymen (Danzberger, 1994). Although these reforms ended up placing school governance in the hands of local citizens, many outside variables have continued to have an impact on school board governance. With the expansion of accountability systems at the federal and state level in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, testing and overall performance data began playing an increasingly important role in the school governance process (Kogan, Lavertu, & Peskowitz, 2016). Local control of schools by school boards has become more and more complex in recent years, with various players, decision makers, and multiple layers of bureaucracy each having some degree of influence on the governance of local schools (Danzberger, 1994; Mizell, 2010).

### **School Board Membership**

Currently, there are over 14,000 school boards and over 95,000 school board members across the United States that govern local school systems, with the majority of boards being comprised of five to seven laypersons elected by the general public (Kogan et al., 2002). Since the inception of layperson school boards, multiple studies have been undertaken to better understand what, exactly, motivates citizens to seek out school board membership. One of the

first studies, conducted by Goldhammer in 1955, found board members pursued their seat among the board because they felt they could fix the issues they identified as being problematic in their local schools. Subsequent studies from the late fifties to the mid-seventies revealed board member motivation was based on everything from a strong interest in education issues to having a sense of civic duty, to personal vendettas or self-interests (Mountford, 2004). Something all of these studies had in common, however, was that each of them found some board members were *neutral* and did not appear to have a motive for their board service (Mountford, 2004). It wasn't until Alby's study in 1979 that significant discrepancies were discovered to exist among board members who self-reported their specific motivation to join the board and the stakeholders who interacted with them on a regular basis (Mountford, 2004). After surveying many board members from different school districts and their core group of stakeholders, Alby found about half of the board members included in the study were motivated by personal reasons and about half were motivated by altruistic reasons (Mountford, 2004).

### **Problems with School Boards**

A variety of problems have been associated with school boards throughout past and current research. Most recently, school boards have been highly criticized, especially in urban areas, for their inability to effectively lead reforms that lead to improvements in student achievement (Danzberger, 1994; Danzeberger & Usdan, 1992; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; NSBF, 1999). Questionable motivation for school board membership is cited as a common concern among superintendents, because of the power struggles that often result (Mountford, 2004). Research by Cavalier (2000) and McClelland (1971) suggests the motivations of citizens to become school board members will have an effect on how they perceive and use their power as a board member. According to Farkas, Foley, and Duffett (2001) 62% of superintendents and 69%

of board members identified those with special interests or personal agendas dominate school board meetings.

Hess (2010) identified several common critiques of school boards including voters not paying attention to who is on the ballot and not holding elected board members accountable. Because of this “electoral apathy,” constituencies such as teachers’ unions and other special interest groups end up having a disproportionate influence on board actions, resulting in lackadaisical district leadership (Hess, 2010; Hess & West, 2006). In a study that examined whether or not public dissemination of school district performance data influenced Ohio school board elections, Kogan et al., (2016) found minimal evidence that voters hold board members accountable, and thus electoral pressure to motivate board members to improve the quality of their district’s schools did not exist.

Another common critique noted by Hess (2010) is the non-coherent and undisciplined behavior of elected school boards that is associated with uncertainty of roles and short-term projects that fail to produce positive results. An example of this can be seen in a 2003 study conducted by Stuckey that investigated the differences in actual versus desired roles of Lutheran school board members. In this study, Lutheran principals, school board chairpersons, and pastors of 200 Lutheran schools throughout the United States were surveyed to determine the amount of time they thought school board members should spend on each of 47 different board governance tasks, as well as the amount of time they believe the board actually does spend on each of the tasks (Stuckey, 2003). Results of the study revealed significant differences existed regarding actual versus desired roles of board members among each of the three groups surveyed.

Operating in isolation to citywide interests which leads to fragmented politics, is cited by

Hess (2010) as another common critique of school boards. Having school boards that are independent entities from local government is cited as a reason transformative improvement is very difficult (Hess, 2010). Hess (2010) even makes the case for mayoral control of large, struggling school districts as an improvement strategy:

In large urban districts plagued by incoherence, leadership turnover, and petty strife, mayoral control seems to offer substantial benefits in those places where the mayor welcomes the authority and is eager to be judged on stewardship of schools. (p. 18)

Land (2002) also emphasized the idea of mayoral or state takeover as a means of combating low student achievement, fiscal mismanagement, and corruption and/or ineptitude of district leadership.

Other common critiques of school boards include their tendency to micromanage, and a lack of awareness of national and state education policy and reform efforts. In an analysis of rural school board meeting minutes and decision making, Alfen and Schmidt (1997) found a pattern of preoccupation with the details of the governance process to exist, in addition to infrequent discussion among board members about current reform movements. As a result, these issues were found to result in rural boards ignoring their function of building consensus and building community (Alfen & Schmidt, 1997). Tucker (2010) echoes this finding in his statement that “School boards should get out of the business of running schools and focus on improving student learning” (p. 29).

Finally, what entails effective school board leadership is a problematic question that has plagued researchers in the field for decades. Based upon Land’s (2002) review of the last twenty plus years of research related to school board effectiveness,

School board organizations, experts, and members have identified characteristics that they consider essential for effective governance; little data, however, exists to substantiate that these characteristics are indeed essential for students' academic achievement (p. 17).

### **School Board Member Roles and Governance**

The roles assumed by school board members in the governing process have typically not been well-defined by state boards of education, nor by local school system policy. This has often resulted in confusion and contention among board members, as well as between board members and school district personnel. According to Mountford (2004), role confusion between school board members and superintendents is the most commonly cited reason for difficult relationships between superintendents and their school board. Other research cites role confusion among board members as more of a symptom of other, more deeply rooted issues, such as the philosophical orientations of board members (Danzberger & Usdan, 1992; Kowalaski, 1995; McCurdy, 1992). Recommendations for the roles boards should and should not take on are frequently encountered in school board governance research, including:

The role of the school board is not to decide, for example, that all elementary teachers need professional development in literacy. Rather, the board's role is to set student learning goals at each level (though that function has largely been preempted by state standards, unless a school board chooses to exceed them) and to develop policies and provide resources that enable educators to meet the goals (Mizell, 2010, p. 23).

According to Dunn (1999) "The school board is recognized as one of the most influential

organizations for developing and shaping policy at the local level” (p. 157). In order for school district policies to truly serve the best interests of students, it is essential for board members to have the knowledge and skills necessary for identifying policy needs and to be able to draft policies that are in compliance with state and federal requirements. To determine the level of knowledge and skills held by board members, Newton and Sackney (2005) gathered data using a combination of observation, analysis of conversations, surveys, and the Critical Decision Method (CDM). They found groups can function using mainly shared, rather than individual information, and that communication patterns actually influence the thought processes of each group of board members (Newton & Sackney, 2005). Newton and Sackney (2005) also pointed out the importance of board members seeking out knowledge they do not currently have in order to function more effectively:

Much of the literature on board effectiveness emanates from the corporate sector and suggests that organizations should acquire the necessary governance knowledge by recruiting qualified board members who have that knowledge. Because elected public-sector boards do not have the luxury of acquiring members in this manner, these boards have to acquire knowledge through other means, namely through individual and group learning (p. 435).

Focusing on the “big picture” concerns of the school district is identified as the main role of school boards according to Herman (2003) to ensure the organization achieves its goals. Also emphasizing the importance of boards working toward established goals, Robinson (2001) included the additional role of boards ensuring they are in compliance with state and federal laws, and participating in activities that lead to increasing credibility of the organization.

According to Kogan et al. (2016) student learning is influenced by school boards in a variety of ways, including shifts in resource allocations, modification of procedures used during hiring and evaluating staff, updates to district strategic plans, union negotiations regarding teacher contracts, and their overall power to select, dismiss, and influence the district's superintendent.

### **High-Performing School Boards**

Although few data-driven studies have been conducted which focus on effectiveness of school boards, the results of the studies that do exist can shed light on the traits that are associated with effectiveness, particularly in terms of improving student achievement. Even with the limited number of research studies available, the National School Boards Foundation proclaimed the school boards' primary purpose must be to improve student achievement (National School Boards Foundation, 1999). In addition, Speer (1998) noted the National School Boards Association adopted improvement of student achievement as a major objective of school boards.

The ability of a school board to govern effectively is highly influenced by top-down regulations from the federal to the state level, as well as pressures from the bottom-up which include local special interest groups, teachers' unions, and/or professional educator organizations with strong advocacy units. Governance, itself, is not a strategy that school boards use to improve schools; instead, specific forms of governance utilized by school boards can create conditions that are more likely to lead to improvement (Hess, 2010). According to Hess, "There exists in the world no scientifically validated 'best' model of governance; there exists only arrangements that work better or worse for certain purposes, in certain contexts, and at certain times (p. 17). Acknowledging the absence of a single, best governance model for school boards,

as well as understanding which governance strategies and arrangements are most effective under certain circumstances is critical for school district success.

