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Characteristics and Behaviors of School Board Members in "Grade A" Arkansas Public School Districts

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Characteristics and Behaviors of School Board Members in
“Grade A” Arkansas Public School Districts

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in Arkansas school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2015). This purpose was achieved through analysis of artifacts from selected school districts including: achievement patterns; board minutes; and board member professional development records. A web-based survey of school board members was also utilized to gather demographic and background information. Finally, personal interviews were completed with a small group of board members to collect perceptual and contextual data. All of the participants of this study were current board members in Arkansas school districts. It is expected that this will provide credibility for the findings with other board members in the state as they seek ways to improve their work as the governing body of a local school district. This work supports what has been done with larger groups and may also act as a model for future research of a similar nature. The potential in this study is the possible focus that may be placed upon school boards in order to instill a sense of efficacy and mutual accountability for improving student achievement across Arkansas.

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	1
A.	Context	2
B.	Problem Statement	5
C.	Purpose and Research Questions	6
D.	Research Design Overview	6
E.	Assumption	7
F.	Limitations	8
G.	Rationale and Significance	10
H.	Subjectivity Statement	11
I.	Definitions	12
II.	Literature Review	13
A.	Overview	13
B.	Conceptual Framework	14
C.	Local School Boards	16
D.	Behaviors of Effective School Boards	18
	Shared Vision with a Focus on Student Achievement and Quality Instruction	20
	Accountability Driven	21
	Collaborative Relationship with Staff and the Community	22
	United Team with the Superintendent	24
	Building Shared Knowledge, Values, and Commitments	
	For Their Improvement Efforts	25
E.	Conclusion	27

III. Methods	28
A. Introduction and Overview	28
B. Theoretical Framework	29
C. Research Design	30
D. Research Sampling Strategies	33
E. Overview of Information Needed	36
Demographic	37
Contextual	37
Perceptual	37
F. Data Collection Methods	37
Web-Based Survey	38
Interviews	38
Document Review	39
G. Data Analysis and Synthesis	40
H. Ethical Considerations	43
I. Trustworthiness	44
J. Timeline	44
K. Summary	45
IV. Data Results	46
A. Introduction	46
B. Behaviors That Board Members Believe Have a Positive Impact on Student Achievement	48

C.	Characteristics Shared Among School Boards Serving High-Achieving School Districts	57
V.	Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings	62
A.	Introduction	62
B.	Analysis	63
C.	Interpretation of the Findings	65
	Shared Vision of High Expectations	66
	Shared Belief That All Children Can Learn	67
	Collaborative Relationship with Staff and Community	67
	Appropriate Relationship with the Superintendent	68
	Research Question One	69
	Research Question Two	70
D.	Synthesis of the Findings	72
E.	Implications	73
VI.	References	76
VII.	Appendices	83
A.	Appendix A Letter of Contact for Superintendents	83
B.	Appendix B Web-Based Survey Questions	85
C.	Appendix C Interview Questions	86
D.	Appendix D Data Summary Table	87
E.	Appendix E Participation Documentation	88
F.	Appendix F Document Summary Forms	91
G.	Appendix G International Review Board Committee Approval Letter	92

List of Figures and Tables

Table 2.1	Number and Types of Sources Reviewed	14
Figure 2.1	Research Design	15
Figure 3.1	Overview of Research Design	32
Figure 3.2	School Grades and Grading Scale	34
Table 3.1	Overview of Information That Was Required	36
Table 3.2	Board Member Years of Service	42
Table 3.3	Board Member Behaviors Identified During the Personal Interviews	42
Table 3.4	Board Member Characteristics Identified During the Personal Interviews	42
Table 3.5	Timeline for Task Completion	44
Table 4.1	Average Percentage of Unanimous Votes (2013-2016)	52
Figure 4.1	Number of Campus Visits Per Year	56
Table 4.2	Average Number of Professional Development Hours Earned By Board Members	56
Table 4.3	Board Member Level of Education	58
Figure 4.2	Connections to School Districts Other Than as a Board Member	59
Table 4.4	Average Percentage of Recorded Board Member Attendance in Board Minutes (2013-2016)	60
Table 4.5	Board Member Self-Reported Attendance Data for Regular Board Meetings	61
Figure 5.1	Initial Code Families	64
Figure 5.2	Code Families (Final)	65

Chapter I: Introduction

Education as a pathway to individual and societal success has been clearly demonstrated and articulated through qualitative and quantitative research. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has repeatedly produced reports which display the differences in income and employability between groups of varying levels of education (Kena et al., 2016). Children depend on their school districts to provide an education that will help them be successful adults. This makes the leadership in those school districts a matter worthy of serious consideration.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in Arkansas school districts with at least 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2015). School Boards are in place to provide local governance over the education of children in a community. Board members are typically elected by the community and may have little or no experience in education or administration. While there may be no straight line between high academic performance of students and the actions of a local board of education, a more complete understanding of common characteristics and behaviors of the school boards in school districts that are experiencing success may lead to professional development to support other school boards as they work to serve schools in Arkansas. Additionally, by highlighting the practices of Arkansas school board members, it may be expected that the implications of the research might be more impactful.

This chapter provides the context of this study. It also contains the problem statement, purpose for the research, the primary research questions, an overview of the research design, assumptions of the researcher, and definitions that are used throughout the study. The limitations

of the study are described as well as the rationale, significance, and purpose of the research question. A subjectivity statement is also included.

Context

Arkansas, along with the rest of the United States, focuses a great deal of public attention on the improvement, success, and failure of public schools. President Ronald Reagan warned the Nation that public schools were being undermined by a lack of standards in 1983 and expressed concern that if our educational system did not improve, The United States would be subject to a hostile take-over by an unfriendly world neighbor (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). More studies followed leading to our current system of standards and accountability focused upon attempting to ensure that school districts, administrators, and teachers are all working to improve education for children. The goal of improved education for our students is clear even though the path to the goal remains indefinite.

School leaders and others interested in issues related to education have access to a wealth of data that demonstrate the positive impact that teachers, principals, and school systems as a whole can have on student achievement. For example, research has shown a significant and negative relationship between frequent teacher turnover and the achievement levels of students in the areas of math and language arts (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Professional development of teachers in the classroom as well as preservice training, have also been demonstrated to have a positive impact on what students learn. One study designed to find a possible correlation between student achievement, specifically in the academic area of science, and the number of hours their teachers participated in a research based professional development course, made this connection very clear (Lumpe, Czerniak, Haney, & Beltyukova, 2012). Teachers who were well trained saw the greatest gain in achievement on science assessments.

Also, data based on a study of primary students and teachers indicate that students whose teachers have had advanced course work in reading and mathematics perform better in those areas. These points help identify a clear relationship between the classroom teacher and student achievement (Croninger, Rice, Rathbun, & Nishio, 2007).

Likewise, the building level principalship has served as the topic for research into the value added by the instructional leader to improving student achievement. One activity that principals in effective schools will often do is to facilitate and participate in professional learning communities (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Student achievement has been shown to increase when teachers participate in meaningful, professional discussion concerning student achievement, upcoming instructional units, planning, reflection, and intervention (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). The principal in an effective school not only ensures the environment to nurture the work of the professional learning communities, but also holds educators accountable when they do not participate in the work with authenticity and vigor. In the schools that see results in student learning, the principal uses their role as leader to ensure that all educators hold up their responsibility to their colleagues as well as their students. They do not retreat from participating in professional learning (Bryk, 2010). We can clearly see the connection of the work of the building principal to the achievement of the students they serve.

Teachers and principals have been berated with the research concerning what they should be doing. Their accountability levels continue to rise along with concern over enrollment numbers and associated state funding. Some school districts find themselves competing for students with neighboring districts. While this competition has always been present with the ability of families to relocate if desired, families in Arkansas also have the option of School Choice, which allows them to choose to attend a public school regardless of where they live.

Teachers and principals have little difficulty seeing their roles and responsibilities in improving student achievement.

Even though the topic of improving student achievement continues to dominate conversations on social media as well serve as a core topic in many political debates, school board members still may not perceive themselves as a potentially key piece of the solution. Some researchers have identified the possible need for focused training for school board members in order to develop an increased sense of self-efficacy on the part of school boards. Rice (2010) found that school board members and superintendents studied agreed that training is very important to a successful school. Another study focused on higher education boards (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015) and concluded, “Without effective professional development, board members cannot understand their roles” (p.13). The Center for Public Education (2012) proposes that without quality professional development for school board members, the district risks an ineffective school board. Roberts & Sampson (2011) found that most states do not have a requirement related to professional development for school board members but that most State Education Directors believe that professional development for school boards was important. They also found that the Education Week 2009 rating of state educational systems awarded a B or C to those states that had professional development requirements of board members while those that did not have requirements earned a D or F.

In spite of research findings such as those described here, Arkansas is one of only fourteen states that report having training requirements for local school board members. While this may be an advantage for Arkansas school districts and school boards, two factors are of concern: the training is only specifically mandated to cover school finance and the specific duties and responsibilities of board members; and the financial burden for this training falls solely on

the local school districts (National School Boards Association website, 2015). These concerns have the potential for impacting the quality and diversity of the training opportunities available to all board members. If a school district or school board member does not already see the need in participating in professional development focused upon improving student achievement, they are not likely to see out and attend training that is optional and might also be costly.

Problem Statement

School board members must begin to see themselves as part of the solution to the challenge of improving student achievement. Dr. Tony Prothro, Executive Director of the Arkansas School Boards Association cited, “state takeovers with board dismissals for fiscal and for academic distress,” and the, “A-F grading of schools” as just two of the reasons for board members to adopt a sense of urgency around this topic (Prothro, 2015, Slide 3). In addition, as the discussion revolving around student achievement has continued to escalate, some have called for the elimination of local school boards entirely as an effort to improve consistency and continuity of services to students across the states and the nation as a whole (Streshly & Frase, 1993).

There is one school of thought that proposes that states or city governments should run schools as simply another branch of public service. Many policy makers are reported to have called for the creation of a completely new mode of school governance at the local level that would take educational policy decisions totally away from the operational issues of school (Danzberger & Usdan, 1994). The locally controlled school board will need to be seen as a relevant and contributing factor in educational reform if it is to continue to exist. It is suggested in one review of literature that, “studies of school boards and educational governance reforms should not only investigate how school boards function under the various reforms but also

identify the features that make them effective” (Land, 2002, p. 247). This would allow for their experiences to support those seeking to improve their service to students.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members for Arkansas school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). The primary question of this study is: What are behaviors and characteristics of school board members in districts where 50% or more campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015)? In the process of answering this overarching question, two specific questions were addressed:

- Which self-reported behaviors do school board members believe have a positive impact on increasing student achievement?
- Are there characteristics shared by board members in school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) that might lead them to work more efficiently and effectively in the effort to improve student achievement?

Research Design Overview

Learning from experiences of others is a strategy used by all of us at one time or another and may occur on an almost daily basis. In seeking to learn about the world around them, Creswell (2007) suggested:

Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes (p. 37).

As qualitative research, the proposed study involved the analysis of personal interviews with school board members, web-based survey results, and artifacts from selected school districts including: achievement patterns; board minutes; and board member professional development records. Upon the receipt of permission to contact individual board members from the participating districts' superintendents, a web-based survey of school board members was utilized to gather demographic and background information. This tool was also used to request board member participation in a personal interview. All of the information gathered was interpreted to develop theories that are grounded in the collected data.

Along with the schools that were identified through the selected sampling methods and agreed to participate in the study, I also reviewed the available public data for a small group of school districts from the lowest level of ratings (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2014). These four school districts had campuses that had earned ratings of C's, D's, and F's.

Assumptions

I approached this research with the assumption that school boards can and do make a difference in terms of student achievement and school district success as determined by the Arkansas Department of Education. While studies that show a clear and direct link between school boards and student achievement are limited, research such as the work completed by Land (2002) show promise in identifying the things school boards do to make a positive difference in their districts. Other studies have shown that districts that are having success are more likely to have board members who place a high priority on student achievement (Shober & Hartney, 2014). My assumptions about school boards and their potential impact on students have potential for creating an additional lens through which I might view my findings. This assumption is also addressed in the section related to subjectivity.

The local school board is the governing body of most public schools in Arkansas. School boards typically consist of five, seven, or even nine members that are elected on a regular, rotating basis. In some instances, special circumstances such as school district consolidation have resulted in larger boards. Each board has a president, vice-president, and secretary. A school board is generally responsible for hiring and evaluating the superintendent, setting goals for the school district, determining major policy, and establishing the organizational structure (Arkansas School Board's Association [ASBA], 2009). One assumption will be that the school board members that participated in the study have been appropriately trained at the minimum level concerning the rules governing school board actions and responsibilities under Arkansas Law. It is also assumed that the board members follow the laws related to meetings and activities as well as their roles and responsibilities within the school district.

Another assumption is that the board members that participated in the study were honest in their responses. Some of the questions used called for judgement-based responses on the part of the board member. It is assumed that the respondent answered based on their honest and true actions and activities.

Limitations

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members for districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of "A" on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). There is a possibility that, since much of the data that was collected was self-reported, the information might be skewed toward a positive view of school board members as well as their characteristics and behaviors.

