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Factors and Sources of Information School Boards Consider when Evaluating a Superintendent

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Abstract

Factors and Sources of Information School Boards Consider when Evaluating a Superintendent

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This mixed methods study uses observations, survey, and interviews to examine the factors and sources of information school boards consider when they evaluate a superintendent. Exploring these elements provided an opportunity to identify what is most important to board members when considering a superintendent's performance. It also provided insight into board members' conception of their role, responsibility, and relationship with a superintendent.

Findings suggest that there is a relationship between a board members' length of service and the likelihood that they hold a trustee conception of their role. This conception relates to a likelihood that a board member supports recommendations from the superintendent, considers himself/herself responsible to the superintendent, and considers the superintendent extremely or very important as a source of information when evaluating the superintendent. Board members

with more tenure also seem more likely to consider student achievement data as a source of information when evaluating a superintendent.

The most important source of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent may be personal observation of the superintendent and his or her interactions with others. Similarly, the factor of performance board members most frequently emphasize when evaluating a superintendent is the superintendent's communication with them, the whole board, staff, and the community. Board members are constantly observing and evaluating a superintendent's performance, particularly throughout school board meetings.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my three children—Tiffany, Jessica, and Philip. May you always find the strength and resolve to dream big, pursue worthwhile goals, and make the most you can of yourselves—to be of greatest value to those around you. Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1.1.1 *The Important Function of School Boards*

Nearly 93,000, mostly volunteer, U.S. citizens serve on more than 13,000 boards of education in the United States (Hess & Meeks, 2010). School board members typically have no prerequisite experience, background, or qualifications more than residence in their respective district, voter registration, and lack of felony convictions. Board members usually serve without financial compensation, while taking time from gainful employment and personal pursuits. Sometimes, their service comes with great cost to relationships, community favorability, and privacy. We ask them to do this and somehow do it as a unit, not merely as separate individuals. In the U.S. system of democratically selected school governance, lay-elected citizens function as a collective to oversee and govern the administration of America's public schools.

This is no small endeavor, and it is fraught with inherent challenges of democratic governance. According to Barth and Delson (2015), the school districts board members serve are often the largest and most complex enterprises in their respective geographical areas. We ask these elected volunteers to understand multimillion-dollar budgets; complicated federal, state, and local regulations; rules for conducting meetings; and what is necessary for effective learning and teaching. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), public school boards oversaw the expenditures of more than \$600 billion in 2014 for educating nearly fifty million K-12 public school children (NCES, 2014).

While there is scant research on school boards and their effects on student outcomes (Land, 2002; Shoher & Hartney, 2014), there is no shortage of criticism from policymakers

(Hess & Meeks, 2010) and educators (Maxwell, 2013). Results from a Gallup/Education Week survey suggest most superintendents in the U.S. do not offer strong approval ratings of school boards' ability to govern districts (Maxwell, 2013). Only 2% of district superintendents reported they strongly agree that their boards govern school districts effectively (Maxwell, 2013).

The effectiveness of school governance could be vital to the outcomes of public education. Alsbury's (2001) research, based in Washington state, showed a strong relationship between what he called politically motivated turnover on school boards and a decrease in student learning outcomes. Others, such as Delagardelle (2008), have identified board member beliefs and actions that seem to have a relationship with improved student achievement. Lorentzen and McCaw (2015) showed a strong relationship between specific board behaviors and improved student achievement in Montana. Shober and Hartney (2014) in a report for the Fordham Foundation suggested, "The fact that board members can influence achievement, even loosely, merits much more attention—surely by scholars but also by voters, parents, taxpayers, and other policy-makers."

1.1.2 *The Nature of Board-Superintendent Relationships*

School boards, as citizen governors of public education administration, typically select and hire a superintendent to fulfill the duties of managing a school district. The relationship between a board and a superintendent is where the will of the public meets the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of hired professionals. Because this relationship between publicly elected school boards and the superintendents they hire is the critical intersection where public policy meets public school administration, one might expect this to be a challenging relationship.

Accordingly, conflict among school board members and between boards and superintendents is

widely reported (Carol, et al., 1986; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Land, 2002; Mountford, 2008; Plecki, McCleery, & Knapp, 2006).

According to Wilson (2004), conflict is an integral part of human nature. Conflict is especially apparent where there is competition for scarce resources. As stewards of the community's two most precious resources—its children and its money—school boards and the superintendents they employ are frequently determining how to allocate resources. This includes funding from federal, state, or local revenue as well as staff distribution, classroom assignments, supplies, facilities and facilities' maintenance. With multiple publics and constituent groups to serve, a certain degree of conflict may be unavoidable.