What constitutes an effective school board is a question that has plagued researchers for many years. Characteristics of effective school boards, according to Feuerstein (2009), can be grouped into several categories based on how boards perform in several different areas including, “the ability to focus on district policy rather than micromanagement; the development of a positive relationship among board members and between the board and the superintendent; the ability to set district priorities; and a focus on professional development and evaluation” (p. 7).

According to Feuerstein (2009), boards that are able to engage in specific communication and strategic thinking behaviors will see more success in their efforts to attain established goals. Feuerstein (2009) also linked these behaviors to student achievement by stating “the effectiveness of school governance within a school district will likely be judged by whether or not students’ academic achievement improves” (p.7). Further, Feuerstein (2009) emphasized the importance of being able to identify the characteristics of effective school boards by linking it to a means of benchmarking for the general public when they are trying to gauge how well their local school board is performing.

A general framework of effectiveness indicators for school boards was developed by Danzenberger et al. (1987) through a series of cases studies and surveys of over 450 board chairs throughout the United States. The indicators, which focused on the basic roles and responsibilities of board members, include leadership and consensus-building; planning, goal-setting, and use of informed procedures for policy development and monitoring; equity in resource allocation; positive working relationships between board members and the superintendent; assessment of board effectiveness; and, commitment to working with other



school boards, state school board, and other stakeholder groups in order to meet the needs of the district (Danzenberger et al., 1987).

In a study that compared Georgia school districts that had high student achievement with demographically similar school districts that had low student achievement, Rice et al. (2000), focused their investigation on the characteristics of the two opposing sets of school boards. Through an analysis of student scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) for grades three, five, and eight, as well as interviews with school staff, superintendents, and board members, Rice et al. (2000) found consistently different views in the “moving districts” versus the “stuck districts” regarding seven conditions necessary for school improvement, including: the development of a self-renewing, professional community that engages in shared decision-making; their perspective on how education gets better; how to create needed support for personnel; the role of staff development for productive change; how to support local schools in the improvement process; how to generate community involvement; and what constitutes integrative leadership. Overall, in the “moving” districts, there was evidence of growing relationships and shared governance between the board and school personnel, a focus on the board and superintendent helping school personnel succeed, and district and school leadership had a positive attitude toward personnel being able to meet their district and school goals (Rice et al., 2000). In addition, it was found that there was a shared understanding among boards and superintendents regarding the value of staff development in reaching improvement goals, a positive attitude among boards regarding specific school site initiatives related to improving student achievement, and they had positive attitudes toward community involvement and district initiatives that increased communication and structures across the district (Rice et al., 2000).

In a meta-analysis of school board effectiveness literature, Land (2002) found the most

frequently identified characteristics of effective school board governance include an appropriate overarching focus on academic achievement and policy, rather than administration; good relationships with all stakeholders; effective policy making, leadership and budgeting; adequate evaluation processes for board and district practices; and professional development geared toward improving board effectiveness. Based on her analysis of school board effectiveness literature, Land established a simple model, as well as a more realistic, complex model, to guide school board research. In the simple model, the characteristics of effective school boards have an indirect, yet overarching influence on student achievement, whereas the complex, more realistic model directly links the characteristics of effective school boards with school operations and student achievement (Land, 2002).

In a study that collected survey data from superintendents and principals of 72 high performing school districts in Ontario, Leithwood and McCollugh (2016) found the effects on student achievement were significant for several school district characteristics including a policy-oriented board of trustees, productive relationships among stakeholders, and alignment of policies and procedures with overall district goals, mission, and vision. Similarly, Baker, Campbell, and Ostroff (2016) surveyed over 800 superintendents and school board chairs of independent schools throughout the United States in effort to identify factors that contribute to effective school board governance. Results of their study revealed three main findings, the first of which is boards that rated highly on perceptions of strategic effectiveness contribute in a positive way to institutional performance (Baker et al., 2016). Second, boards that displayed strategic effectiveness were intentional about onboarding of new board members; and third, highly effective boards devoted much time and effort to interactions between potential board members and existing board members prior to any formal recruiting processes to help create a

sense of interest and ownership in board tasks (Baker et al., 2016).

Meeting the challenge of school board effectiveness has led to a variety of recommendations by researchers in the field. Herman (2003) recommended several strategies that can be most easily accomplished by boards for increasing effectiveness, with overarching strategies that include prioritizing what is most important for the board to accomplish, empowering principals to avoid micromanagement, listening to their constituents, investing in board education, and establishing self-governance policies. Carver and Charney (2004) echoed the importance of boards establishing self-governance policies as a means of improving or maintaining effectiveness because school boards are ultimately accountable to constituents for school effectiveness and performance. Reimer (2008) also linked effective governance with positive educational outcomes in regard to student learning and overall student achievement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Decision Output Theory of Wirt and Kirst (1982) attempts to explain the relationships between the inputs and outputs of the governance and policy development processes of school boards. “Wirt and Kirst’s Decision-Output Theory (1992), has endured over time as a theoretical construct explaining the inner workings of local school board governance” (Blasko, 2016, p. 6). The foundation of this theory is based on the notion that typical inputs such as financial and human capital, as well as influences from various stakeholders, contribute to the actions undertaken by the board during the governance process. Those actions, in turn, contribute to the outputs of the process, including student achievement.

Wirt and Kirst’s (1982) framework of school board governance serves as the foundation for this research. This framework will be utilized to analyze the Georgia School Board Association’s Board Recognition Program to determine if the inputs (board actions that are

required to meet each level of distinction included in the Board Recognition Program) lead to significantly different outputs (student achievement). Research study findings are combined with frequently-cited literature of prominent authors of research related to school board member roles and governance, and characteristics of effective school boards.

### **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Overall, literature on principal-level leadership indicates school principals who have the greatest impact on student achievement share the following characteristics: effective instructional leaders; build capacity among staff; foster group goals; and create and maintain good school culture. In order to develop these characteristics in principals, district leadership, in turn, must foster conditions for success by: promoting and providing ongoing professional development for principal; providing effective mentoring opportunities; communicating clear expectations; and at give principals autonomy in their hiring process. Finally, school boards must utilize governance models that allow district leaders to implement and sustain these practices. However, the link between school board effectiveness and student achievement has not been established by literature.

Literature on school board effectiveness suggests it is a multi-dimensional topic that can be difficult to measure and difficult to link to student outcomes, but there is much consensus among researchers regarding the characteristics of effective school boards. Of the studies reviewed, the commonalities include: a focus on district policy that includes the use of informed policy development procedures as well as a policy evaluation process; self-governance policies; establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the superintendent and school personnel; effective communication and the use of strategic thinking to set district goals and

priorities, and build consensus during decision-making; and the use of a shared governance model between the board and schools, with a focus on helping school staff succeed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

A review of the literature showed much knowledge about both student achievement and school boards has been gained through a variety of quantitative and qualitative research studies. Studies have identified the variables that have the greatest impact on student achievement; investigated how school boards make decisions; how local, state, and national policies affect their decision-making processes, how their working relationships influence their effectiveness, how voters select candidates; how participation in professional learning correlates to overall district performance; and that certain leadership practices are common to high performing districts. What has not been investigated, however, is how these pieces of information ultimately interact to influence student achievement. The body of research available on school boards has become vaster in recent years, and much insight into the way school boards function. However, there is still a great need for deeper understanding of the overarching role of school boards in the school district governing process especially as it relates to their impact on student achievement.

The Georgia School Board Association Board Recognition Program (GSBA BRP) was developed to recognize school boards that engage in highly skilled leadership practices. Currently, the GSBA BRP includes three levels of distinction that can be awarded to any Georgia school board that applies and meets the requirements for a specific level of distinction. The levels of distinction are Quality Board, Distinguished Board, and Exemplary Board. Each level of distinction requires specific criteria to be met. From 2013-2016, the criteria required board members to engage in specific behaviors regarding strategic planning, the Georgia Vision Project, board self-assessment and/or external assessment, superintendent evaluation, training requirements for board members, accreditation, and coaching by governance teams (Appendix

A). In 2017, the requirement of coaching by governance teams was removed, and board member ethics, as well as fiscal responsibility were added (Appendix B). The objective of the GSBA is to have all school boards in Georgia achieve and maintain the GSBA Quality Board recognition level of the GSBA BRP. To achieve this goal, the GSBA claims they will work to develop processes and programs to help the organization and local school boards to continuously improve and use data effectively. A board recognition program that is not correlated to student achievement may lead community members to develop an unwarranted impression of the effectiveness of their local school board. This chapter includes a review of: research questions, research design and methodology, study population and setting, procedures, instrumentation, and, data analysis.