Due to the criteria used to select school districts to include in a comparison group, it was not reasonable to request access to school board members for web-based surveys or personal interviews. Comparison school districts were ranked as the lowest performing school districts in Arkansas (ADE, 2015). While a wealth of information for these districts was accessible due to the reporting requirements of the Arkansas Department of Education, direct access to board members for web-based surveys or personal interviews was not requested. The information those board members could have provided might have been valuable to the study in many ways, but the potential for a negative impact on current administrators as well as board members predicated the decision to use only use the publicly available information. This created a situation where the comparison groups is referenced only sporadically throughout the study.

In addition to the lack of primary source data from the comparison group, the sampling strategy for selecting participants to complete the survey also created a possible limitation to the study. The primary concern of the researcher was the willingness of superintendents to allow me to contact their current board members.

Another factor that may have impacted the value of this study is the possibility that some board members might have been unwilling to respond to a survey concerning their school district, their school board, and their personal thoughts about school district leadership. I believe that board members in some districts were hesitant to participate for fear of being asked for confidential or private information. It is even possible, in some instances, that board members might have been specifically cautious about agreeing to respond to a survey as an individual, when they have been instructed to act as a board.

The study involved the use of a web-based survey. Web-based or internet surveys are used for a variety of purposes. The web-based survey served as a vehicle to gather demographic

information and allowed respondents to participate at their convenience without the need for an in-person appointment. In addition to the direct questions on the survey, board members had the opportunity to add additional information as they felt appropriate. Even while the survey had the benefit of being an efficient means of collecting and analyzing data quickly, I had to consider the possible nonresponses as a factor in my ability to generalize the findings (Matsuo, McIntyre, Tomazie, & Katz, 2004).

Also of concern was the source that was used for the selection of the school districts was updated in April of 2015 but was based upon data from no later than 2014. The current board members may or may not have been in their position during that time and therefore their responses may have lacked a complete understanding of the circumstances that were in place at the time the letter grade was assigned.

Rationale and Significance

This study adds to research intended to bring focused attention to the school boards, specifically in Arkansas. By studying school board members in districts with more than 50% of the campuses considered grade “A” schools, I gained knowledge that I hope will be valuable to school board members as well as the individuals and organizations that provide professional development for board members and district leaders. I intend for this study to shed new light on the role of a school board member in our state’s changing educational structure. Finding solutions to the challenges we face in education requires resources beyond the classroom or campus. It is my expectation that board members may be able to gain a heightened sense of self-efficacy as well as responsibility for their position on a local school board through examining this research.

Children in the United States are depending on school districts, and the individuals that are leading them, to provide the tools necessary for success as adults. The income and employability statistics make this point clear (Kena et al., 2016). Therefore, describing characteristics and behaviors of board members in districts that are considered to be successful is critical.

School boards, as a way of governing public schools, have been under attack (Danzberger & Usdan, 1994) for many years as the debate over the most effective ways to improve student achievement continues to stir emotions of decision makers and their constituents. In some large cities, mayors are asking for, and getting, control over the city's schools. Some citizens charge that there isn't anyone leading the schools because board members may be more concerned with their own initiatives and goals than they are with the needs of the district as a whole ("The Future of School Boards," 2004).

Subjectivity Statement

While I am not a board member, nor are any of my immediate family members, I have close friends that currently serve on local school boards. My professional experience has afforded me the opportunity to observe school boards that debate freely and openly as well as boards that present themselves as a unanimous body at all times. As an educational practitioner, I sought to determine the behaviors and beliefs of school boards that may contribute to an environment that produces successful schools.

As stated in the section concerning assumptions, I believe that school boards can and do make a difference in improving student achievement in the school districts they serve. My assumptions about school boards and their potential impact on students have potential for creating an additional lens through which I might view my findings.

I am of the opinion that an informed board is a more productive board. I believe that board members should be educated as completely as is practical on all aspects of school improvement. If this belief is validated, I would argue that there is an urgent need for targeted professional development in order to ensure that, just like the teachers in our school systems, our school board members must also be “highly qualified.” Whether or not this personal belief was validated by the research, it still might have presented a potential for personal bias.

Definitions

Arkansas Public School Board of Education – local governing body of a school district.

Comparison School District – The group of school districts selected for a review of public documents only.

Grade A School – An Arkansas public school that scored 270 – 300 points on a rating instrument that examines the following: student achievement on both state and national assessments; school performance concerning federal standards; the retention percentages for students in grades 1-8; school establishment of a safe and orderly environment; teacher quality; the percentage of students that reside in another school district but have utilized School Choice this school; and school funding as it relates to areas where the district has control such as the average amount spent per pupil as well as the average salary for a certified teacher. These schools likely have graduation rates and achievement levels that do not differ greatly among groups of students. (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2014).

Chapter II: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). In order to achieve this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

- Which self-reported behaviors do school board members believe have a positive impact on increasing student achievement?
- Are there characteristics shared by board members in school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) that might lead them to work more efficiently and effectively in the effort to improve student achievement?

Prior to attempting to answer this question, a review of the current literature was conducted in order to gain a more complete understanding of the sub questions below:

- What are the primary roles and responsibilities of school board members?
- What is known about the ability of a school board to impact change in public schools across the nation?

A review of literature produced the information below. Keywords used in searches included: school board, school board governance, local control of education, student achievement, accountability for student achievement, school board professional development and effective schools. Online search engines and academic databases used included ProQuest, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Table 2.1 lists the number and types of sources that were reviewed for this study.

Table 2.1

Number and types of sources reviewed

Types of source	Number of sources reviewed
Peer reviewed journal articles	35
Scholarly books	14
Organizational reports	19
Dissertations	1
Other	9
Total	78

Conceptual Framework

This review of the literature is focused upon local control over public education, defining the roles of school boards and their members as a way to govern school, and reviewing what is known about the relationship between school boards and student achievement will serve as the springboard for the research. Also of note is my own experience as an educator for over 25 years in a variety of roles which include classroom teacher, building administrator, educational consultant, and district administrator. In each role I had a specific type of relationship with school boards as well as a different level of accountability for improving student achievement.

The conceptual framework of this study was constructed from the review of literature conducted through the lens of my personal experiences in education. These experiences have shaped the way I have approached this review of current literature and therefore should be taken in to account by the reader. The first section of the review examines the current state of school boards and their role in governing public education at the local level. This is followed by a look upon the roles and responsibilities of school board members in Arkansas and the location of the

sites to be selected for participation in this study. The final section of the review examines what is currently known about the behaviors of school boards that are believed to be most effective in improving student achievement.

Figure 2.1 shows the connections among the components of the study including the goals, conceptual framework, research questions, methodology, and efforts to maintain the validity of the data.

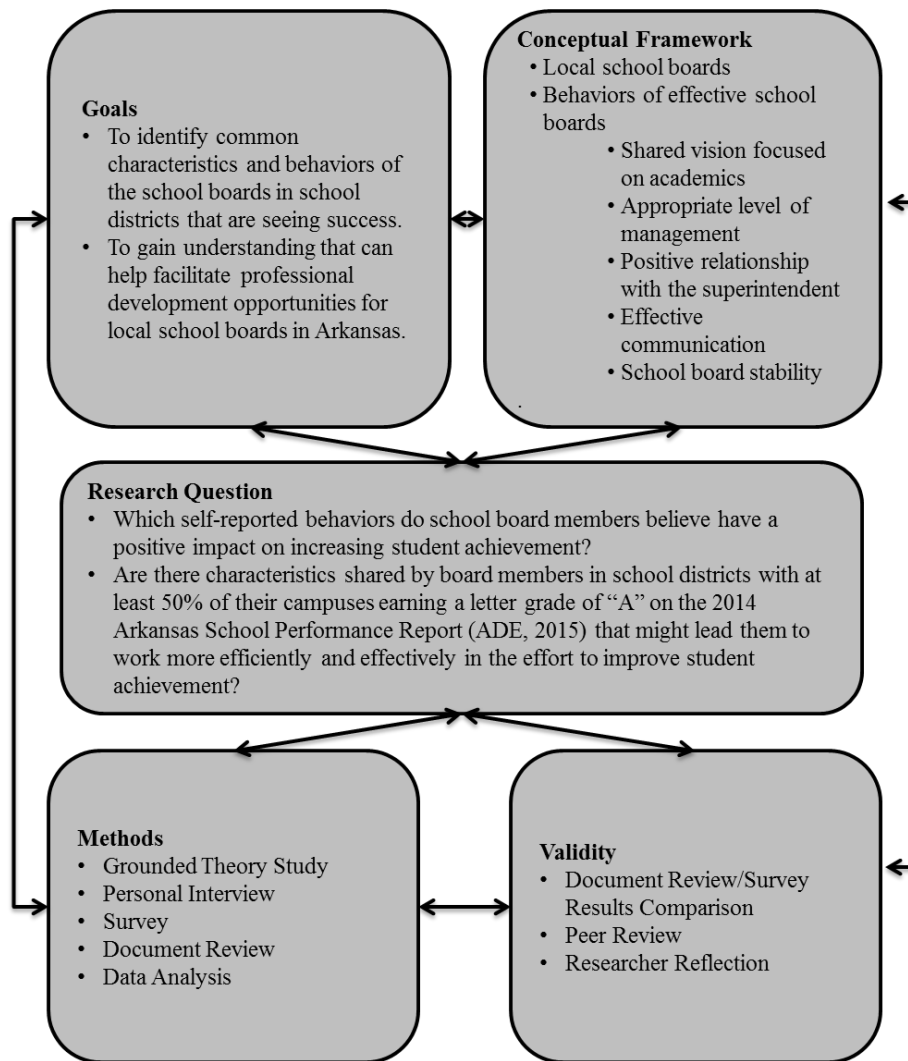


Figure 2.1. Research Design

The major components of this conceptual framework contributed to the resolution of the questions and goals addressed in this study.

Local School Boards

The local school board, as a system of governing the education provided within a community, has been in existence in some form since the mid 1600's (NSBA, 2015). During this time, schools were under the control of the local citizens through their city government.

Gradually, communities were required to form school committees to manage the affairs of educating their children. This movement toward a committee or board is thought to have occurred due to an increase in the requirements put upon local governments by other duties associated with growing numbers of citizens in communities (Danzberger, 1994). Those early, local school boards were expected to, "hire and support a competent professional as superintendent, defend the schools against public criticism, and persuade the people to open their pocketbooks" (Eliot, 1959, p. 1039). The resulting organizational structure remains essentially the same today as it was in the 1800's.

In Arkansas, A.C.A. § 6-13-620 outlines the responsibilities of school board members. Key areas of focus for boards as a whole include providing the overall vision and direction for the school district, ensuring fiscal responsibility, overseeing the management of the educational services and staff, and serving as a representative of the community the district serves. While the role of the school board has many facets:

No individual board member has any power or authority and must never attempt to act as an administrator of the school system. Board members can act only as a group. No single board member has the right to make any decision for the rest of the board. The only time board members may transact any business is when they meet in a legally convened session (ASBA, 2015, para. 2).

The school board as a whole should be available and accessible to the community it serves and should hold itself accountable for student achievement.

School board members are called upon to select and evaluate the superintendent and maintain the “fiscal autonomy,” (Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 15) of the school district. Board members are expected to listen to parents, district administration, leaders in the local business community, politicians, and community agency leaders. One piece of research has indicated that board members can, when given the task and opportunity, provide oversight which leads to greater accountability. The simple fact of their pointed and direct interest in student achievement and academic achievement can have a positive impact creating the environment for improvement (Hess, 2008). Unfortunately, their role is often ambiguous and the line between appropriate and unethical can be unclear. Members may become too controlling or too “hands off”. Erring in either direction may undermine the improvements in academic achievement that they seek (Institute for Educational Leadership [IEL], 2001).

The research that is available on the modern school board demonstrates that local communities have many expectations for the leaders in their district. School board members must consider these expectations while at the same time, they may be struggling with a lack of a sense of self-efficacy in the light of federal and state controls that mandate many activities of schools. The list of items that that are actually within the realm of influence for local school board members is diminishing (Kirst, 2008).

In addition, when local control is available, it is frequently being put in the hands of district employees (e.g., superintendents, principals, teachers’ unions, etc.) which may have the potential to leave board members with a feeling of helplessness and yet at the same time, accountable (Danzberger et al., 1987). To add to this issue, budgets of school districts are being reduced, due in part to the competition brought about by the rise of charter schools and school choice laws (Moody’s Investor Service, 2013), board members are finding themselves being

forced to make decisions to reduce budgets, cut programs, and even reduce staff. However many still hold to the belief expressed in 1999 by M. A. Resnick:

The quality of education for all children is more important than ever to each individual and the nation as a whole. Accordingly, the necessity to achieve high academic performance is profoundly changing the ways in which the nation's school systems do business. Local school boards have an integral and unique role in transforming education at the community level through their leadership and governance roles (p. 21).

Reimer (2008) went even further by stating that school governance is a service that only a locally elected school board can truly provide.

Behaviors of Effective School Boards

Though the number of quantitative studies that link school board behaviors directly to student achievement is limited, there have been several large bodies of qualitative research focused upon the behaviors of school boards in districts that have been successful in improving the academic achievement of students (Land, 2002). One study, commissioned by the Leadership Research Council, sought to find areas in which the business sector might offer a model for school boards (Brenner, Sullivan, & Dalton, 2002). The Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the Iowa School Boards Foundation, the Wallace Foundation, and the National School Boards Association sponsored research to look at six areas school board practices. This group conducted surveys focused upon what board members think, how they do their work, how boards are made up, how they are elected, and how boards work with the superintendent (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

The National School Boards Association, through the Center for Public Education (2012) has identified a set of fundamental characteristics of effective school board operations:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision. Effective

boards make sure these goals remain the district's top priorities and that nothing else detracts from them.

2. Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school board members are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.
4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective school boards are data savvy: they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts (para. 2-9).

The characteristics that will be examined more closely in this review of literature include: having a shared vision with a focus on student achievement and quality instruction; being accountability driven; having a collaborative relationship with staff and the community; leading as a united team with the superintendent; and building shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their

improvement efforts. These five characteristics were selected as areas of focus specifically because they are the ones that I expect to find in my study.

Shared vision with a focus on student achievement and quality instruction. School boards that are considered effective are reported to have a clear and shared vision of improving student achievement (Goodman, Fulbright, & Zimmerman, 1997). In fact, a clear vision of learning and a shared belief in the ability of all children to learn at high levels is listed as items one and two on the Center for Public Education's list (2012) of characteristics of effective school boards. These boards have a well-defined vision of student achievement and teacher performance accompanied by high expectations for students and the system as a whole. The NSBA (2015) also listed a clear vision and high expectations as the first item among the discussion of the tasks ahead for school board members. Shober & Hartney (2014) found that those districts seeing academic success were more likely to have school board members who placed a high value on academic achievement. The school boards in these districts measured their decisions on the basis on the contribution to instruction and student achievement (Griffin & Ward, 2006). Simply having a common vision and focus seems to be of most importance. Ford & Ihrke (2015) actually found that regardless of the definition of accountability that a school board chose to use, their agreement on that definition produced a significant and positive impact on academic performance.

Not only did the school boards share a vision and high expectations, but they also believed that they could do something to advance that vision (Iowa Association of School Boards [IASB], 2000). Research focusing on Dutch school boards report similar findings stating the more boards are, "thinking that they can contribute to the quality of school education the more they are aware of the quality of school education...which is considered to be prerequisite for

actually steering and improving the quality of school education” (Hooge & Honingh, 2013, p. 11). One study suggests that board members are more likely to participate in the work of the school board as a team, if they believe that the board is able to make a meaningful difference. There are documented efforts to encourage this confidence in school board effectiveness. A posting for an open position on local school boards in the Worthington, MN area opened with the question, “Do you have a desire to help lead your city into the future or guide your community’s school board through change?” (Buntjer, 2016, para. 1). This message is an attempt to communicate to potential candidates the impact that could be made by school board members.

Research published in 2014, however, appears to conflict with the assertions concerning a clear and shared vision for student learning. Survey results demonstrated that board members in achieving school districts were less likely to agree with statements supporting the value of possessing a vision based on beliefs and values, and discussing the improvement of student achievement (Plough, 2014).

Accountability driven. Another characteristic found by Goodman, et al. (1997) that is believed to be shared by effective school boards is, “effective management by the board without micromanagement” (Land, 2002, p. 19). School boards that are deemed effective focus on vision and policy and delegate the management of facilities and the supervision of instruction to the superintendent and staff. School boards must rely on the expertise of those that the district employs in order to make decisions related to budgets and district management (Phillips & Dorata, 2013).

As we push school leaders to greater accountability, they may tend to focus on the minor issues for a majority of the time in order to avoid negative consequences (Wilkins, 2015). School board policy making, “can be highly influenced by the social and political contexts in

which school districts are situated” (Diem et al., 2015, p. 741). When there is a pull upon the board to focus on issues that would distract from their vision and goals for the school district, effective boards insist that the issues of student achievement and academic performance remain the focus. According to the Center for Public Education (2012), these boards spend, “less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement” (para. 34). Effective district-wide leadership has been found to have a positive effect on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) and school boards, by definition, are a critical component of the district leadership team.

Collaborative relationship with staff and the community. School boards that choose to collaborate well with each other, the superintendent, the school personnel, and the community, teach us that a strong communication system is critical to keeping all stakeholders informed and engaged (Center for Public Education, 2012) in the activities associated with improving the educational services offered to students. When school boards communicate effectively with each other, the superintendent, faculty and staff, as well as the community results can be seen in the classroom. It is evident in these districts where a school board is communicating effectively, that efforts are being made to help parents and school boards work together more efficiently. The goal must be to improve education for their children in the environment of increasing levels of change ("Restructuring," 2000).

One study found that school boards in high-achieving school districts are even more likely to budget resources in order to conduct activities designed to improve communication with the community (Plough, 2014). They seek out ways to, “institutionalize parent and patron involvement” (Griffin & Ward, 2006, para. 7). Effective school boards that communicate well

will see their vision of improving student achievement in the work of teachers, administrators and students (IASB, 2000).

An additional aspect of communication is public relations. School districts may be hesitant to promote their work, challenges, or focus issues related to student achievement. Many times, school boards do not consider a school district as something in need of a plan for public relations; however, districts have been called to include the public in discussions about education for many years (Carol et al., 1986). The National School Public Relations Association (n.d.) defines public relations for school districts as follows:

Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function to help improve the programs and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the organization. Educational public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and information activities which earn public understanding and support (para. 1).

As school board members look at the practices that are determined to be part of effective boards they are considering the matter of public relations as an additional facet of the communication plan. Although the school district superintendent is the leader in the strategic use of public relations strategies, school boards and members, as well as all faculty and staff within a school district, have key roles to play in public relations aspects of communication (Scott, 2008).

The collaborative relationship experienced by school boards and others may be developed in a variety of ways and may also be visible in ways that are traditionally unexpected. One study conducted in 2010 suggested that the actual school board election and related voter turn-out was found to have a positive correlation to a higher level of academic performance. It was determined that a higher level of voter participation in school board elections might be the first sign of community interest in student achievement (Webber, 2010).

United team with the superintendent. A positive relationship with the superintendent is another common denominator among school boards that are deemed to be effective. The superintendent of a school is typically hired by the local board to manage the operational issues associated with education students, employing appropriate personnel, and managing facilities and services associated with those tasks. When the superintendent and the school board, “manage to establish a positive togetherness, they transform the mine field into a golden zone. Where the role identities are constructed in duality...the mutual understanding can pave the way for success: it creates clarity and a good climate” (Skott, 2014, p. 853). However, conflict with school boards and superintendents often comes from a lack of agreement upon the roles and responsibilities of each.

In a study of superintendents and school board presidents and their perceptions of their relationships, the conclusion that these relationships are complex was not surprising. The researcher found that the relationships are constantly changing and therefore proposed that an ongoing evaluation of the needs as they relate to training be conducted in order to facilitate an effective environment for student achievement (Thompson, 2014). A best practice for effective school boards is leading as a team, in the spirit of a collaborative relationship with the superintendent and also the faculty and staff of the school district (Goodman et al., 1997). This collaborative relationship may be seen in the reported findings of Kirst et al. (2010) which showed that superintendents connected an effective school board with improved achievement results for students. The NSBA supports the assertion by Goodman stating, “The board and superintendent must draw on, and respect, the backgrounds and abilities of everyone involved” (2015, para. 1). Leading as a team was demonstrated to be the most productive and was possible due to a common understanding of roles and responsibilities.

Building shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.

It can be very difficult to build a sense of shared knowledge, values, and commitment to improvement efforts when board members may be moving on and off the board based on election results. For example, Phillips & Dorata (2013) make a case for greater school board member training by making the connection between one of the primary functions of school boards, approving the operating budget of the local school district, and the taxes paid by individual community members. In Arkansas, local property taxes make up an average of 30% of a school district's budget. Property taxes are collected directly from local citizens and therefore it is understandable that those same citizens might expect school board members to be educated in how to manage the school district's finances. However if the board accomplishes a goal of thorough training in the areas of finance and budgets and then loses two members in the next election cycle, the training will need to be repeated at some level. It is easy to infer that this would slow the overall progress of the school board.

One study (Goodman et al., 1997) noted that stability in the school board membership, the long-term relationship between board members and the superintendent should be included in the list of characteristics of effective school boards. Thompson (2014) asserted, "A healthy school board-superintendent relationship is more likely to exist when lengthy tenures of superintendents and board members are expected and encouraged" (p. 75). Additionally, a case study conducted by S. C. Weiler (2015) found that the unit of a school board was cited as a key factor to the work that was accomplished in spite of a single board member creating scandal and distraction for the school district and the community.

School board instability may make it difficult to sustain appropriate policies to promote improvements in the district. As school boards begin to work on policy issues, they are educated

through their own initiative or the mandate of others. When members are not elected to return to their posts, the board can lose ground in their policy work due to the time it takes to educate new members and come to a renewed agreement as to the action that should be taken (Frankenberg & Diem, 2013).

The stability of school boards may be either a cause or an effect of harmony among members. Lack of disruptive conflict in the educational system is another possible factor in high levels of academic achievement. One study (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988) that looked at twelve effective school districts found consistently positive relationships in each of the following pairings: the staff and administration; the superintendent and school board; and the district and community. While the groups did not always agree, the overall result was a generally peaceful relationship. In fact, Ford and Ihrke (2015) studied the definitions of “accountability” supported by school board members in Wisconsin as compared to performance indicators in their school districts. They found that it didn’t matter how the board members defined accountability but rather it was their agreement on a definition that could be connected to student performance. If stability in the school board is a desired reality, communities will need to consider that, “...it is vitally important to assure selection of approximately equipped school board trustees and to ensure that those trustees are indeed representative of voter interests” (Mueller, 2011, p. 224). Additionally, school boards with board members that are, “open and honest with one another” (Ford & Ihrke, 2015, p. 11), make positive differences in the achievement of the students that they serve.

Stability in the superintendency has also been identified as a characteristic of successful schools. Glass (2001) stated that the constant changing of the superintendent may be an

underlying cause of community and faculty distrust of administration. This might be a hindrance to any attempt to improve student achievement from any source.

Conclusion

While research exists related to characteristics of effective school boards and the role they may have in improving student achievement, in Arkansas, professional development and board accountability is primarily focused upon fiscal management and supervision of the superintendent. As school districts continue to work to improve the services they provide, more attention may be given to school boards and the role they might play. Under current law and rule, the Arkansas Department of Education will make public the list of schools and school districts considered to be Achieving. School districts want to be on that list. In studying the characteristics and behaviors of the school board members and boards in those districts that have already achieved that status under the current definitions of achievement, I will be able to answer the question proposed in this study with a goal of providing some level of insight to other school boards and school districts in Arkansas. The data that is collected in this study could also be used to frame future research focused on improving education in Arkansas.

Chapter III: Methods

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). School boards are in place to provide local governance over the education of children in a community; however, board members often have a wide variety of academic, personal and professional experiences that may or may not include education or administration. While there is research regarding what teachers, principals, and schools can and should be doing to improve student learning, there less research to help us understand the role of the local school board and what it can do to improve student achievement.

This study was designed as grounded theory and was intended to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) and then develop a theory, based on the data collected, which is of value in assisting school board members in all school districts as they work to improve student achievement. Grounded theory is “inductively developed during a study” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 42). In addition, grounded theory will allow for analysis and interpretation of data throughout the process of the study and then culminate in a theory that is grounded in the data and therefore the basis will be transparent (Charmaz, 2006). The qualitative methods involved in a grounded theory study are suited to address the primary research questions of the proposed study in order to discover possible connections between school board member behaviors and characteristics and student achievement.

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). In order to achieve this purpose, two research questions were addressed:

- Which self-reported behaviors do school board members believe have a positive impact on increasing student achievement?
- Are there characteristics shared by board members in school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) that might lead them to work more efficiently and effectively in the effort to improve student achievement?

These questions guided the study and were intended to illuminate findings that will help facilitate professional development opportunities for local school boards in Arkansas.

The remainder of this chapter describes the theoretical framework used to build this study as well as the research design components. These components include: the research sample identification process; an overview of the information that is necessary for completion of the study; the methods for gathering and analyzing the needed information; ethical considerations; the limitations of the study; and the timeline.

Theoretical Framework

A social constructivist world view provided the lens through which this study was approached. Social constructivism describes a framework in which the researcher seeks to develop meanings from the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). It was important to rely on the experiences of school board members and school personnel in order to develop a theory grounded in the data that will lead to improved student achievement. The use of open-

ended questions to support clear, rich descriptions of the settings in which the participants function allowed for the construction of meaning from their experiences. This type of openness also allowed me to, “discover the order within the data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 140). Each board member approached the questions in a different way. The approaches themselves added data above the response to the question alone.

An interpretive approach to analyzing the data provided for the construction meaning from the characteristics and behaviors of the participants. The data gathered must be interpreted and therefore will become a resource for information that also contributes to the findings (Creswell, 2007). In the interpretive approach, the researcher is not only concerned with the participants in the study, but also with their interpretation of the events they describe during the study. Interpretive research seeks to, “understand phenomena through accessing the meanings that participants assign to them,” (Rowlands, 2005, p. 84) rather than to explain it, as quantitative research would be inclined to do. It was necessary to interpret the statements and behaviors of the school board members interviewed in order for there to be a theory grounded in the data.