### **Research Hypothesis**

One hypothesis will be tested in this study:

H<sub>1</sub>: It is predicted that school district recognition level will not significantly predict district-wide student achievement across the three years for either English language arts or mathematics.

### **Research Questions**

One research question will also be addressed in this study:

What is the predictive effect of school district recognition level on district-level student achievement in English language arts and mathematics (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) for the 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 academic years, while controlling for gender (female as referent), socioeconomic status (economically disadvantaged as referent), disability status (students with disability as referent), race (minority, non-white as referent) and English language proficiency (limited English proficiency as referent)?

## **Research Design and Approach**

To test the hypothesis, a list of school districts who have earned each BRP level of distinction from 2013-2016 were obtained from the GSBA. Student achievement data for each district were also obtained. Specifically, student achievement data from 2013 - 2016 were obtained from the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) and the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS) End of Grade (EOG) assessment in grades three, five, and eight, in English-Language Arts and Mathematics were obtained for the year each district received their initial designation from the GSBA BRP. Student achievement data for the year(s) each subsequent level of distinction was earned were also obtained. In addition, demographic data (i.e. socioeconomic status; gender; ethnicity; English proficiency; and disability status) for each district were obtained for each year a recognition level was awarded or maintained. It should be noted that all data used in this study are publicly available data that can be accessed through the GA DOE and the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) websites.

Once all data were obtained, data were coded such that it could be analyzed using statistical analysis software. A correlational analysis was conducted to determine if student achievement is correlated to the level of distinction by analyzing the student achievement data of all school districts that have received the same level of distinction as well as a regression analysis to evaluate whether level of distinction significantly predicted student achievement after controlling for key district contextual characteristics. After completing the statistical analyses, the criteria description for each level of distinction was examined to determine which, if any, components focus on student achievement, and which components may need to be revised to more effectively represent student achievement as an indicator for each level of distinction. A finding of a positive correlation between student and GSBA BRP level indicates the objective of



the GSBA will have been met. However, a finding of a negative correlation between student achievement and GSBA BRP level indicates otherwise, and the strategies the GSBA uses to try to meet the objective, as well as the criteria used to award this level of recognition will need to be reconsidered.

### **Data Analysis**

Because data were obtained from multiple districts (i.e., achievement scores in math and English-Language Arts [ELA]), the intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) were calculated to ascertain the amount of variance that was attributable between districts. This was done to account for the nested nature of the data structure (i.e., achievement scores within districts). The ICCs for each of the outcome variables—3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA and math achievement respectively—were negligible (all ICCs  $\leq .01$ ), however, indicating that the majority of the variance in ELA and math achievement was attributable within-districts, not between districts. Hence, the need to conduct a multilevel linear model (MLM) analyses was unwarranted. Ordinary least squares regressions were conducted in lieu of MLM.

Ordinary least squares regression analyses were conducted to answer the research question. In each of the six regression models, demographic and contextual characteristics of each district were added in the first block and the GSBA level was entered in the second block as predictors, and each of the grade level ELA and math achievement scores served as the criterion in each of the models respectively. The  $p$ -value was adjusted to account for the multiple ordinary least squares regressions using the Bonferroni adjustment to obviate Type I error rate inflation. Effect sizes for all regressions were reported as  $R^2$ . Cohen (1988) specified the following interpretive guidelines for  $R^2$ : .010-.299 as small; .300-.499 as medium; and  $\geq .500$  as large.

## **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is any correlation between the GSBA BRP and student achievement. To test the hypothesis presented in this study, a correlational analysis and regression analysis were used. The study utilized data from the GA DOE and GOSA for each for each of the school districts that have received a level of distinction from the GSBA BRP. School district population and demographic data were used in the regression analysis. In addition, the GSBA BRP criteria for each level of distinction were analyzed to determine if they include indicators associated with student achievement.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate whether or not a correlation exists between the GSBA BRP Levels of Distinction and student achievement in English language arts and mathematics in grades 3, 5, and 8 from state standardized test results from 2013 – 2016. As such, this correlational study was used to identify if school district recognition level will predict student achievement across three years for English language arts or mathematics. Student achievement data for a total of 115 public school districts in Georgia were analyzed using least squares linear regression. This chapter provides a description of the regression analysis results. A summary of results is presented in the chapter conclusion.

#### **Research Hypothesis**

One hypothesis will be tested in this study:

H<sub>1</sub>: It is predicted that school district recognition level will not significantly predict district-wide student achievement across the three years for either English language arts or mathematics.

#### **Research Question**

One research question will also be addressed in this study:

What is the predictive effect of school district recognition level on district-level student achievement in English language arts and mathematics (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) for the 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 academic years, while controlling for gender (female as referent), socioeconomic status (economically disadvantaged as referent), disability status (students with disability as referent), race (minority, non-white as referent) and English language proficiency (limited English proficiency as referent)?

## Findings

In the regression analysis, school district contextual characteristics (socioeconomic status; disability status; gender; English proficiency; and ethnicity) and GSBA level of distinction (Quality; Distinguished; and Exemplary) were analyzed with student achievement in English-language arts and math as the criterion. Results showed the only significant school district contextual characteristic was disability status in which  $p=.037$  for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA;  $p=.042$  for 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELA;  $p=.033$  for 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA; and  $p=.037$  for 8<sup>th</sup> grade math. The  $p$ -values for the remaining grade levels for both ELA and math were .079 or less, which was much lower than those for all other contextual characteristics. A finding that is most significant to this study is that GSBA level remained a negative predictor of student achievement in ELA and math across each grade level with  $\beta$ - being negative for all contextual characteristics except gender for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA; all contextual characteristics except gender and English proficiency for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade math and 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELA; all contextual characteristics except gender for 5<sup>th</sup> grade math and 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA; and all contextual characteristics except gender and English proficiency for 8<sup>th</sup> grade math. Table 1 contains the results of the ordinary least squares linear regressions.

Table 1

*Ordinary Least Squares Linear Regression Results with Demographic Characteristics and School District GSBA Level with Student Achievement as Criterion*

Predictor	$B^+$ (CI <sub>95%</sub> )	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA				
SES	-.835 (-2.061, .391)	-.106	-1.341	.181
Disability	-8.749 (-16.974, -.523)	-.131	-2.094	.037*
Gender	1.672 (-17.862, 21.207)	.010	.169	.866
LEP	-.083 (-3.422, 3.257)	-.003	-.049	.961
Minority	-.202 (-1.283, .879)	-.030	-.368	.713
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade MA				
SES	-.782 (-1.992, .429)	-.101	-1.271	.205
Disability	-7.405 (-15.674, .864)	-.112	-1.763	.079
Gender	1.406 (-17.943, 20.754)	.009	.143	.886
LEP	.138 (-3.159, 3.434)	.005	.082	.935
Minority	-.175 (-1.247, .897)	-.027	-.321	.749
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA				
SES	-.872 (-2.105, .360)	-.110	-1.393	.165
Disability	-8.589 (-16.845, -.333)	-.129	-2.048	.042*
Gender	.492 (-19.164, 20.148)	.003	.049	.961
LEP	.015 (-3.337, 3.367)	.001	.009	.993
Minority	-.194 (-1.279, .892)	-.029	-.352	.725
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade MA				
SES	-.938 (-2.166, .289)	-.119	-1.505	.134
Disability	-7.913 (-16.138, .313)	-.119	-1.894	.059
Gender	.497 (-19.029, 20.023)	.003	.050	.960
LEP	-.030 (-3.369, 3.309)	-.001	-.018	.986
Minority	-.140 (-1.221, .940)	-.021	-.256	.798
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA				
SES	-.753 (-1.989, .483)	-.095	-1.199	.232
Disability	-9.018 (-17.311, -.725)	-.135	-2.141	.033*
Gender	1.484 (-18.210, 21.177)	.009	.148	.882
LEP	-.054 (-3.420, 3.313)	-.002	-.031	.975
Minority	-.174 (-1.264, .916)	-.026	-.314	.754
8 <sup>th</sup> Grade MA				
SES	-.757 (-1.945, .430)	-.100	-1.256	.210
Disability	-8.465 (-16.434, -.495)	-.132	-2.091	.037*
Gender	1.210 (-17.723, 20.142)	.007	.126	.900
LEP	.178 (-3.125, 3.482)	.006	.106	.915
Minority	-.225 (-1.272, .822)	-.035	-.423	.673

$N = 115$  \* $p < .05$  ELA = English-Language Arts MA = Math

$B^+$  = Unstandardized regression coefficients and their 95% confidence interval (CI<sub>95%</sub>)

$\beta$  = Standardized regression coefficients

A review of the criteria for each level of the three GSBA BRP levels of distinction revealed student achievement is not explicitly included. However, strategic planning, which is

one of the criteria included in the BRP process for each level of distinction, could implicitly include student achievement, as strategic plans for public school systems typically focus on improving student achievement. Specifically, the GSBA BRP recognizes a Quality board as one that adopts and implements a strategic plan. Distinguished boards, on the other hand, must adopt and implement a strategic plan and utilize scorecards to measure progress towards improvement goals. Finally, Exemplary boards must adopt and implement a strategic plan which includes the use of balanced score cards on completing district goals, and the scorecards must be posted on the system's website for stakeholder accessibility.

### **Chapter Summary**

Data analysis results of the present investigation were consistent and resulted in four main findings. The first is that school district contextual characteristics (e.g., SES, gender distribution, minority composition, etc.) did not, for the most part, predict student achievement in math or English-Language Arts. The second is that the only significant school district contextual characteristic was disability composition, in which districts with fewer rates of students with disabilities performed better than districts that included higher rates of students with disabilities. This suggests that, for every one unit increase in proportion of students with disabilities: 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA decreases by -.131 of one standard deviation; 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELA decreases by -.129 of one standard deviation; 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA decreases by -.135 of one standard deviation; and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math decreases by -.132 of one standard deviation. The third, and perhaps most relevant to the present study, is that GSBA level of distinction remained a negative predictor of both student achievement variables included as outcomes in this study, indicating that school districts with higher levels of distinction tended to be related to lower student achievement in both achievement outcomes. This suggests that, for every one unit increase in GSBA BRP level of

distinction: 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA decreases by -.321 of one standard deviation; 3<sup>rd</sup> grade math decreases by -.326 of one standard deviation; 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELA decreases by -.316 of one standard deviation; 5<sup>th</sup> grade math decreases by -.318 of one standard deviation; 8<sup>th</sup> grade ELA decreases by -.309 of one standard deviation; and 8<sup>th</sup> grade math decreases by -.308 of one standard deviation. The fourth is that the aforementioned patterns were consistent across grade level (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

In response to the research question, statistical analyses of data revealed the GSBA BRP is not a predictor of student achievement for neither of the three levels of distinction. Further, instead of there being no correlation between student achievement and GSBA BRP level of distinction as hypothesized, the analysis of data showed there is actually a negative correlation; lower student achievement is typically correlated to higher GSBA BRP levels of distinction.

#### **Analysis of Research Findings**

Data analysis results of the present investigation were consistent and resulted in four main findings. The first is that school district contextual characteristics (e.g., SES, gender distribution, minority composition, etc.) did not, for the most part, predict student achievement in math or English-Language Arts. The second is that the only significant school district contextual characteristic was disability composition, in which districts with fewer rates of students with disabilities performed better than districts that included higher rates of students with disabilities. The third, and perhaps most relevant to the present study, is that GSBA level of distinction remained a negative predictor of both student achievement variables included as outcomes in this study, indicating that school districts with higher levels of distinction tended to be related to lower student achievement in both achievement outcomes. The fourth is that the aforementioned patterns were consistent across grade level (3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

#### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the GSBA BRP and student achievement. Specifically, the study sought to determine if the GSBA BRP was a



predictor of student achievement in districts who have received a BRP distinction from 2013-2016. As described by the GSBA, the purpose of their BRP is to recognize school boards that engage in highly skilled leadership practices. The GSBA BRP includes three levels of distinction that can be awarded to any Georgia school board that applies and meets the requirements for a specific level of distinction. The levels of distinction are Quality Board, Distinguished Board, and Exemplary Board, each of which requires specific criteria to be met in order to receive the designation. The objective of the GSBA is to have all school boards in Georgia achieve and maintain the Quality Board recognition level of the GSBA BRP. To achieve this goal, the GSBA claims they will work to develop processes and programs to help the organization and local school boards to continuously improve and use data effectively.

This quantitative study identified the relationship between the GSBA BRP and student achievement. The following discussion compares the research findings of this study to research presented in the review of literature.

### **Leadership and Student Achievement Research**

Research regarding leadership and student achievement consistently and strongly emphasizes the importance and impact of teacher and principal leadership. A smaller body of research is available that focuses on district-level leadership and its impact on student achievement. The importance of district-level support has recently been recognized as a crucial factor in creating and fostering the conditions necessary for success of its principals (Fink & Silverman, 2014). However, Fink and Silverman (2014), also identified challenges principals are faced with in regard to district-level expectations, one of which is a lack of understanding by district-level staff in regard to the how to support them with improving student achievement which includes a lack of relevant professional development opportunities. The need for district

leadership to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for principals was confirmed by Finnigan (2012) through a study of low-performing Chicago schools that found principal capacity in the area of instructional leadership and supporting change were very weak. Consistent capacity-building professional development focused on transformational leadership and mentoring for principals were recommended by Finnigan (2012) as means to improve performance in low-performing schools. Similarly, Bloom and Owens (2011) noted the importance of district leadership providing opportunities for teaching and mentoring principals to ensure their success.

This study emphasized school board leadership and student achievement, specifically focusing on the board leadership expectations included in the GSBA BRP. As research on leadership and student achievement has consistently indicated, building capacity of those in leadership positions through ongoing, relevant professional learning is vital to improving student achievement. The objective of the BRP as indicated by the GSBA is to have all school boards in Georgia achieve and maintain the Quality Board recognition level of the GSBA BRP. To achieve this goal, the GSBA claims they will work to develop processes and programs to help the organization and local school boards to continuously improve and use data effectively. If these processes and practices are currently in place, they need to be reevaluated for effectiveness, as the results of this study indicate lower student achievement in districts that have received each successively higher level of distinction from the GSBA BRP, thus effective use of data in decision-making is likely not occurring as frequently as desired in districts as level of distinction increases. This may indicate the need for GSBA processes and programs to be developed or revised in order to build capacity among school boards regarding effective use of data for school improvement.

## **School Board Research**

School boards are often criticized for their inability to effectively lead reforms that lead to improvements in student achievement (Danzberger, 1994; Danzeberger & Usdan, 1992; Harrington-Lueker, 1996; NSBF, 1999). Other common critiques of school boards include their tendency to micromanage, and an overall lack of awareness of national and state education policy. Alfen and Schmidt (1997) found consistent preoccupation with the details of the governance process to exist among board members, in addition to infrequent discussion about current reform movements. Tucker (2010) echoes this finding in his statement that “School boards should get out of the business of running schools and focus on improving student learning” (p. 29).

Exactly what entails effective school board leadership is a question that has plagued researchers in the field for decades. According to Dunn (1999) “The school board is recognized as one of the most influential organizations for developing and shaping policy at the local level” (p. 157). In order for school district policies to truly serve the best interests of students, board members must be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary for identifying policy needs and to be able to draft policies that are in compliance with state and federal requirements. A study conducted by Newton and Sackney (2005) about the level of knowledge and skills held by board members resulted in the conclusion that it is critical for board members to seek out knowledge they do not currently have in order to function more effectively in their roles. Research by Kogan et al. (2016) reinforces the importance of board members seeking out additional knowledge because of their finding that student learning is influenced by school boards in a variety of ways, including resource allocation, hiring and evaluation procedures, strategic plan development and implementation, as well as their overall power to influence the

district's superintendent.

As a result of this study, it was revealed that a huge discrepancy exists between the intended outcome of the GSBA BRP and student performance in districts that have received recognition through the program. Under the current BRP offered by the GSBA, school boards that are awarded a level of distinction of Exemplary, which is the highest level of distinction, actually have the lowest average student achievement. This presents a variety of problems for both the school systems receiving the recognition, as well as for the GSBA. First, when the lowest-performing school systems receive the highest board recognition level, it leads to many questions and concerns about the fidelity of the GSBA BRP, and could result in the credibility of the program being challenged by stakeholders of all public school systems that have received recognition. Second, when school boards receive a level of distinction from the GSBA, they will likely use the recognition as a public relations tool to gain positive press for the district. This is problematic because unsuspecting stakeholders, as well as those who may be considering relocation to the area, may equate an Exemplary board to a high-performing district, when in fact the opposite is true. Painting a false picture of the overall "health" of the district, whether intentional or not, could lead to additional scrutiny and much criticism of the board.