Research Design

Grounded theory methods were used to transform the data gathered through the study into a theory intended to inform practice in improving the educational services provided to our children. Grounded theory methods allow the researcher to stop and write whenever it is appropriate. Researchers may begin analyzing the data they collect almost immediately. Using coding and memos encouraged me to expand my thinking as I proceeded through the study. Grounded theory also facilitated the exploration of different avenues of the study that arose during the data gathering process in order to develop a relevant theory aimed at the purpose of the study (Charmaz, 2006). The primary and secondary research questions also lended

themselves to grounded theory methods. The questions, along with the primary purpose of this study, required the collection of information from participants that needed to be interpreted in order to develop a theory. The primary value of my study is the development of a theory or theories that can help to improve the educational systems that serve our children and for this reason I have selected the grounded theory approach as the best way to achieve my purpose.

As is the nature of grounded theory research, there was a possibility of unforeseen steps in the study. However, there were many steps that were sequential and describable. An ongoing literature review was the starting place for the study but was left open to allow for additional information throughout the study. Based on this literature review, a broad list of interview questions was developed and then narrowed down to form the interview protocol to be used with board members.

A letter of introduction and explanation was sent via email to the superintendent of each non-charter, public school district where at least 50% of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) (see Appendix A). The letter explained the purpose of the study and included the questions to be used in the online survey (see Appendix B) and follow-up interview (see Appendix C) as well as the participation documentation (see Appendix E). The participation documentation included a place for the superintendent to sign on behalf of the school board members in their district. This indicated an agreement to participate in the survey portion of this study. At that time, documents including board minutes, board member policies, and organizational charts were gathered from the district offices and the district websites.

While the information was being collected for the school districts with campuses that earned an “A” from the Arkansas Department of Education and had agreed to participate,

documents were also being reviewed for a comparison group of school districts. These districts scored at the very bottom of a ranked list of school districts when sorted by the total points awarded by the ADE in the A-F Grading Scale for Schools (ADE, 2015). These school districts had campuses that received the letter grades of “C”, “D”, and “F”. Due to the requirements of the ADE for data publication, I was able to access and analyze a wealth of information for districts at both ends of the list.

Once an agreement to participate was received from the superintendent, the online survey was sent to each board member from that district. This also included an explanation that the completion of the online survey indicated their agreement to participate in the study, including the follow-up interview. Participates also received the participation documentation (see Appendix E). No personally identifiable information was required for participation. Field notes were gathered and analyzed throughout the process and stored under a number connecting notes to the associated school district. Figure 3.1 illustrates the major components of the research design.

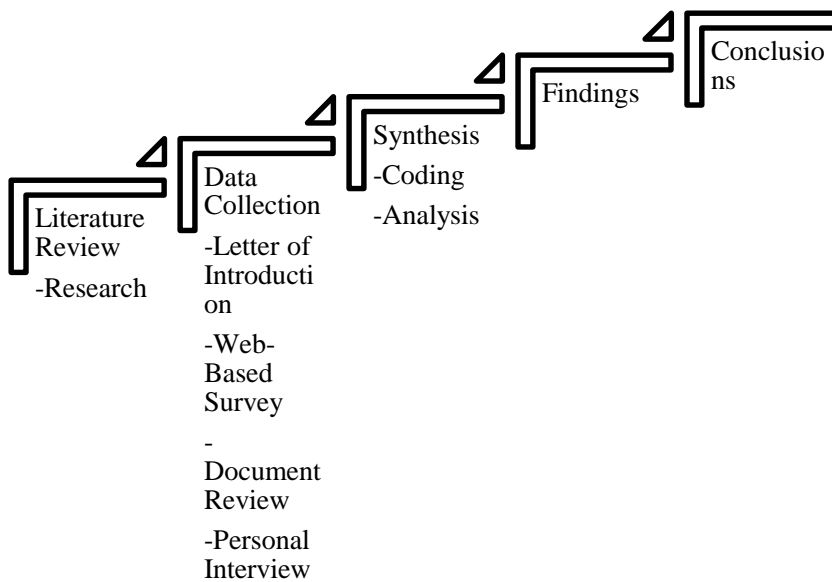


Figure 3.1 Overview of Research Design

After the interviews were transcribed, first cycle coding was conducted through each reread using attribute, descriptive, and in-vivo coding as appropriate. Attribute coding allowed me to gather basic demographic data and be able to search interview transcripts based upon this criteria at a later date. At the same time, descriptive coding provided the opportunity to focus on key attributes to the responses of the participants. Finally, the in-vivo coding allowed me to code the data based on small pieces of quoted text. In-vivo coding captured the meaning of the participants more accurately than simply focusing on the words themselves (Charmaz, 2006). This facilitated the identification of common themes throughout the study. A second round of coding was then utilized to allow for the combination of codes based upon the research questions.

Research Sampling Strategies

In order to clearly communicate the research sampling strategies that were used, an explanation of the A-F Grading Scale for Schools that is used by the ADE must be provided. In 2013, The Arkansas Legislature passed Act 696 (School Rating System, 2013) which mandated the ADE to publish an annual report of the results of statewide assessment and also to provide each school with a single performance category level. The grades given to schools based upon Act 696 represent many things including: student performance on state mandated assessments; how schools are meeting their expected growth targets in math and English language arts; whether high school students are graduating; how students with special needs or that require additional services are performing as compared to their peers; are their large gaps in achievement levels among the different categories of students in a district; and also whether a school is performing above state expectations. A letter grade is assigned to a school based upon points they the school earns related each of these areas. Schools may earn points for their performance

in one area and lose points in another area. The result is an overall score that places a school in one of five rating categories as shown in Figure 3.2 below.

<u>School Grades and Grading Scale 300 Points</u>
A = 270 to 300 points
B = 240 to 269 points
C = 210 to 239 points
D = 180 to 209 points
F = Less than 180 points

Figure 3.2 School Grades and Grading Scale (ADE, 2015, p. 2)

Purposeful sampling was selected for use in this grounded theory study in order to allow me to deliberately select sites and participants that share the characteristic of having 50% or more of the campuses in their district earning a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). Based upon the ADE Performance Report, I was able to sort the Excel spreadsheet by the total number of points that schools had and then resort based upon the district. This allowed me to group schools by district and in order of points earned for each individual campus in order to utilize theory based sampling. In theory based sampling, “The participants interviewed are theoretically chosen to help the researcher best form the theory” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Theory based sampling allowed me to select school districts to participate based upon their perceived ability to contribute to a theory related to the characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where a majority of campuses are considered to be achieving.

From the list of districts and campuses the twenty-five highest scoring Arkansas school districts were invited to participate in this study. These were non-charter, public school districts

where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). Of the twenty-five school districts that were contacted concerning participation, twelve districts agreed to participate. The superintendent’s role was limited to the provision of consent to the researcher to contact board members in order to request their individual participation in the study. Keeping the superintendent’s involvement in the survey limited was determined to be important in order to eliminate the bias that a superintendent might have and also due to the fact that the tenure of a superintendent is not tied to that of board members and their experiences with the specific district that is being reviewed may be vastly different.

For each district that agreed to participate, the board members were invited to complete a web-based survey and participate in a personal interview. Additionally, related data, such as board minutes and board member professional development records were gathered from school district websites and ADE reports. The participating districts are referred to as District 1, District 2, District 3, District 4, District 5, District 6, District 7, District 8, District 9, District 10, District 11, and District 12.

A very similar strategy was used to select an equal number of school districts that earned a low number of points on the same report (ADE, 2014) in order to create a comparison group. The sorted Excel Spreadsheet referenced above was analyzed to identify those schools at the very bottom as far as total points. Once schools were identified, the list was cross referenced with the most recent list of schools labeled as being in Academic Distress (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2014). If a school on the list was also labeled as being in Academic Distress, they were removed from group of comparison districts and another district that was next on the spreadsheet was added. Additionally, one school was removed from the list because

it has been under state control for a period of time which might greatly impact the documents to be reviewed. Another district was removed from the list because it was recently consolidated and had missing or incompatible data. The selected comparison school districts are referred to in tables as District 1L, District 2L, District 3L and District 4L.

Overview of Information Needed

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). I sought to identify common characteristics and behaviors of school boards in an effort to learn from those commonalities and possibly generalize, at least to a small degree, in order to inform professional development offerings for school board members in Arkansas. In order to discover what school board members have in common and how they interact with each other and those around them in the school district such as administrators and patrons, three categories of information were required: (a) demographic, (b) contextual, and (c) perceptual as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1
Overview of Information That Was Required

<i>Type of Information</i>	<i>What the Researcher Requires</i>	<i>Method</i>
Demographic	Descriptive information on participants and their school districts	Web-Based Survey and Document Review
Contextual	Background information regarding participants and school districts	Web-Based Survey Document Review Personal Interview
Perceptual	Perceptual description of the participants’ beliefs regarding school boards and student achievement	Web-Based Survey Personal Interview

Demographic. Demographic data concerning the selected board members allowed for a description of the participants as individuals and also as board members. This information also made possible the discovery of characteristics that highlight similarities and differences among the members such as age, years of experience as a board member, professional development hours earned from 2010-2014, and educational level. Pseudonyms were used to represent the participants and their districts.

Contextual. Gathering contextual data provided an opportunity to learn about possible relationships and connections among board members at each school district site selected. Contextual data components included survey questions that specifically targeted the board members' relationships to the school district other than as a board member, their education level, the years of service, the occupation outside of the school board. Learning about these possible connections within the school board informed an understanding of the work climate of the school board and gave information about the culture of the community leadership due to the fact that the board members are elected and serve at the discretion of the community members.

Perceptual. Perceptual data was necessary in order to learn of the beliefs of board members that may influence their behaviors. It was critical to this study to learn, directly from board members, what those members believe about education and their role in supporting academic achievement as a leader in their local school district.

Data Collection Methods

Prior to data-collection, a review of the literature indicated that, "The future control of school boards over local education could depend on research that identifies key characteristics of effective school board governance and clearly links these characteristics to students' achievement" (Land, 2002, p. 265). At least two forms of data collection were determined to be

necessary to allow for a theory to be derived from the study. Using multiple methods to gather data provided for greater validity of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For this reason the methods of using a web-based survey, personal interview, and document review were chosen as the most appropriate. These methods were selected based on the value each one added to finding an answer to the primary research question. The focus was to describe the characteristics and behaviors of school board members in school districts with at least 50% of their campuses earning a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). This allowed for the possibility of triangulation of data among demographic information and self-reported data gathered through surveys and interviews.

Web-Based Survey. The use of a web-based survey supported the collection of demographic, contextual, and perceptual data (see Appendix B). The information gathered with this method included the number of years of experience as a board member, the number of children each one has that has attended or is currently attending the school district they serve, current occupation, level of personal education, and types of professional development or training they have had that may have been beneficial to their current service as a school board member. The board members that agreed to participate in the survey were made aware of the underlying research question in order to facilitate a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the board member and also allowed them to share the benefit of their own knowledge (Maxwell, 2005). This information was used to determine any factors that may have a bearing on the characteristics and behaviors of the board members studied. Each board member was assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

Interviews. In order to collect perceptual data, board members were invited to participate in a personal interview. Personal interviews provided an opportunity to gather

additional information through tone of voice, follow up questions, and the possibility of board members choosing to add additional information as they felt was appropriate (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions were developed to directly address the specifics of the primary research questions (see Appendix C). Questions were few yet broad and allowed for discussion and board member reflections and elaboration as they were so inclined, allowing me access to rich data concerning board member behaviors and beliefs (Charmaz, 2006). The board members interviewed were made aware of the underlying research questions behind the interview in order to, “create a more symmetrical and collaborative relationship in which participants are able to bring their own knowledge to bear on the questions,” (Maxwell, 2005). After consent from the participants was obtained, the interviews were recorded and uploaded to a web-based storage site through an application called TapeACall, and then coded for analysis using ATLAS.ti version 7. Each participant was assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

Document Review. Document review was another source of contextual data.

Information that was collected through the document review process was stored in document summary forms (see Appendix F). The documents that were reviewed included board minutes from the past three years for participating districts as well as for the districts that were selected for comparison purposes. I limited the review of minutes to three years in order to attempt to be consistent due to the varying amount of historical information that school districts might have on their public websites. These documents, since they are extant texts as compared to elicited texts, provided an objective look (Charmaz, 2006) into the past workings of the district. Specifically, the history of split or unanimous voting records was used to indicate a pattern or lack of a pattern of consensus building and collaboration. While unanimous voting does not explicating require that the board be successful at collaboration, the lack of frequent split votes could be an indicator

of that collaborative work environment when it is added to other aspects such as board member attendance and board members earning more than the required number of professional development hours.

Another set of documents that was important to review included information regarding professional development or training of board members as it related to their service to the district. These documents were part of the Annual Report Card published by the ADE (ADE, 2014). This allowed the researcher to determine if those districts with campuses considered to be achieving or exemplary have encouraged, provided, or offered training to their board members to allow the board to operate more efficiently and effectively. I was also able to determine the number of hours that individual board members earned.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

After the raw data were collected in the form of school board minutes, 27 school board member surveys from 9 school districts, 7 personal interviews, and school board member professional development records from 16 school districts, I worked to make meaning from the pieces of the information by analysis and making inferences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This involved merging the data derived from each source into a cohesive body of information which could be used to respond to the research questions addressed by this study.

ATLAS.ti was utilized to assist in data organization and analysis. Using this type of software allowed for “moving out of the black box of analysis and making the entire analytic process more transparent” (Friese, 2012, p. 3). This electronic assistance supported the use of color for the organization of codes and also provided access to searches and queries in order to better work with the data that has been gathered (Saldana, 2011). Once the data was entered into the software, the coding process was used as both an organizational exercise as well as a process

for analysis. Reflecting over the data in order to code provided an opportunity for continuous analysis. The reflection involved multiple re-reads of the data that was collected as well as frequently returning to the existing literature to ensure that something important was not inadvertently overlooked.