### **High Performing School Boards**

Although there is a limited amount of research studies available regarding what constitutes high performing school boards, the National School Boards Foundation proclaimed the school boards' primary purpose must be to improve student achievement (National School Boards Foundation, 1999). In addition, Speer (1998) noted the National School Boards Association adopted improvement of student achievement as a major objective of school boards. An emphasis on improving student achievement is also noted by Hess (2010), by describing

school governance as a series of processes used to create conditions for improvement.

Several researchers have offered insight into the characteristics of effective school boards, including Feuerstein (2009), who identified professional development and evaluation as key characteristics, and linked these behaviors to student achievement by concluding that the level of effectiveness of board governance is likely judged by whether or not student improvement occurs. Rice et al. (2000), found in the “moving” districts (i.e. those that are able to accomplish gains in student achievement), there was evidence of shared governance between the board and school personnel and a focus on the board and superintendent helping school personnel succeed. In addition, it was found that there was a shared understanding among boards and superintendents regarding the value of staff development in reaching improvement goals (Rice et al., 2000).

The most frequently identified characteristics of effective school board governance, as identified by Land (2002) include an overarching focus on academic achievement and policy, rather than administration; good relationships with all stakeholders; effective policy-making, leadership and budgeting; adequate evaluation processes for board and district practices; and professional development geared toward improving board effectiveness. Although the GSBA BRP strives to recognize boards with highly effective leadership practices, and the criteria for obtaining a level of distinction emphasizes several of the characteristics identified by Land, it is doubtful that boards who have received recognition through the program truly employ each of these practices with fidelity. If, for example, all of the Exemplary school boards were implementing leadership practices indicative of effective boards, and if the GSBA were indeed implementing processes to assist school boards with effective data use, then one would expect student achievement scores to be highest in districts with Exemplary boards. However, this

study proved Exemplary boards do not necessarily employ the most effective data use practices, nor do they utilize appropriate means for evaluating their own effectiveness as evidenced by the results of this study.

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions were drawn following the analysis of research findings. The conclusions are presented to address the question of if the GSBA BRP was a predictor of student achievement in school districts that have received a level of distinction. The researcher concluded from the study:

1. The GSBA BRP does not accurately predict student achievement in English Language Arts and Math in grades 3, 5, and 8 based on the CRCT and GMAS EOG.
2. The GSBA BRP is negatively correlated to student achievement in English Language Arts and Math in grades 3, 5, and 8 on the CRCT and GMAS EOG; student achievement is lower in school districts who have received higher levels of distinction, where Quality boards have higher student achievement and Exemplary boards have lower student achievement.
3. The GSBA BRP levels of distinction criteria do not explicitly include student achievement in the district nor do they explicitly include the use of student achievement data in board decision-making processes.

### **Implications**

Much research is still needed regarding the impact of school boards on student achievement. School boards continuously make decisions that have district-wide implications, thus the use of student achievement data should be a regular part of their decision-making practices. Existing ways of evaluating school boards by state school board associations, or other

stakeholder groups, must be carefully scrutinized to ensure the appropriate use of student achievement data is a focus of the criteria and to ensure student achievement is taken into account when awarding a school board a specific level of distinction. Researchers have identified characteristics of high-performing school boards, which include consistent use of data-driven board governance processes, yet the GSBA BRP does not explicitly include the use of student achievement scores in their criteria for awarding a level of distinction, nor does it take into consideration student achievement scores of the district.

As evidenced by this study, student achievement in grades 3, 5, and 8 English-language arts and math is negatively correlated to student achievement. Therefore, the GSBA BRP criteria for awarding each level of distinction should be revised to ensure the BRP accurately reflects an emphasis on the use of student achievement data in board decision-making processes, as well as uses student achievement scores when awarding a level of distinction.

The conclusions presented in this chapter represent the issues uncovered about the current GSBA BRP. This research contributes to the existing body of literature focusing on the relationship between school boards and student achievement. Specifically, this study contributes by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between the GSBA BRP and student achievement in districts that have received a level of distinction. The results of this study may assist the GSBA in revising their BRP. Additionally, the results of this study may inform other state school board associations in the development or revision of a board recognition program.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

1. The GSBA should more clearly define the purpose of their BRP.
2. The GSBA should revise their criteria for awarding each level of distinction to explicitly include the use of student achievement in decision-making.

3. The GSBA should require school boards to participate in professional development directly related to the use of student achievement data in decision-making, including achievement and growth data in each demographic group included in this study.
4. State school board associations should consider the findings of this study when developing and/or revising a board recognition program.
5. State school board associations should consider the findings of this study when developing board member professional development requirements.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The amount of pressure placed on school districts to improve student achievement continues to rise as new federal and state regulations are implemented. This pressure is felt by school boards throughout their decision-making practices which ultimately have district-wide implications. Hence, it is critical for school boards to consistently focus on student achievement in their decision-making practices. If state school board associations wish to recognize school boards by awarding various levels of distinction to them, then steps should be taken to ensure the criteria used to award each level of distinction are inclusive of the use of student achievement data in board decision-making practices. The following are recommendations for further study:

1. Since this study only included student achievement data in English-language arts and math for students in grades 3, 5, and 8, further research should be conducted to include science social studies student achievement data from the same grade levels, as well as student achievement data from each high school state-tested course.
2. This study was exclusive to school districts who have received a GSBA BRP level of distinction from 2013-2016. Further research should be conducted to include school



districts who receive a GSBA BRP level of distinction in the next four-year period, from 2017-2020.

3. This study analyzed student achievement scores from the CRCT and GMAS EOG assessments. Further research should be conducted to include an analysis of CCRPI scores from districts who have received a GSBA BRP level of distinction for the year they received their initial award, as well as subsequent years they held the level of distinction or were upgraded to a higher level of distinction.
4. This study was quantitative. A mixed method study would allow for a survey of school board members from each board that has received a GSBA BRP level of distinction to determine why they applied for recognition through the GSBA BRP and whether or not a self-evaluation would reveal whether or not board members' self-evaluation results are in agreement with the level of distinction they received.
5. This study focused on student achievement in school districts that have received a GSBA BRP level of distinction. Additional research should be done to include a survey of school system stakeholders (i.e. staff, parents, business partners, etc.) from each school system that has received a level of distinction to determine how they would rank their school board (using indicators that represent quality, distinguished, and exemplary). This would provide insight on any discrepancies that may exist between the GSBA level of distinction and the perception of board performance by stakeholders.
6. This study was based on the GSBA BRP. Further research should be conducted to analyze student achievement data from any other state school board recognition programs to determine if their criteria for awarding board recognition are similar, and to determine if similar data analysis results are found.

### **Dissemination**

The GSBA, along with other state school board associations, would be interested in the findings of this research as the study would provide empirical evidence regarding the relationship between student achievement and the board recognition program developed by the GSBA. This study would also be of interest to stakeholders of public school systems that have received recognition through the GSBA BRP, as the levels of distinction were found to be negatively correlated to student achievement. This study will be shared with the GSBA in effort to inform future discussions and decisions regarding their BRP and the criteria used to award each level of distinction. This study will also be made available publicly through the Georgia Southern Library and disseminated via online databases. In addition, this study will be submitted to peer-reviewed education journals and possibly other professional publications available for public view.

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## APPENDIX A

## Georgia School Boards Association Board Recognition Program Outline (through 2017)



*GSBA has revised its recognition program to reflect the state standards, which offers school boards additional ways to increase their effectiveness. The following is an outline of the new program.  
For more information, contact the GSBA Board Development Department at 770-962-2985.*

**GSBA: GOVERNANCE TEAM ACHIEVEMENT  
RECOGNITION LEVELS – FY15**

CRITERIA	QUALITY BOARD Level I Annually July 1 through June 30	DISTINGUISHED BOARD Level II July 1 through June 30	EXEMPLARY BOARD Level III July 1 through June 30
STRATEGIC PLANNING	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted and is being implemented.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted, currently being implemented and includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted, currently being implemented which includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals and posted on district's web site for stakeholders review.
VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN GEORGIA	The board has reviewed the report and recommendations of the Vision for Public Education in Georgia.	The board has approved the Vision Resolution and incorporated ten of the Vision Project's school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.	The board has incorporated <b>fifteen</b> of the Vision Project's school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.
ASSESSMENT	The Governance Team conducts a self-assessment and develops recommendations for improvement in Board Governance. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)	The Governance Team conducts a self-assessment, and then a Distinguished Committee (DC)* conducts an assessment using the same instrument. The board will review the DC recommendations for further consideration. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)  *The Distinguished Committee consists of, as a minimum, two community stakeholders, two board members and a central office administrator.	The Governance Team conducts a Self-Assessment using a Self-Assessment instrument, and then an Exemplary Committee (EC)* (composed of different members than Distinguished Committee) conducts an assessment using the same instrument. The board will review the EC recommendations for further consideration. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)  *The Exemplary Committee consists of, as a minimum, two community stakeholders, two board members and a central office administrator.  Additional assessment options are being considered.

<b>SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION</b> § GA Code 20-2-210	The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)	The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)	The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent evaluation instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)
<b>LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</b>	The local board of education has met the State Board of Education annual training requirements.	All board members have met the state training credit requirements (15 credit hours for new board members and 9 credit hours for veteran board members), and the majority of board members have exceeded the annual training requirements by a minimum of three additional credit hours.  Additional credit hours will be considered from state approved and non-state approved training providers. Documentation of completed courses is mandatory.	The State Board of Education annual training requirements are exceeded by a minimum of three additional credit hours for all Governance Team members.  Additional credit hours will be considered from state approved and non-state approved training providers. Documentation of completed courses is mandatory.
<b>ACCREDITATION</b>	The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.	The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.	The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.
<b>COACHING BY THE GOVERNANCE TEAMS</b>	Once the Quality Board recognition is awarded, assistance to others to achieve Quality Board Recognition is expected.	If requested during the Distinguished Recognition period, the Governance Team is expected to assist recognized Quality Boards to obtain the Distinguished Board recognition.	Members of the Governance Team would be willing to assist recognized Distinguished Boards or Quality Boards to obtain the Exemplary Board recognition.
<b>RECOGNITION REMOVAL</b>	Can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.	Can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.	Can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.
<b>RENEWAL CYCLE</b>	Annual: July 1 – June 30	Annual: July 1 – June 30	Annual: July 1 – June 30

- **Governance Team** = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education
- Applications for all recognition levels are **Due to GSBA by October 1** each year.
- Recognition for the awards will be given during the following GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference.
- Boards must apply for and receive the previous level of recognition, beginning with Quality Board, before advancing to the next level.
- Please make sure **ALL** documentation is available upon request.

In 1998, the Georgia School Boards Association was one of the first school board associations in the nation to develop a program of standards for local boards of education. Because the Georgia Board of Education adopted a set of state standards for local boards of education in 2011, GSBA has revised its recognition program to reflect the state standards and also to offer school boards additional ways to increase their effectiveness. Below is an outline of the criteria headings, expectations, and rationale and application requirements for **QUALITY BOARD RECOGNITION**. Quality Board Recognition applications must be completed and submitted by October 1 each year. Similar information will be provided for Distinguished Board and Exemplary Board recognitions on the GSBA web site. Boards seeking Distinguished and Exemplary Status must first earn the Quality Board Recognition.

CRITERIA	EXPECTATIONS	RATIONALE	REQUIREMENTS
	Complete during each fiscal year; July--June	Why is the criterion important to school governance?	<i>Optional items are not required for recognition but are helpful for future reference</i>
<b>STRATEGIC PLANNING</b>	An adopted System Strategic Plan is being implemented.	A System Strategic Plan and its alignment with school improvement plans are vital to the continuous improvement process. Adoption of the plan and the process used by the Governance Team reinforces its importance throughout the system and community.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted and is being implemented.
<b>GEORGIA VISION PROJECT</b>	The local board of education reviews the recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project	The Vision Project was created by Georgia educational leaders using researched best practices and data to support it. <b>Governance Teams<sup>1</sup></b> are encouraged to review this work, discuss the implications in their own system, and identify opportunities, where appropriate, to incorporate the Vision recommendations into their System Strategic Plan. The goal is that public education will provide an equitable and excellent education that prepares all students for college, career, and life.	The board reviewed the recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project in Georgia report.  <i>Optional: The board reviewed and adopted the resolution to implement the Georgia Vision Project.</i>

<sup>1</sup>GOVERNANCE TEAM = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

<p><b>ASSESSMENT</b></p>	<p>The Governance Team completes a self-assessment and develops recommendations for improvement in Board Governance. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)</p> <p><i>Optional: The Governance Team Self-Assessment improvement recommendations were discussed in the required Whole Board Governance Team Training session.</i></p>	<p>Members of a local board of education are to "manage and control" and make decisions on many aspects of public school operations. The school board's day-to-day responsibilities are generally delegated to the superintendent. This criterion assesses the processes, procedures and best practices utilized by the Governance Team in providing school district leadership.</p>	<p>The Governance Team has completed a self-assessment and developed recommendations for improvement in Board Governance. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)</p> <p><i>Optional: The Governance Team Self-Assessment improvement recommendations were discussed in the required Whole Board Governance Team Training session.</i></p>
<p><b>SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION</b> § GA Code 20-2-210</p>	<p>The annual Superintendent Evaluation instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals.</p>	<p>The board, as part of the Governance Team, is required by state law to annually evaluate the superintendent's performance. The evaluation instrument should address the specific goals to be evaluated and identify evidence of performance. The superintendent evaluation instrument should be linked to the System Strategic Plan and identified improvements.</p>	<p>A Superintendent Evaluation Instrument has been adopted that reflects state requirements and incorporates the System's Strategic Plan improvement goals. (GSBA Superintendent evaluation instrument or equivalent instrument may be utilized)</p>
<p><b>LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</b></p>	<p>The local board of education has met State Board of Education training requirements.</p>	<p>As part of the training program adopted by the State Board of Education, the Georgia Department of Education must confirm board member training credit hours. The GSBA recognition program recognizes local boards of education that meet the training requirements.</p> <p>For Quality Board recognition, all school board members must meet annual training requirements.</p>	<p>All board members have met the State training credit requirements. (15 credit hours for new board members and 9 credit hours for veteran board members)</p> <p><i>Optional: All board members have met the State training credit requirements and some board members exceeded the requirements.</i></p>
<p><b>ACCREDITATION</b></p>	<p>The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.</p>	<p>Voluntary accreditation is considered an external measure of the quality of education provided in a school district. The GSBA recognition program does not require any specific accreditation agency; however, because of the valid external measures with required best practices and the impact on student scholarships this criterion is mandatory.</p>	<p>The school district is in compliance with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.</p>
<p><b>COACHING BY THE GOVERNANCE TEAMS</b></p>	<p>Once the Quality Board recognition is awarded, assistance to others is expected.</p>	<p>When a Governance Team is recognized by GSBA for its accomplishments in obtaining the Quality Board level of recognition, there is an obligation on behalf of that recognized Governance Team to assist other Governance Teams, if requested, to achieve Quality Board recognition.</p>	<p>If requested during the Quality Board recognition year, the Governance Team is willing to assist other Governance Teams in seeking Quality Board Recognition.</p>

IGOVERNANCE TEAM = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

Quality Board Recognition Process

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<b>RECOGNITION REMOVAL</b>	Quality Board recognition can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.	If the local board of education "no longer meets" the Quality Board recognition criteria during the recognition period, then recognition is withdrawn.	The local board of education pledges to implement and maintain all criteria required for the Quality Board recognition level.
<b>RENEWAL CYCLE</b>	Annually: Each fiscal year July--June	The first level of the program is Quality Board recognition and is only one year in length. Quality Board recognition criteria should be completed by July 1. The application for GSBA Quality Board recognition must be submitted to GSBA by October 1. Quality Board recognition will be awarded at the following Winter Conference.	* If the School Board elects <b>not</b> to be recognized as a Distinguished Board after the Quality Board recognition, it must re-apply each year and maintain the criteria for continued Quality Board recognition status.

**TIMELINE FOR QUALITY BOARD RECOGNITION**

**Criteria Completed**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial Year</li> <li>Renews Annually or after one year may apply for Distinguished Board recognition.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>October 1</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>December GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference</li> </ul>

**Application Due to GSBA**

**Recognition Date**

For more information, contact the GSBA Board Development Department at 770-962-2985 or GSBA's website at [gsba.com](http://gsba.com).

GSBA has revised its recognition program to reflect the state standards and also to offer school boards additional ways to increase their effectiveness. Below is an outline of the criteria headings, expectations, and rationale and application requirements for **DISTINGUISHED BOARD RECOGNITION**. Applications must be submitted to GSBA by October 1 each year. Similar information will be provided for Quality Board and Exemplary Board recognitions on the GSBA web site. Boards seeking Distinguished and Exemplary Status must first earn the Quality Board Recognition.