The analysis began with open-coding, “where the descriptors emerge from the data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 102). Through the process of searching for patterns within the data, I was looking for common characteristics and behaviors among the board members.

After the open-coding, axial coding was used to transform the small pieces of data that have been broken into isolated codes, back into useful, understandable information. Axial coding enabled the reorganization of the individual codes around categories. The expected categories for this study included those that surround the research questions. Axial coding can provide a, “frame for researchers” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61) and assisted in the development of findings for this grounded theory study.

The word code, when used in qualitative studies, means, “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and /or evocative attitude for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldana, 2011, p. 3). Having collected different forms of information, coding allowed me to take the large volume of board minutes, web-based surveys, school board professional development information, and school performance information and transform that information into a useable set of data that could be analyzed even further.

During this process of coding, charts were created in order to organize the collected information. As codes and themes were discovered, documenting them in a visual manner such

as a chart assisted me in providing structure to the data. Microsoft Excel was used to store data and create charts as necessary. Examples of these charts are shown below in Tables 3.2 – 3.4.

Table 3.2

Board Member Years of Service to the School Board

	<1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	>10
# of BM	1	2	3	3	0	6	3	1	3	0	0	5
% of BM	3.7	7.4	11.1	11.1	0	22.2	11.1	3.7	11.1	0	0	18.52

Table 3.3

Board Member Behaviors Identified as Important During the Personal Interviews

	Keeps a student focus	Keeps a community focus	Keeps an open mind	Cooperates with supt and staff	Keeps themselves informed	Avoids promoting a personal agenda	Maintains a “right” relationship with the supt
# of Instances	12	12	11	8	8	7	19

Table 3.4

Board Member Characteristics Identified as Important During the Personal Interviews

Characteristic	# of Instances
Comes from diverse backgrounds	11
Have connections to the school district outside of their role on the board	3

A data summary table (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 104) (see Appendix D) was also used for this purpose. In order to determine the common characteristics and behaviors of school board members where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) careful attention was given to the subtleties of the web-based survey responses, personal interviews, and the data that was reviewed.

Ethical Considerations

There may be many possible ethical issues facing any researcher (Creswell, 2007). I designed this study to be sensitive to the potential ethical issues that may arise through the collection of information as well as in the compilation and dissemination activities related to this study. Given that two of the tools utilized for information gathering in this study, personal interviews and web-based surveys, were based upon personal contact, respect for persons was a continuous concern. Respecting the individuals who volunteer to participate in this study was important in order to secure their participation as well as to ensure that the participants were not used, “as means to an end” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 47).

Another possible ethical concern was that of protecting the institutions that allowed their members to participate as well as those who were not included or were included as a comparison group based upon their lower rating by the Arkansas Department of Education. While the school districts that were chosen for this study had campuses classified as high-performing and were likely pleased with that label, other school districts could have been harmed, unintentionally, by not being chosen for the study. It could have been possible that a neighboring district to one that is chosen for participation might have been viewed as less desirable to some of their patrons because of this non-selection. With school choice being a very real component to student enrollment numbers and having an impact on the district’s budgets, this could have proven to be harmful. While some of the information gathered about the school districts was public in nature and readily available, members of the public may rarely spend time searching public information on school websites or the Arkansas Department of Education’s information system. Since the information has been put into the form of a research study, it may have become more consumable and therefore the anonymity of the districts was important.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves both credibility and dependability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Silverman (2004) points out the need to provide a high level of detail in how researchers conduct their work. This includes the setting of the study, an explanation of the researcher's background, cultural factors, or other circumstances that might in any way impact the results. I have clarified by possible personal bias concerning school boards. I have also taken advantage of overlapping sources of information when possible. This has allowed for a limited amount of triangulation in some aspects of the study. Perhaps the greatest test of the credibility of this study will be conducted when school board members are able to review the findings and determine whether or not they are, "meaningful and applicable in terms of their experience" (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999, p. 380). The participants were assured that they would have this opportunity as soon as it is allowable.

Dependability in this context refers to one's ability to follow the researcher through the processes used to collect and interpret the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). My data is available for review by other researchers upon request. I have repeatedly returned to the data to determine whether apparent findings still make sense.

Timeline

The completion dates for the study components are displayed below in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5

Timeline

Component	Completion Date
Review of Literature	Ongoing
Data Collection	April 2016-January 2017
Data Analysis	April 2016-March 2017
Presentation of Findings	April 2017

Summary

Literature clearly indicates that there are many things that teachers, administrators, and government agencies can do to effect improvement in student achievement. There is less information concerning what the governing body of local school districts should be doing to create the environments and organizational systems necessary for the work of school leaders.

In order to complete this study, identification of districts and school boards for participation began upon approval from the IRB. A digital and traditional filing system for the storage of information, transcripts, field notes, and permission forms were created. All digital data was stored on one computer with a copy preserved on an external hard drive. Surveys were sent in late April of 2016. The ongoing development of a code book, coding, and analysis began once the agreements to participate were received. Many of the artifacts that I reviewed were available online and therefore allowed for analysis to begin as soon as IRB approval was received. There was also an ongoing review of any current research related to my study.

Data which addresses the primary research questions of this study were obtained through surveys, interviews, and document review. The results of this study are intended to add to a growing pool of knowledge focused upon school board members in successful school districts.

Chapter IV: Data Results

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in Arkansas school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2015). I believed that if a more complete understanding of common characteristics and behaviors of the school boards in school districts that are experiencing success is obtained, professional development and other resources may be identified which could enable all school boards to operate more effectively.

This chapter presents data results based upon the results of web-based surveys (Appendix B), personal interviews (Appendix C), and a review of published school board meeting minutes and professional development reports, all intended to answer these questions and lead to a possible theory of successful school boards that could serve other districts and the school boards that are responsible for their operation. An analysis of the 2015 School Performance Reports (ADE, 2014) produced twenty-five school districts that were determined to meet the theory based sampling criteria required for this study in that they had characteristics that were believed to be valuable in advancing the learning and understanding of the researcher (Creswell, 2007). Four comparison districts whose performance placed them on the lower end of the rankings of school districts on the 2015 School Performance Reports were also identified. Due to limited access to comparison districts, little usable data was gained that would support authentic comparisons to the districts that were identified as being successful and that agreed to participate.

Of those twenty-five selected school districts that were invited to participate in this study, twelve school district superintendents responded positively to my written request for district level approval of board member participation. Board members serving those twelve school districts were then invited to participate in a web-based survey. Twenty-seven school board members completed the web-based survey. Of those twenty-seven, seven also agreed to participate in a personal interview. Those interviews resulted in 211 pages of transcripts.

The document review process for both the participating school districts as well as the comparison school districts was identical. School board minutes from the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school year were collected, read for initial content, reread for specific information such as voting records, specific patterns to voting splits, and attendance of board members. Professional Development for board members is reported as part of the annual ADE Report Card for Schools. The reports for each of the participating and comparison school districts were collected for the 2013, 2014, and 2015 school years. These reports are typically published in their final version in early to mid-fall for the previous school year. They are labeled with the year of the graduation. For example, 2014-2015 is reported as 2015. While the reports show data for three years, the board member professional development component is only presented for the current year. The information gleaned from the school board minutes and professional development records was then organized with Microsoft Excel and put into a form that would allow for further analysis and, ultimately, communication.

Each method of data collection contributed information that was used to answer the primary research questions of this study: (1) Which self-reported behaviors do school board members believe have a positive impact on increasing student achievement? (2) Are there characteristics shared by board members in school districts where 50% or more of their

campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) that might lead them to work more efficiently and effectively in the effort to improve student achievement?

Behaviors That Board Members Believe Have a Positive Impact on Student Achievement

Data obtained from the personal interviews was critical in answering the first research question which focused upon the behaviors that school board members perceived as having a positive impact on student achievement. As board members responded to the interview questions posed to them, opportunities arose to seek clarification and extract rich explanations of the deep rooted beliefs that board members’ possess about their role as related to student achievement.

Board members believe they must maintain a focus on students. All of the board members (7 of 7 [100%]) that were interviewed expressed the belief that putting students first was an unwavering non-negotiable behavior. A student focus can take on several forms. For some board members, they saw this focus as having compassion for students that struggle. Others felt putting students first involved the manner in which they approached decisions. In either case, they believed that keeping the focus on the best interests of students was the primary job outside of hiring the superintendent. When board members where asked about the characteristics of good board members the responses included statements such as, “The ideal school board member is one that's willing to listen to all sides and have a huge heart. They can put the kids first”, “All kids are equal and need the right programs”, and “They have to make our students their first priority.” Another board member put it in these words:

They know enough and have the courage to do what's right for kids and not necessarily do what's right for a special interest group and not try to get a candidate on the board. Some don't have kids at heart but have a special interest and that's not what you want. They have a hidden agenda and they don't look at the big picture.

One board member stated, “All kids don't go to college and not every kid is on that super achiever level. You have to think about all your kids. A lot of our kids come from a low socio-economic level. What do *they* need?” In response to the question related to the most important role of a board member, one person responded with:

...providing resources in order to provide different ways of learning like one thing we're really talking about a lot now is how to communicate with the students. I believe our role is to make the path less bumpy to get to where they want to be whether that's a vocation or whether that is to go to college. It's, we have to find a pathway for every student and not just the majority.

Statements such as these indicate a keen awareness that student achievement is dependent on the growth of all students. Many school districts are working to add programs that allow students to earn employment certificates while in high school. These programs range from work in the electrical field to health care certifications. The board members interviewed were able to clearly communicate their belief that the needs of students from every background on every level must be met in order for their school to be considered successful.

Board members were asked about many topics but as the interviews progressed, it became clear that each of the board members I spoke with was serving on their school board because they believed they could do good work for kids. Even when the question might not have lent itself to have a student focused response, many times board members would still find a way to return to that theme. For example, when asked about the ability of a participating school board to reach a consensus the board member responded, “We come to a consensus for the kids.” Another question concerning the board’s expectations for their superintendent produced the response that they should be, “empowering the school leaders to help teachers do the right thing for kids.” Repeatedly throughout the interviews, board members made statements such as these

and referred me back to the students. It was clear that the members I spoke with had a vested interest in their school district and believed that they could make a difference for kids.

As the board members were asked for their final thoughts related to their role in impacting student achievement, many of their responses returned to a focus on students. One board member passionately responded:

I would make sure that no child was lacking for anything they needed in school, especially school supplies. This includes internet access at home. Even if this means giving them an internet hot spot because as fast as the world is, as fast as technology is you know, nobody has the World Book Encyclopedia at home anymore. I think that's a handicap for a lot of our students. You know you have kids with a smartphone in their hand but you look at other kids and they don't have a cell phone or smartphone. It is a handicap for when you ask them to go do a project. Another thing that I know is really expensive and most schools do provide some of it is the counseling on campus. There are so many things going on with kids. It isn't just kids from low socio-economic backgrounds...they're all affected.

This board member expressed a wish list for their school district that clearly demonstrates a student focused mindset. From basic school supplies to technology, the goal was a school that provided every student with the tools they needed. Mental health was not a topic that was mentioned by other board members that participated in the interviews however, it is a strong example of what it means for board members to be driven by a focus on students.

Concerning the role of the school board, one response shows that the focus on students must stay clear as the never-ending flow of business items comes before school boards. This member stated:

If a school board member has been a businessperson whether that be in farming which is our economically number one job right now or in factory work or whatever, there are things that you really need in order to maintain a steady structure. But if you look at a school as a business and then what you do daily that works with children, there is a great divide. Sometimes you can function as a business but *all* the time you have to think of both.

Another board member supported this position independently by stating, “At the end of the day it's about the kids. It's not about you. It's not about an agenda. It's not about popularity. It's about what is best for the kids and the community.” A summative statement from a different board member indicated that the focus on students is the very thing that makes their school board successful as a working group: “We're blessed. Our school board members are very good people here and they want what's best for the kids and if that's at the heart of what you're doing as a school, boy, the rest of it will take care of itself.”

The willingness to keep an open mind was also viewed as a key behavior of board members that contributes to student success. For the board members surveyed, keeping an open mind meant listening, considering other points of view, being willing to take risks, and expressing themselves in a positive and productive manner. Board members expressed this thought in a variety of ways. One board member framed this thought by stating:

Sometimes it's a difficult task to meet the needs of every student. It's a big challenge but it takes everyone working together to do that and you go back to being community minded individuals who are willing to listen to the others and not quick to judge, not to block things out. Be open-minded and willing to try new things. Not necessarily thinking that every one of them [new things] is going to work. Some do. Some don't. You take your licks on the chin and keep trying new things.

Another interview participant expressed the value of listening to each other with open minds as being critical to their work. “I really try to go into the boardroom with the thought of you know, being very open minded and objective and really listen closely to what's been said.” Still another board member shared that their board worked so well together because, “We respect one another and we know that we are each just as important as the next. Everyone's opinions matter and we just work together through mutual respect and through what's best for the kids.” A positive working relationship among board members was important to the participants.