CRITERIA	EXPECTATIONS	RATIONALE	REQUIREMENTS
<b>STRATEGIC PLANNING</b>	Must be Quality Board recognized to apply for Distinguished Board  A System Strategic Plan has been adopted, currently being implemented and includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals.	Why is the criterion important to school governance?  A System Strategic Plan and its alignment with school improvement plans are vital to the continuous improvement process. Adoption of the plan and the process used by the governance team reinforces its importance throughout the system and community.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted and is being implemented with scorecards completed to measure progress on accomplishing the stated improvement goals.
<b>GEORGIA VISION PROJECT</b>	The board has approved the Vision Resolution and incorporated <b>ten</b> of the Georgia Vision Project local school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.	The Vision Project was created by Georgia educational leaders using researched best-practices and data to support it. Governance teams are encouraged to review this work, discuss the implications in their own system, and identify opportunities, where appropriate, to incorporate the Vision recommendations into its system's Strategic Plan.	The board has reviewed and/or adopted the Vision Resolution and incorporated <b>ten</b> of the Georgia Vision Project local school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.
<b>ASSESSMENT</b>	The <b>Governance Team</b> <sup>1</sup> conducts a Self-Assessment; then a <b>Distinguished Committee</b> <sup>2</sup> conducts an assessment using the same instrument. The board will review the committee recommendations for further consideration.	Members of a local school board are to "manage and control" and make decisions on many aspects of public school operations. The school board's day-to-day responsibilities are generally delegated to the superintendent.  This criterion assesses the processes, procedures and best practices utilized by the Governance Team in providing school district leadership.	The Governance Team has completed the annual self-assessment; a Distinguished Committee has completed an assessment using the same instrument. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.) The Governance Team has reviewed and considered any Distinguished Committee improvement recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> **GOVERNANCE TEAM** = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

<sup>2</sup> **Distinguished Committee** = As a minimum consists of 2 community stakeholders, 2 board members and a central office administrator.



<p><b>SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION</b> § GA Code 20-2-210</p>	<p>The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)</p>	<p>The board, as part of the Governance Team, is required by state law to annually evaluate the superintendent's performance. The evaluation instrument should address the specific goals to be evaluated and identify evidence of performance. The Superintendent Evaluation Instrument should be linked to the System's Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>A Superintendent Evaluation Instrument has been adopted that reflects state requirements and incorporates the System's Strategic Plan improvement goals. Evidence of use must be submitted upon request by GSBA. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)</p>
<p><b>LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</b></p>	<p>The local board of education exceeds the State Board of Education's annual training requirements by a minimum of three additional credit hours by the <b>majority</b> of board members.</p>	<p>As part of the training program adopted by the State Board of Education, the Georgia Department of Education must confirm board member training credit hours. The GSBA Distinguished Board recognition program recognizes local boards of education that meet and exceed the training requirements. All board members must meet the minimum requirements and the majority must exceed the minimum by three additional hours.</p>	<p>All board members have met the State training credit requirements, (15 credit hours for new board members and 9 credit hours for veteran board members) and the <b>majority</b> of the board members have exceeded the annual training requirement by a minimum of three additional credit hours.</p>
<p><b>ACCREDITATION</b></p>	<p>The board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.</p>	<p>Accreditation is considered an external measure of the quality of education provided in a school district. The valid external measures with required best practices and the impact on student scholarships make this criterion mandatory. The GSBA recognition program does not require a specific accreditation agency.</p>	<p>The school district is in compliance with all selected accreditation agencies applicable.</p>
<p><b>COACHING BY THE GOVERNANCE TEAMS</b></p>	<p>Once the Distinguished Board Recognition is awarded, assistance to other Governance Teams is expected.</p>	<p>When a Governance Team is recognized by GSBA for its accomplishments in obtaining the Distinguished Board level of recognition, there is an obligation on behalf of that recognized Governance Team to assist other governance teams, if requested, to achieve Quality Board recognition and Distinguished Board Recognition.</p>	<p>If requested during the Distinguished Board Recognition period, the Governance Team is expected to assist other Governance Teams in seeking Quality and Distinguished Board Recognition.</p>
<p><b>RECOGNITION REMOVAL</b></p>	<p>Distinguished Board Recognition can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.</p>	<p>If the School Board "no longer meets" the Distinguished Board Recognition criteria during the recognition period, then recognition is withdrawn.</p>	<p>The School Board pledges to implement and maintain all criteria required for the Distinguished Board Recognition level.</p>

<sup>1</sup> **GOVERNANCE TEAM** = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

<sup>2</sup> **Distinguished Committee** = As a minimum consists of 2 community stakeholders, 2 board members and a central office administrator.

<b>RENEWAL CYCLE</b>	Annual: July-June	<p>The second level of the recognition program is the Distinguished Board Recognition. All Distinguished Board Recognition level criteria should be completed prior to application deadline and the application must be submitted to GSBA by October 1. All levels of GSBA Board Recognition will be awarded at the following December Annual Conference.</p> <p>*If the Governance Team elects not to be recognized as an Exemplary Board after the Distinguished Board recognition, it must re-apply and maintain the criteria for Distinguished Board Recognition.</p>	After the first year of recognition, the Governance Team will re-apply for Distinguished Board for continued recognition at this level <b>or</b> may complete the Exemplary Recognition criteria and apply for Exemplary Recognition.
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For more information, contact the GSBA Board Development Department at 770-962-2985 or GSBA's website at [gsba.com](http://gsba.com).

### TIMELINE FOR DISTINGUISHED BOARD RECOGNITION

**Criteria Completed**

- Initial Year Application - Must be a Quality Board to Apply

**Application Due to GSBA**

- After one-year, may reapply for Distinguished Board or apply for Exemplary Board if criteria has been met.

**Recognition Date**

- October 1
- December GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference

<sup>1</sup> GOVERNANCE TEAM = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

<sup>2</sup> Distinguished Committee = As a minimum consists of 2 community stakeholders, 2 board members and a central office administrator.

GSBA has revised its recognition program to reflect the state standards offers school boards additional ways to increase their effectiveness. Below is an outline of the criteria headings, expectations, and rationale and application requirements for **EXEMPLARY BOARD RECOGNITION**. Applications must be submitted to GSBA by October 1 each year. Similar information will be provided for Quality Board and Distinguished Board recognitions on the GSBA web site. Boards seeking Exemplary Status must first earn the Quality and Distinguished Board Recognitions.

CRITERIA	EXPECTATIONS	RATIONALE	REQUIREMENTS
<b>STRATEGIC PLANNING</b>	Must be Distinguished Board recognized the prior year to apply for Exemplary Board  A System Strategic Plan has been adopted, currently being implemented which includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals and posted on district's web site for stakeholders review.	Why is the criterion important to school governance?  A System Strategic Plan and its alignment with school improvement plans are vital to the continuous improvement process. Adoption of the plan and the process used by the governance team reinforces its importance throughout the system and community.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted and is currently being implemented, which includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals and posted on district's web site for stakeholders review.
<b>GEORGIA VISION PROJECT</b>	The board has incorporated <b>fifteen</b> of the Vision Project's local school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.	The Vision Project was created by Georgia educational leaders using researched best practices and data to support it. Governance teams are encouraged discuss the implications in their own system, and where appropriate, to incorporate the Vision recommendations into its system's Strategic Plan.	The board has incorporated <b>fifteen</b> of the Vision Project's school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.

<sup>1</sup> **GOVERNANCE TEAM** = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

<sup>2</sup> **Exemplary Committee** = As a minimum consists of 2 community stakeholders, 2 board members and a central office administrator. (The committee is composed of different members than the Distinguished committee.)

<p><b>ASSESSMENT</b></p>	<p>The Governance Team<sup>1</sup> conducts a Self-Assessment using a Self-Assessment Instrument, and then an <b>Exemplary Committee<sup>2</sup></b> (composed of different members than Distinguished Committee) conducts an assessment using the same instrument. The board will review the EC recommendations for further consideration. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)</p>	<p>Members of a local school board are to "manage and control" and make decisions on many aspects of public school operations. The school board's day-to-day responsibilities are generally delegated to the superintendent.</p> <p>This criterion assesses the processes, procedures and best practices utilized by the Governance Team in providing school district leadership.</p>	<p>The Governance Team conducts a Self-Assessment using a Self-Assessment Instrument, and then an <b>Exemplary Committee</b> (composed of different members than Distinguished Committee) conducts an assessment using the same instrument. The board will review the EC recommendations for further consideration. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)</p> <p><b>Additional assessment options are being considered.</b></p>
<p><b>SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION</b> § GA Code 20-2-210</p>	<p>The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)</p>	<p>The board, as part of the Governance Team, is required by state law to annually evaluate the superintendent's performance. The evaluation instrument should address the specific goals to be evaluated and identify evidence of performance. The Superintendent Evaluation Instrument should be linked to the System's Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent evaluation instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)</p>
<p><b>LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</b></p>	<p>The State Board of Education annual training requirements are exceeded by a minimum of three additional credit hours for all Governance Team members.</p>	<p>As part of the training program adopted by the State Board of Education, the Georgia Department of Education must confirm board member training credit hours. The GSBA Exemplary Board recognition program recognizes local boards of education that exceed the training requirements. All board members must exceed the minimum requirements by three additional hours, or 18 credit hours for new board members and 12 credit hours for veteran board members.</p>	<p>The State Board of Education annual training requirements are exceeded by a minimum of three additional credit hours for all Governance Team members.</p> <p>Additional credit hours will be considered from state approved and non-state approved training providers. Documentation of completed courses is mandatory.</p>
<p><b>ACCREDITATION</b></p>	<p>The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.</p>	<p>Accreditation is considered an external measure of the quality of education provided in a school district. The valid external measures with required best practices and the impact on student scholarships make this criterion</p>	<p>The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.</p>

<sup>1</sup> **GOVERNANCE TEAM** = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education

<sup>2</sup> **Exemplary Committee** = As a minimum consists of 2 community stakeholders, 2 board members and a central office administrator. (The committee is composed of different members than the Distinguished committee.)

			mandatory. The GSBA recognition program does not require a specific accreditation agency.	
<b>COACHING BY THE GOVERNANCE TEAMS</b>	Once the Exemplary Board Recognition is awarded, assistance to other Governance Teams is expected.		When a Governance Team is recognized by GSBA for its accomplishments in obtaining the Exemplary Board level of recognition, there is an obligation on behalf of that recognized Governance Team to assist other Governance Teams, if requested, to achieve Distinguished and Exemplary Board Recognition.	If requested during the Exemplary Board Recognition period, the Governance Team is expected to assist other Governance Teams in seeking Distinguished and Exemplary Board Recognition.
<b>RECOGNITION REMOVAL</b>	Exemplary Board Recognition can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.		If the School Board "no longer meets" the Exemplary Board Recognition criteria during the recognition period, then recognition is withdrawn for good cause as determined by GSBA.	The School Board pledges to implement and maintain all criteria required for the Exemplary Board Recognition level.
<b>RENEWAL CYCLE</b>	Annual: July 1 – June 30		The highest level of the recognition program is the Exemplary Board Recognition. All Exemplary Board Recognition level criteria should be completed by the deadline and the application must be submitted to GSBA by October 1. All levels of GSBA Board Recognition will be awarded at the following December Annual Conference.	After the first year of recognition, the Governance Team will submit to GSBA by October 1, verification that the Exemplary Board Recognition criteria continue to be met by completing the Exemplary online application in order to maintain status.

For more information, contact the GSBA Board Development Department at 770-962-2985 or GSBA's website at [gsba.com](http://gsba.com).

**TIMELINE FOR EXEMPLARY BOARD RECOGNITION**

<b>Criteria Completed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initial Year Application - Must be a Distinguished Board to Apply.</li> <li>Apply online yearly for Exemplary Board to verify still in compliance.</li> <li>October 1</li> <li>December GSBA/GSSA Annual Conference</li> </ul>
<b>Application Due to GSBA Recognition Date</b>	

<sup>1</sup> GOVERNANCE TEAM = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education  
<sup>2</sup> Exemplary Committee = As a minimum consists of 2 community stakeholders, 2 board members and a central office administrator.  
 (The committee is composed of different members than the Distinguished committee.)

## APPENDIX B

### Georgia School Boards Association Board Recognition Program Levels of Distinction

#### Criteria Descriptions (2017)



GSBA has revised its recognition program to reflect the state standards, which offers school boards additional ways to increase their effectiveness. The following is an outline of the three-tiered program. The levels must be completed in order and no levels may be skipped. For more information, contact the GSBA Board Development Department at 770-962-2985.

#### GSBA: GOVERNANCE TEAM ACHIEVEMENT RECOGNITION LEVELS – FY18

CRITERIA	QUALITY BOARD Level I Annually July 1 through June 30	DISTINGUISHED BOARD Level II July 1 through June 30	EXEMPLARY BOARD Level III July 1 through June 30
STRATEGIC PLANNING	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted and is being implemented.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted, currently being implemented and includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals.	A System Strategic Plan has been adopted, currently being implemented which includes balanced scorecards on completing district goals and posted on district's web site for stake-holders review.
GEORGIA VISION PROJECT	The board has approved the Vision Resolution and incorporated five of the Vision Project's school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.	The board has approved the Vision Resolution and incorporated ten of the Vision Project's school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.	The board has incorporated fifteen of the Vision Project's school district recommendations into the system's Strategic Plan.
ASSESSMENT	The Governance Team conducts a self-assessment and develops recommendations for improvement in Board Governance. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)	The Governance Team conducts a self-assessment, and then a Distinguished Committee (DC)* conducts an assessment. The board will review the DC recommendations for further consideration. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)  *The Distinguished Committee consists of, as a minimum, two community stakeholders, two board members and a central office administrator.	The Governance Team conducts a Self-Assessment using a Self-Assessment Instrument, and then an Exemplary Committee (EC)* (composed of different members than Distinguished Committee) conducts an assessment. The board will review the EC recommendations for further consideration. (GSBA Governance Team Self-Assessment instrument or equivalent instrument can be used.)  *The Exemplary Committee consists of, as a minimum, two community stakeholders, two board members and a central office administrator.  Additional assessment options are being considered.

<b>SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION</b> § GA Code 20-2-210	The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)	The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent Evaluation Instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)	The annual Superintendent Evaluation Instrument, as a minimum, incorporates the Strategic Plan District Goals. (GSBA Superintendent evaluation instrument or equivalent instrument can be used)
<b>LOCAL BOARD OF EDUCATION TRAINING REQUIREMENTS</b>	The local board of education has met the State Board of Education annual training requirements.	All board members have met the state training credit requirements (15 credit hours for new board members and 9 credit hours for veteran board members), and the majority of board members have exceeded the annual training requirements by a minimum of three additional credit hours.  Additional credit hours will be considered from state approved and non-state approved training providers. Documentation of completed courses is mandatory.	The State Board of Education annual training requirements are exceeded by a minimum of three additional credit hours for all board members.  Additional credit hours will be considered from state approved and non-state approved training providers. Documentation of completed courses is mandatory.
<b>ACCREDITATION</b>	The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.	The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.	The local board of education and school district comply with standards of all selected accreditation associations applicable.
<b>BOARD MEMBER ETHICS</b>	All board members will abide by their local Code of Ethics Policy.  Review Code of Ethics Policy annually at a board of education meeting.  Address any infractions by members as per board policy.	All board members will abide by their local Code of Ethics Policy.  Review Code of Ethics Policy annually at a board of education meeting.  Address any infractions by members as per board policy.	All board members will abide by their local Code of Ethics Policy.  Review Code of Ethics Policy annually at a board of education meeting.  Address any infractions by members as per board policy.
<b>FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY</b>	Annually adopt a balanced budget.  Regular review/updates of district finances by the governance leadership team in public meetings.  Develop an annual budget calendar that includes public meetings and public input.	Annually adopt a balanced budget.  Regular review/updates of district finances by the governance leadership team in public meetings.  Develop an annual budget calendar that includes public meetings and public input.  Align budget to the school district's strategic plan.	Annually adopt a balanced budget.  Regular review/updates of district finances by the governance leadership team in public meetings.  Develop an annual budget calendar that includes public meetings and public input.  Align budget to the school district's strategic plan.

RECOGNITION REMOVAL	Can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.	Can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.	Can be removed for good cause as determined by GSBA.
RENEWAL CYCLE	Annual: July 1 –June 7	Annual: July 1 –June 7	Annual: July 1 –June 7

- Governance Team = Superintendent plus the Local Board of Education
- Boards must apply for and receive the previous level of recognition, beginning with Quality Board, before advancing to the next level of the three tiers.
- Boards must apply for their last level they received in FY16, due to added criteria for FY18.
- Applications for all recognition levels are **Due to GSBA by April 15 each year.**
- Please make sure ALL documentation is accurate and submitted by the deadline.
- Boards have until **May 1, 2018** to complete all criteria except for training.
- Boards must meet all training requirements by **5 p.m. on June 7, 2018.**
- Awards presented at Awards luncheon on **Friday, June 8** at the GSBA Summer Conference.