Many board members shared that when new members come to their positions with personal agendas it can be damaging and actually cause the work of the board to suffer. “School board members can be nit-picky about things that their kids or grandkids are saying. That is a problem if you interject yourself in the daily issues as a board member. That is not healthy.” This board member recognized that sometimes individuals outside of the board but still connected to the school in some way might share information about a possible or perceived issue. The desirable response, according to this board member, is to listen with an open mind while maintaining an understanding that the person speaking may not have all of the facts. These statements also lend support to the weight the participants gave to keeping an open mind as a board member.

The pattern of unanimous voting in the districts that participated in the study is also attributed, in part, to the behavior of listening and keeping an open mind. The overwhelming majority (3,370 of 3,401 [99.08]) of all votes taken by the participating school boards during regular board meetings from July 2013- June 2016 resulted in a unanimous and affirmative decision. This information is displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Average Percentage of Unanimous Votes (2013-2016)

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	Average
Participating Districts	99%	100%	99%	100%
Comparison Districts	92%	90%	99%	94%

One board member directly connected this voting record to the ability of board members to listen by responding, “We do have the ability to listen and hear each other out and hear both sides of the story before we make our decision. I think that is our strong point.” The ability to keep an open mind was also linked closely with a school boards ability to work together effectively. A

board member enthusiastically responded to the question about unanimous voting results with the following:

Well honestly we, I mean we just we have fabulous people in our school board. We're very lucky. I'm the only black sheep you know [board member laughs]. And I think it's primarily because we respect one another and we're, you know, we're each just as important as the next. There's no problem with telling each other what you really think. Everyone's opinions matter. You want to come to a consensus on most things for the kids and for what's best for the district and when you walk out, the reason you want to see unanimous is because you want to ensure a united front...that this is the decision we've made...all of us are on board and we'll support it.

Another board member stated, "It's just people. Whether your district is large or small, we just have to get along with each other." The board members that were interviewed all projected themselves to have a similar philosophy. Their voice inflections, and tones indicated that they enjoyed their service on the board. Some also made it clear that while keeping an open mind was sometimes a challenge, it was something that they would often remind each other to do if deliberations became heated.

Maintaining an appropriate relationship with the superintendent and district staff was also a behavior that all board members (7 of 7 [100%]) cited as one that leads to academic success for the students in their districts. A board member from one district believes their primary job is, "to be supportive of the superintendent. The leadership promotes and expects what the school district considers to be important. As far as academics and instruction go it's got to come from the top." Board members recognized the position of superintendent as one that must be allowed to lead and direct the day to day business of the district. They also realized that it was their responsibility to hire the right person for the job and then to let them perform that job to the best of their ability. An example of a board members belief about maintaining an appropriate relationship with the superintendent is seen in the following board member's statement:

We're going to hold the superintendent accountable for what happens. The superintendent has the responsibility but also the freedom to make the hiring selections. I wouldn't like to be handling everything at school myself. You just have to realize where you are and what you can do and who you trust in their positions to do their jobs. I have my own businesses to run...the superintendent that we hire runs the school.

A different participant stated:

We try to direct and assist the superintendent making sure that there are resources to assist the principals and the teachers and move forward the instruction of the students but also I think it's our responsibility to create the positive atmosphere in the community.

This participant felt that a job of the board member was almost to be that of a “cheerleader”, promoting the school district within the community to those that might not be as closely connected to the work. Still another board member recognized that it is the superintendent that should be, “working primarily with the principals giving them directions on the day to day operations of the school but also trying to keep a close eye on all of our curriculum and ensure that we're meeting all state mandates.” The board members consistently echoed these thoughts, “I'm not in that school sometimes for a very long period of time. It's not my job to go and hire people that I'm not going to manage. I run three businesses. I don't micromanage them. First of all I don't have the time.” When asked about the job of a school board member, one participant answered, “The job of school boards overall is to find the right administration and to back that administration in leading the school in the direction that you all choose.” Another went farther stating, “When we hire quality people in administrative levels, let them do their job. Quite honestly, if they're going to fail let them fail and then deal with the fact. Don't go in and try to fix it.” Another board member concluded his response to the question related to board relationships to staff by saying, “I think our superintendent should be the master of the ship and should steer it with calm control because he knows what direction the school is going.” This board member believed that if the board hired a superintendent that held the same core beliefs

and sense of purpose that was held by the school board and the community, it was the board's responsibility to trust the superintendent and let him or her lead as expected.

School board members that were interviewed also expressed the importance of board members making the effort to keep themselves informed on issues related to education, finance, politics, family services, and their own community. One member asserted that because board members are required to make decisions about financial matters,

They've got to have some understanding. Collectively we have a broad group of members...I would say, you know, individually for me I'm a C.P.A. so when I ran for school board it was expected that I would bring my experiences with me. Everyone needs to have a certain level of understanding though.

Another member reported that, "When we have questions we can call the appropriate people to get our answers." The board members that were interviewed did not indicate that they were simply the recipients of information. They communicated their own roles in actually reaching out and gathering information for themselves. Board members consistently expressed their responsibility for, "educating themselves." One member summarized the need for this behavior in this manner:

I've been retired since two thousand and eight. When I hear the principal start giving reports and stuff, I need to understand. I know I can ask questions and I do. But you know, it's really the board members' responsibility to stay abreast of what's going on in education and the community. They need to ask questions. Community people ask us questions to get things explained. You know, I think reading, reading, reading, reading everything that comes across the computer and everything that comes from the School Board Association is important. They put out a really nice magazine. The training offered by the School Board Association provides opportunities for board members to make themselves more knowledgeable of what's going on in education and to keep up with the legislature.

They sought out information. The participants believed it was their responsibility.

Campus visits may be another way that board members in high-achieving school districts stay informed. Figure 4.1 represents this data.

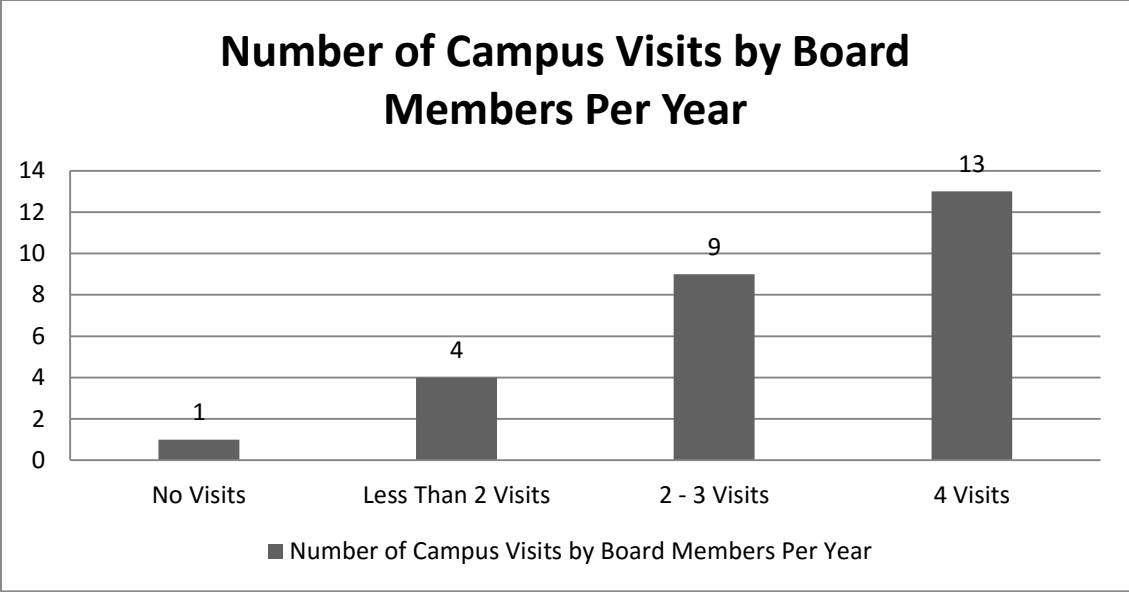


Figure 4.1 Number of Campus Visits by Board Members Per Year

Board members that were interviewed mentioned being on campus for events and activities such as music performances, athletic events, and spelling bees.

The belief held by participating board members concerning the importance of staying informed is also supported by the professional development records that were reviewed across all of the participating districts as well as the comparison districts. School districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2015) showed a slightly higher average number of professional development hours than the comparison districts. This information is displayed in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2

Average Number of Professional Development Hours Earned by Board Members (2012-2015)

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	Average
Participating Districts	9.5	9.4	8.7	9.2
Comparison Districts	9.3	8.1	8.1	8.5

Characteristics Shared Among School Boards Serving High-Achieving School Districts

Board members in school districts that are considered to be successful, as defined in this study, believe that diversity among the board members is one characteristic that contributes to their ability to promote academic achievement for their students. All (7 of 7 [100%]) of the board members that were surveyed emphasized the diversity of their board as a source of strength. Diversity in the sense that it was used by the board members who participated in this study, relates primarily to backgrounds, occupations and educational levels. It was expressed by all board members that the strength of their school board was due, in part, to the diversity of their school board membership. Having members from different occupations and positions within the community was touted as a key reason for their success in being able to make good decisions for their district. One member stated:

I think just we did have a well-rounded group and we listen and hear each other out. As far as education goes we probably have sixty seventy percent of our board members that are degreed individuals but then we have some successful business people on the board. We also have some very community minded individuals on the board.

Another survey participant stated, “We have a good blend of individuals that are interested in different areas of education.” A board member from one district reported, “Our board ranges from the professional business owner to those that work outside in the timber industry. That makes us strong and we each bring skills and different backgrounds so that collectively, we have a very broad group.” An appreciation for the different perspectives that a diverse membership brought to the work of a school board was evident across the interviews.

A different board member that has also recently retired from the position of teacher in the district where she now serves on the board, believes that diversity also helps in keeping a focus on multiples facets of education. The school board members:

...come from different areas academically and professionally. I think that is important, that way you can look at a wide variety of activities and ask questions. They are not all sports minded or academic folks. I think we have a good blend of individuals who are interested in each one of those areas. So there is not one area slips by.

Table 4.3 shows the diversity of educational backgrounds in board members who responded to the web-based survey.

Table 4.3

Board Member Level of Education

	HS / GED	Some College	College Degree	Some Grad Work	Adv. Degree	Other
# of BM	2	6	13	1	4	1
% of BM	7.4	22.2	48.	3.7	14.8	3.7

Another consistent characteristic of school board members in the districts that were studied is that the board members were connected to the school district other than just serving as a board member. Board members believed that having students in school and other such connections encouraged them to support the success of the school more passionately. When members did not have kids or close family members in the school they were perceived to have a tendency to block things that might seem unnecessary such as a millage increase or the purchase of new technology resources. One board member stated, “If you have no knowledge about the schools, you are not going to support a tax increase to help kids. That’s what can happen if you don't have a kid or grandkid in there.” Another board member pointed out that even if someone doesn’t have a child in the school district, they may have other connections that will support their dedication to service. For example, the following was shared:

One of our board members doesn’t have kids in school currently but he's a self-made businessman. He has a strong sense of what is needed in the local workforce right now and he brings a good perspective to the table.

Each of the participants in the web-based survey as well as the personal interviews possessed direct connections to the district as well as the community.

The survey data also showed a pattern of involvement with the school district outside of service on the board. The strong majority (26 of 27 [96.29%]) of board members surveyed reported connections to the school district outside of their role on the board. Survey results are displayed in Figure 4.2.

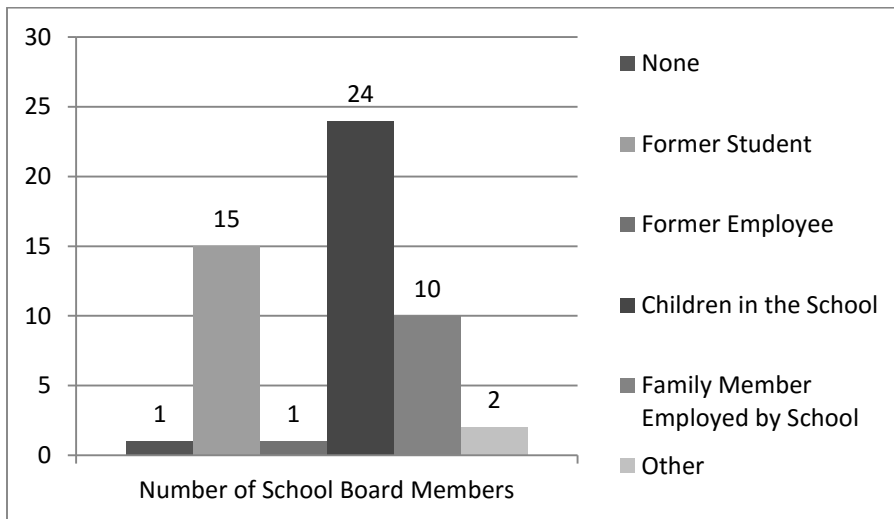


Figure 4.2 Connections to School Districts Other Than as a Board Member

One board member interviewed reported being a retired teacher and stated, “As a teacher, the personnel policy committee gave me a great background for some issues”, while others referenced having children in the district as being critical to the ability to be a good board member. One board member interviewed stated, “It helps to have a child in the school because you feel more in touch with what's going.” “This is our community,” stated another board member, “and no one from the outside would understand us like we do.” “We know our history and traditions,” asserted another board member, “and we want what is best for our kids and our community.” A great sense of pride in the community was easy to identify.

The nature of school boards as locally elected bodies charged with serving to support school districts may be the driving force behind this consistent presence of relationships of board members with the school district above serving simply as a board member. Another factor could be that board members receive no compensation for serving. This may be a factor to encourage those with an additional interest in the school district to give their personal time to the work of school district leadership.

Regular attendance at board meetings was also a common characteristic found among school board members in school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (Arkansas Department of Education [ADE], 2015). The document review showed a three year average attendance of school board members at the regular board meetings of 88%. Upon review of the public data available from the comparison group, it was found that those districts had lower average attendance (79.33%) at regular board meetings over the three year period. This data is displayed in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4

Average Percentage of Recorded Board Member Attendance in Board Minutes (2013-2016)

	Avg. # of BMs	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	Average
Participating Districts	6.8	86%	87%	91%	88%
Comparison Districts	7	76%	81%	81%	79%

Not only is the attendance rate of the districts labeled as achieving higher (9 percentage points) but the positive trend of being present was also noted in the self-reported information obtained through the web-based surveys. Of the 27 board members responding to the survey, all (27 of 27

[100%]) reported attending 10 or more meetings each year. This information is represented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Board Member Self-Reported Attendance Data for Regular Board Meetings

	12	10-11	8-9	< 8
# of BM	18	9	0	0
% of BM	66.7	33.3	0	0

Another characteristic shared by many board members in successful school districts is that they report to be on campus above the amount of time required by their position. A majority (22 of 27 [81.48%]) of the participants surveyed visited the school two times per year or more in addition to attending the school board meetings. This information was displayed in figure 4.1. Arkansas School Board members are required, as a minimum, to visit a campus in their district at least annually. The board members in this study reported visiting much more often than that basic requirement. This characteristic seems to directly connect to the belief held by board members that was noted in the previous section that school board members needed to keep themselves informed about the issues impacting school districts and education. With almost one half (13 of 27 [48.1%]) of the surveyed members reported visiting a campus at least four times a year, it appears that the board members participating are interested in what school business looks like on a day-to-day basis.

Chapter V: Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to describe characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). The core belief that served as the basis for this work proposed that if a more complete understanding of the common characteristics and behaviors of the school boards in school districts that are considered to be successful could be obtained, professional development and other resources might then be identified or developed that might enable other school districts to operate more effectively.

The primary research questions that were developed in order to gain this depth of understanding included:

- Which self-reported behaviors do school board members believe have a positive impact on increasing student achievement?
- Are there characteristics shared by board members in school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) that might lead them to work more efficiently and effectively in the effort to improve student achievement?

The purpose of this chapter is to present interpretations of the results obtained through web-based surveys, personal interviews, ADE published professional development records, board minutes, achievement level records, a review of current literature, and my own experiences as they relate to the focus of this work. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the tools that were used to collect the data and the processes that supported my analysis before presenting an interpretation of the findings that were gathered. My interpretation of the data is integrated with

existing literature related to school boards, school board members, and their possible connection to student achievement before finally being encapsulated within the context of the two primary research questions. In conclusion, a synthesis of the data will show new understandings that can be inferred from the lessons learned throughout this study.

Analysis

An interpretive approach to analyzing the data was selected in order to allow for the construction of meaning from the characteristics and behaviors of the participants. The data gathered was interpreted and therefore became a resource for information that also contributes to the findings (Creswell, 2007). In the interpretive approach, the researcher is not only concerned with the participants in the study, but also with their interpretation of the events they describe during the study. As I participated in multiple reviews of the data collected, I began to specifically interpret the information through the lens of the primary research questions and the Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards (Center for Public Education, 2012).

After data collection, I worked to make meaning from the pieces of information provided by the web-based surveys, personal interviews, ADE published reports, and the review school district documents including minutes of board meetings occurring from July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2016. This involved multiple readings of all documents for the participating districts as well as the comparison districts.

The next phase of analysis focused upon the use of open-coding, “where the descriptors emerge from the data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 102). The analysis began with open-coding, “where the descriptors emerge from the data” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 102). The initial codes that were used were simplistic and predictable given the nature of the study and the survey questions that were developed. Even so, the process of coding allowed for the

identification of patterns. Figure 5.1 displays the initial code families created and managed with Atlas.ti.

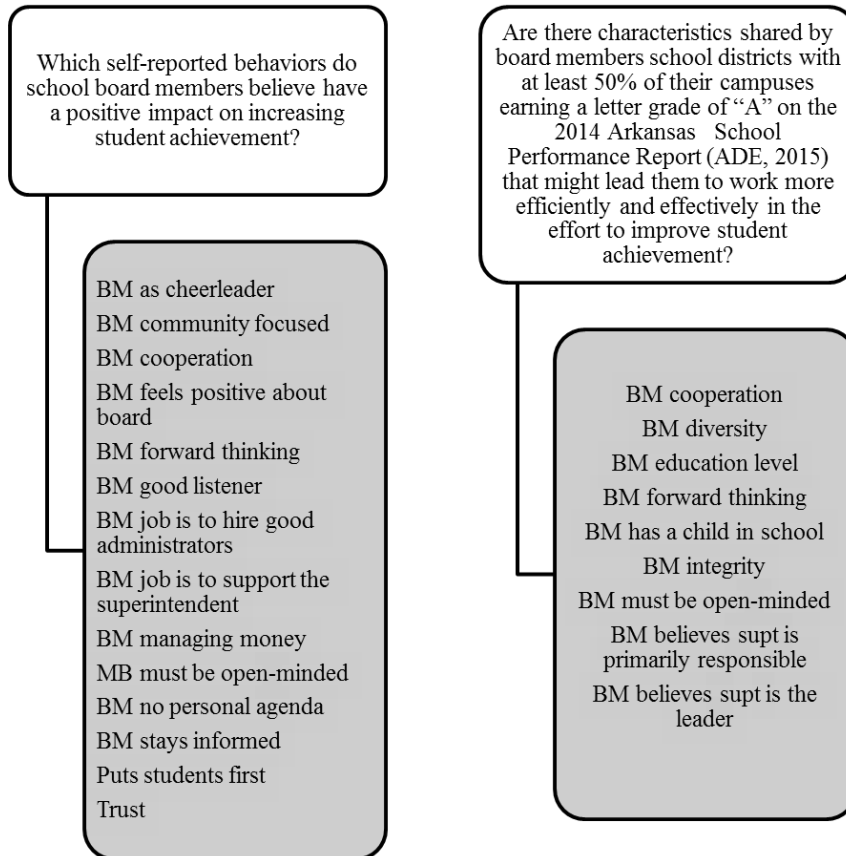


Figure 5.1 Initial Code Families

After the open-coding, axial coding was used to transform the small pieces of data that have been broken into isolated codes, back into useful, understandable information. Axial coding allowed for the reorganization of the individual codes around categories. Through this process, several common characteristics and behaviors among the board members surveyed, as well as the participating districts, emerged. This was especially evident when the commonalities were analyzed alongside the data from comparison districts. It was important to return

frequently to the primary documents in order to obtain confirmation or dissolution of apparent patterns. The basic codes that were initially selected were reformed as shown in Figure 5.2.

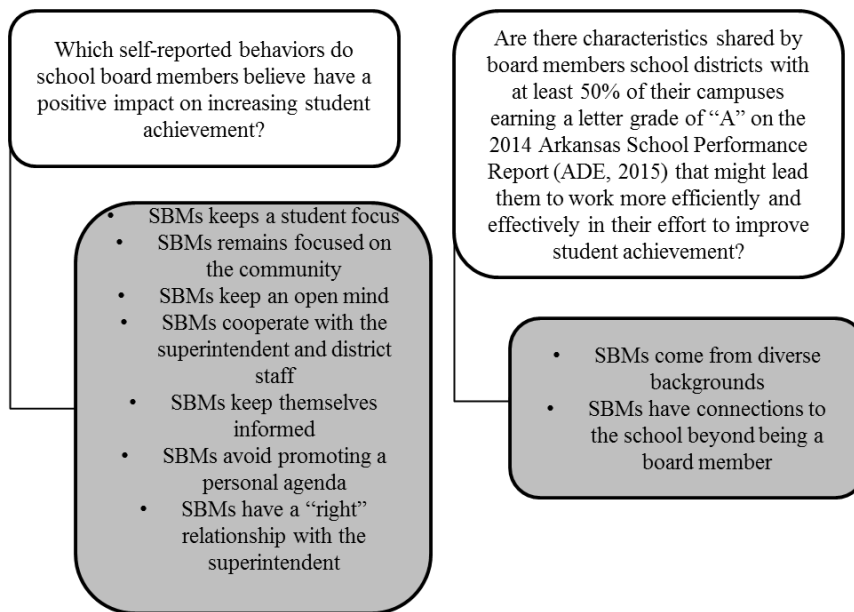


Figure 5.2 Code Families (Final)

Based upon the data and the resulting review and organizational process, three analytic categories were developed which focused upon the primary research question:

1. The relationship between the words of the participants and their own beliefs about their role in student achievement.
2. The relationship between the findings and the characteristics of school board members.
3. The relationship between specific findings from this study and The Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards (Center for Public Education, 2012).

Interpretation of the Findings

The discussion in this section will place the small pieces of data that were identified in the previous chapter into a more cohesive understanding of the beliefs and behaviors which are shared among school board members in districts that are labeled as successful in terms of student

achievement. Existing literature on effective school boards from the Center for Public Education (2012) will serve as the context for this interpretation.

Shared Vision of High Expectations

Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision. Effective boards make sure these goals remain the district's top priorities and that nothing else detracts from them. School board members that participated in a personal interview consistently cited the strong student focus of themselves and their colleagues as being critical to their school board's success in promoting student achievement in their district. These board members recognized that they had to be committed the students first and avoid personal agendas or other distractions that could deter them from helping their school district serve the students of their community. Board members repeatedly made statements that pointed me to their desire for a school district that provides students with the skills necessary to be successful after graduation. Many board members referenced college but others expressed the desire for their children to have jobs that would allow them to support themselves and their families. These board members wanted their children to not only get jobs, but they wanted them to get "the good jobs".

Participating board members also clearly articulated that they try to look at their decisions and ask themselves how the possible outcomes would impact students. This is consistent with the work of Griffin & Ward (2006) which found that effective school boards weigh their actions on the scale of contribution to instruction and student achievement.

Board members showed their desire for the very best for their students as far as academic achievement and post-high school success through their words. It was not only that the board members typically spoke for a longer period of time when the response was focused upon

student success, but also the tone of their voice and the warmth that was expressed. The board members that spoke with me had personal connections to their school district and weren't willing to settle for anything but the highest levels of achievement, regardless of the circumstances.

Shared Belief That All Children Can Learn

Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels. Board members in high achieving districts recognized that they needed to provide the “right programs” for all kids. The words “all kids” were repeated by many participants. These board members understood that they were not simply serving the students that were headed to college but they were also responsible for those that wanted to find a productive career or further their education in a different manner. A board member summarized this thought by saying, “...we have to find a pathway for every student and not just the majority.” All students were important to these board members.

This commitment to all children was not solely focused upon academic achievement. These board members felt driven to make sure that the students they served had many other needs met including mental health, school supplies, and even high-speed internet access. This underscores the assertion that the board members in the high-achieving school districts were genuinely committed to ALL children.

Collaborative Relationships with Staff and Community

Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals. These effective boards were actually found to be more likely to spend money specifically focused upon communication (Plough, 2014).

They did not leave good communication to chance. Board members that were interviewed expressed a similar commitment to the importance of communicating with the community regarding the activities of the school district. “It’s our responsibility” to help create a feeling of trust and positive energy for the work with the school. The boards in the districts that were studied felt that they represented their community. They understand that they have access to a greater level of understanding concerning the issues revolving around education and seem to feel obligated to share what they know with those in the community that have questions or misconceptions. These board members consistently communicated a feeling of team spirit and a collegial relationship with teachers, administrators, and community members. They were connected to the school district in some way other than simply by their position on the board. This connection was reported to not only be part of *the reason for their service* but also the *mode for much of their communication* concerning the district.

School board members that collaborate well with each other, the superintendent, and the community can see the results in the classroom (IASB, 2000). Connections to the district and the community, school board member attendance at regular board meetings, and experience as a board member could all be components of successful collaboration. The relationships that board members have with the school district outside of their role as board member may also be a contributing factor to their desire to collaborate and move the district forward. These board members are present for the work, they have experience with the work, and they have demonstrated their ability to get the work accomplished through decision making.

Appropriate Relationship with the Superintendent

Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust. All of the board members that

participated in a personal interview believed that the “right” relationship with the superintendent played a key role in their success as a district and board. Additionally, the posted school board minutes from all of the participating school districts reflected that the overwhelming majority of all votes taken by these school boards as a collective group during the regular board meetings resulted in a unanimous and affirmative decision. Board members attributed this to many factors including their commitment to make good decisions for students but they also cited their strong trust in the superintendent that they hired to led the district. They see themselves as leading alongside the superintendent, as a partner.

Research Question One: Which self-reported behaviors do school board members believe have a positive impact on increasing student achievement?

Based upon personal interviews from school board members who volunteered to participate in this study there are four behaviors that school board members in achieving school districts believe have a positive impact on student achievement: remaining student focused, keeping an open mind, maintaining an appropriate relationship with the superintendent and district staff, and staying informed on topics related to education.

Every board member that spoke with me expressed a personal focus on the best interests of students and also communicated that this focus was critical to their success as a school board member. These members also shared that their entire school board has the same focus on students. They were also able to demonstrate this focus through the actions and information they shared with me through the discussion of other topics throughout the interview. The board members in these districts stated that they, and their colleagues in their district, work to maintain a focus upon students and use that focus as a lens through which to view their decision making opportunities.

Board members also agreed that their ability to keep an open mind and listen to each other, staff, administration, and students was a key component for their success as a board and as a school district. Interview participants repeatedly stated the importance of listening to others as a means of demonstrating respect as well as allowing them to benefit from the experience of others. When board members keep an open mind, they limit the ability for personal agendas to interfere with their work.

Maintaining appropriate relationships with the superintendent and district staff was also a behavior that all of the participants identified as being necessary to their success as a board. They believe that their job is to hire a strong leader as a superintendent and then support him or her as needed. The board members recognize that they are not needed for micromanagement, especially if they do their job of hiring the superintendent well. They believe that their efforts to stay positive and connected to the district help them maintain a relationship with the superintendent and others that is healthy and productive and therefore, contributes to student success.

Board members are also aware of their need to keep themselves aware of relevant information so that they can better understand issues that come before them and make informed decisions. They don't rely on others to feed them information; they seek it out through attendance at professional development, visits to campus, and professional publications.

Research Question Two: Are there characteristics shared by board members in school districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of "A" on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015) that might lead them to work more efficiently and effectively in the effort to improve student achievement?

Based upon a review of school board documentation, personal interviews, and web-based surveys were three characteristics shared by school board members in achieving school districts: diversity, board members are connected to the school district, and regular board member attendance at meetings.

All board members that participated in a personal interview noted the diversity of the board members was a strong factor in their ability to support academic achievement. Diversity in board members was widely proposed by study participants as a source of strength for their boards. The diversity that was described by participating board members refers to occupation, financial status, education level, age, personal history, and area of greatest interest. Being a “well-rounded” board was repeatedly expressed as a major factor in the success of the school districts.

Board members in high achieving school districts are connected with the district they serve in at least one way other than in their role as a board member. Whether they have children in the district, are a former teacher, or a former student, the board members are connected in some way. This provides a build-in vested interest in the success of the school district and likely impacts their sense of self-efficacy. Believing that they can and should make a difference is crucial to their success (IASB, 2000).

A third characteristic of school boards in successful school districts is a positive attendance record for board members at school board meetings. These school board members are present for board meetings. They are demonstrating many things through their regular attendance including their commitment to their responsibility, commitment to the students, interest in the school district, and their expectation that they can make a difference with their presence.

Synthesis of the Findings

Education reform, as a topic for debate, legislation, and posts on social media, may have never been more popular. There are individuals and organizations that are looking for someone or something to blame for “failing” schools, some that might attempt to use education as a source for profit, and others that simply want the very best for children. I believe that the vast majority of Arkansans fall within the last category. We simply want educational services for our children that will genuinely prepare them to be successful as adults.

Whatever the motivation might be behind the heightened sense of urgency surrounding education, it is more important than ever that everyone involved with public education understand the situation and fully embrace their own role in addressing the challenges facing our schools from every direction. Governance of school districts is a natural place to look for answers when students do not appear to be experiencing success, no matter how the term “success” is defined. If school boards are to remain in their current role and at their existing level of influence and autonomy in their service to Arkansas’ school districts community members, state leaders, and board members themselves will need to see the local school board as a highly effective form of school leadership.

Across all of the interviews and surveys a single theme emerged that embodies what might be the most meaningful finding from this study: self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has been defined as an individual’s belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997). Even though there wasn’t a specific question that specifically addressed a board members sense of self-efficacy, it was exceedingly clear that the participants believed that their service on their local school board makes a difference in the lives of students, educators, and community members.

The Center for Public Education (2012), presents a school board's commitment to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction as the first of 8 characteristics that are common to effective school boards. These boards are extremely intentional in their efforts to make sure these goals remain the district's top priorities and that nothing else detracts from them. Included within this commitment is the understanding that school board members actually believe that they can make a difference and also that the school board as a collective group can have a meaningful impact on student achievement. The districts that participated in this study shared multiple beliefs and characteristics which were supported by many different studies on effective school boards however, the presence of a well-developed sense of self-efficacy that permeated throughout the data may be the starting point for those that seek to support school boards in becoming more effective in their work for public education in Arkansas.

Implications

As I concluded a professional learning activity that served to focus building and district leaders on the need for student focus and more effective use of professional learning communities as a vehicle for improving student achievement, a person working with the district in a position that does not allow them to have direct contact with the teaching and learning process asked, "We aren't ever going to do this perfectly. Why do we go to all of this trouble and spend all this time on this kind of thing? We are still going to be working with some that won't buy in?" I responded without hesitation, "Because we keep getting better. If we never try to improve, we won't. Every time we work to improve, we reach more children. We make a difference. As long as we keep working to improve, we will." There is a great deal of energy being expended in the effort to improve schools in Arkansas. This is an exciting time to be

working with Arkansas' educators to improve teaching and learning for our children. This study examined just one facet, among the thousands that are visible, of the diamond that are the public schools of Arkansas. Our schools are under attack on a daily basis from those outside of education as well as some within. The scrutiny, however it is intended, produces positive as well as negative results for students. A benefit that the attention to quality public schools continues to produce is a never-ending focus on improving education for children. Public schools can be their own worst enemy when success and student achievement are left to chance. Districts that are striving to remain relevant are becoming more intentional and strategic with their improvement efforts. School boards can play an important resource in these efforts.

This study has a potential for impacting public schools in Arkansas through the identification of the concept of "self-efficacy" as a focus for professional learning for school boards. This is not implying that if board members simply know the definition of self-efficacy, they will improve. The recommended approach begins with supporting school board members as they learn to embrace the belief that they can make a meaningful impact in the improvement of teaching and learning in their district.

Board members will need data to support this supposition. Sharing the existing literature that pertains to effective school boards along with the information gathered in this study which focuses specifically on Arkansas school districts can help board members begin to understand how they can make a difference. This recommendation should not be interpreted to mean that we need to simply say, "School boards, you are important." The focus must be upon behaviors, and in the case of self-efficacy, beliefs, that should become habits or habits of mind in order to enable the school board to have a greater impact on student achievement.

All of these activities support the work currently being done by organizations such as The National School Boards' Association, The Arkansas School Boards' Association, The Arkansas Leadership Academy, and The Arkansas Public School Resources Center. All children deserve to be educated. If school boards aren't responsible to see that this takes place, then who is?

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Appendix A

[Insert name of superintendent]

[Insert school district address]

[Insert current date]

[Insert appropriate greeting],

My name is Bridget Chitwood and I am the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Professional Development in a school district in central Arkansas. I am also a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas. The purpose of my study is to describe the characteristics and behaviors of school board members for districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). The [insert name of school campus], [insert name of school campus], and [insert name of school campus] in the [insert name of school district] were labeled as [insert label] in this report. I am asking your permission to contact the school board members in your district via email to conduct a web-based survey. The web-based survey will be sent to the email accounts that are made available to me by you or your designee.

For the purpose of my study, I do not need to collect email addresses, ip addresses, school district names, or even the names of the board members that choose to respond. I will provide all participants with the required confidentiality documents. If you will allow me to contact the board members in your school district via email for this short survey please indicate your permission below and provide the most appropriate contact email addresses. I will be excited to

share my work with you upon final approval of my Chair and the University of Arkansas. Please contact me if you have any questions at any point in this activity.

Thank you for your consideration,

Bridget Chitwood

bchitwoo@email.uark.edu

501-860-4947

___ Please do not contact school board members from the [insert name of district]

___ I agree to allow Bridget Chitwood, a doctoral candidate with the University of Arkansas, to contact school board members from the [insert name of district] at the following email addresses:

Board Member Email Address: _____

Board Member Email Address: _____

Board Member Email Address: _____

Board Member Email Address: _____

Board Member Email Address: _____

Board Member Email Address: _____

Board Member Email Address: _____

Appendix B Web-Based Survey Questions

This will be administered through a web-based survey tool. All interviewees will be aware that they are providing their consent to participate in this study as a result of responding to this survey.

Questions

1. What is your position (officer if applicable) on the school board?
2. How long have you served on a school board?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is your highest level of formal education?
5. Are you connected with the school you serve in any way other than as a board member?
(response options will include former student, faculty, parent of a student, other)
6. On average, how many regular school board meetings do you attend each year?
7. Do you have opportunities to visit classrooms or attend school events during the school day? (If so, about how many?)
8. What training have you had to help you as you serve on the school board?

Appendix C

Personal Interview Questions

Interviews were conducted via telephone and the participants agreed to be recorded to allow for transcription at a later date.

Questions:

1. What do you see as the primary role of the school board as it relates to improving student academic achievement?
2. How would you describe the ideal school board member?
3. When your board considers an agenda item such as a very large purchase or beginning a new construction project, do you attempt to reach consensus before the official vote?
4. If yes, how?
5. Overall, do you believe that the school board members with whom you serve work together effectively?
6. If yes, to what do you attribute this effective working relationship?
7. What do you see as the primary role of the superintendent as it relates to improving student academic achievement?
8. Who should be held the most accountable for student success?
9. If time and money were not obstacles, what one thing would you change about your school district to help students see greater academic success?
10. Is there anything that I haven't asked that you think could help me as I seek to understand how school boards support academic achievement?

Appendix D

Data Summary Table

	Descriptor 1	Descriptor 2	Descriptor 3	Descriptor 4	Descriptor 5	Descriptor 6
Pseudonym 1						
Pseudonym 2						
Pseudonym 3						
Pseudonym 4						
Pseudonym 5						
Pseudonym 6						
N=X	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %	# = x %

Appendix E

Participation Documentation

University of Arkansas

PART 1: Research Description

Principal Researcher: Bridget Chitwood

Research Title: Characteristics and Behaviors of School Board Members “Grade A” Arkansas Public School Districts

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to discover the characteristics and behaviors of school board members in districts where 50% or more of their campuses earned a letter grade of “A” on the 2014 Arkansas School Performance Report (ADE, 2015). Your participation will include a web-based survey. Your name and the name of your school district will not be used in any way and you will be referred to in all transcripts and data by a pseudonym.

This study will be conducted by Bridget Chitwood, a doctoral candidate at the University of Arkansas. The web-based survey will be sent to the email account that is made available to the researcher, or accessible through public information, as soon as you have given permission. A personal interview will also be conducted via telephone or in person, depending on the needs of the school board member.

Risks and Benefits:

This research is intended to contribute to the understanding of school board members and their possible impact on student achievement based on their characteristics and behaviors. This understanding may lead to the identification of areas of professional development that may be beneficial to other school board members. There is no physical risk related to this study above

that which is involved in a normal office meeting. There is no financial remuneration for your participation in this study.

Data Storage to Protect Confidentiality:

Participants will not be identified by name or institution in the course of this study, or in any publication thereof. Every effort will be made that all information provided by you will be treated as strictly confidential. All data will be coded and securely stored, and will be used for professional purposes only.

How the Results Will Be Used:

This research study is to be submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas. The results of this study will be published as a dissertation. In addition, information may be used for educational purposes in professional presentation(s) and/or educational publication(s).

PART 2: Participant's Rights

- I have read and discussed the research description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without jeopardy to future medical care, employment, student status, or other entitlements.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available that may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.

- Any information derived from the research that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have any questions regarding the research or my participation, I can contact the researcher, Bridget Chitwood who will answer my questions. The researcher's phone number is (501) 860-4947. I may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Ed Bengtson, at (479)-575-5092.
- If at any time I have comments or concerns regarding the conduct of the research, or questions about my rights as a research subject, I should contact The University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board. The phone number for the IRB is (479) 575-2151. Alternatively, I can write to the IRB at Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, 422 Administration Building, Fayetteville, AR 72701.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

Investigator's Verification of Explanation

I, Bridget Chitwood, certify that I have carefully explained the purpose and nature of this research to _____. He/she has had the opportunity to discuss it with me in detail. I have answered all his/her questions and he/she provided the affirmative agreement, through responding to the web-based survey, to participate in this research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Investigator's signature: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Appendix F

Document Summary Forms

	Board Minutes
Name of Document	
Total Number of Pages	
Date Received	
Date Reviewed	
Type of Document	
Brief Summary of Contents	
Significance of Document	
How Many Times Do the Board Minutes Reflect a Vote of the Members During Regular School Board Meetings?	
Of Votes Counted, How Many Split (Having Votes Both For and Against Issue)?	
Is There Anything Exceptional About Document?	
Additional Comments, Reflections, Issues	

	Professional Development
Name of Document	
Total Number of Pages	
Date Received	
Date Reviewed	
Type of Document	
Brief Summary of Contents	
Significance of Document	
How many times did a board member fail to earn the minimum hours of professional development?	
What is the average # of hours of professional development earned for this district?	
Is There Anything Exceptional About Document?	
Additional Comments, Reflections, Issues	

Appendix G

International Review Board Committee Approval Letter



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

May 10, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bridget Chitwood
Ed Bengtson

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 16-04-724

Protocol Title: *Characteristics and Behaviors of School Board Members in "Grade A" Arkansas Public School Districts*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 05/10/2016 Expiration Date: 05/09/2017

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 100 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior* to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.