Problems at this intersection of publicly elected officials and hired professional staff are common in the U.S. Whitaker and DeHoog (1991) discussed turnover of city managers due to conflict with city councils. Kammerer, Farris, DeGrove, and Clubok (1962) discussed these same conflicts three decades earlier. Similarly, concerns with school boards and their relationships with the superintendents they hire are widely reported in literature about school leadership and governance, both historically (Nelson, 1988; Tyack & Hansot, 1982) and in the present day (Gelber, Thompson, & Leverett, 2015; Shober & Hartney, 2014).

Carol, et al., (1986) discuss specific challenges of boards working with superintendents, especially when there is turnover on the board. Plecki et al., (2006) noted the frequent criticism of this relationship, "School board members tend to have difficulty working together and with the superintendent as an effective governance team" (p.27). Similarly, superintendents tend to have difficulty working with school boards (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Especially when considering educational reforms, tension in board-superintendent relationships seems to be frequently associated with stymied progress. Danzberger, Kirst, and Usdan (1992) discussed this

concern. They found that the board-superintendent relationship determines whether education reforms are successful. When school boards resist, or are reluctant to support education reforms the superintendent wants to accomplish, there is likely to be turnover in the superintendent's position (Danzberger, et al., 1992).

Job stability for superintendents and turnover are one serious concern. Additionally, the relationship between the board and superintendent can affect the level of satisfaction with, and the performance of, the entire school district. Simpson (2013) found a statistically significant relationship between superintendent tenure and student achievement. Several researchers have suggested that how board members interact with each other and their superintendent may relate directly to the outcomes of public school students (Alsbury, 2015; Delagardelle, 2015; Shober & Hartney; 2014). Alsbury (2008) described a linkage of superintendent turnover with central office and building-level administrator turnover, turnover of teachers, and reduced student achievement. As well as a possible effect on student achievement, conflict among boards and superintendents could also have negative effects on the efficiency of public education. Unfortunately, little is known about the nature of board-superintendent relationships, and there is almost no research about the nature of the relationship from the perspective of school board members (Land, 2002, Delagardelle, 2008).

1.1.3 *The Opportunity of Superintendent Evaluation*

Typically, board members provide a formal evaluation of the superintendent's performance at least once each year. These evaluations may support whether the board decides to retain the superintendent, extend the length of a contract, and/or increase compensation. Not surprisingly, superintendents report a high level of stress around their performance reviews (Carter &

Cunningham, 1997; DiPaola, 2001). Hoyle and Skrla (1999) claim that evaluation can be a superintendent's worst nightmare.

Performance evaluation of a superintendent by school boards may pose unique challenges—especially when compared with other education professionals. The following six concerns emerge from literature on this topic (Candoli, Cullen, & Stufflebeam, 1997; Dawson & Quinn, 2010; Dillon & Halliwell, 1991; DiPaola, 2007; Hoyle & Skrla, 1999; Peterson, 1989):

1. The scope and breadth of a superintendent's duties might make it difficult to assess performance accurately.
2. Fairness and reliability of evaluation by diverse individuals collectively evaluating a superintendent could be questionable.
3. Knowledge of and understanding by board members about performance measures and inter-rater reliability (calibration of ratings) may be a concern.
4. Lack of previous experience with performance evaluation, and evaluation by a group, along with other aspects of individual's backgrounds might affect board member capacity and consistency when evaluating a superintendent.
5. Friction among school board members and between them and their superintendent seems to be commonplace.
6. Varied perspectives on roles, responsibility, and the purpose of public education could affect board member perceptions of the superintendent's performance.

Each of these concerns may have importance when examining the nature of superintendent evaluation and board-superintendent relationships. However, the occasion of superintendent

evaluation could provide a key opportunity to examine what boards really want from a superintendent, in spite of these concerns.

The factors and sources of information that board members consider when evaluating a superintendent may suggest how board members conceive of their role, their responsibility, what is most important to them, and the nature of the board-superintendent relationship from a board member perspective. In this study, the term *factor* refers to attributes or aspects of a superintendent's performance. *Sources of information* refers to evidence of performance such as written reports and data as well as statements or expressions from individuals. The terms *factors* and *sources of information* are used broadly to include any potential characteristic and suggestion of performance.

When a school board evaluates a superintendent, the full weight of the governance structure exercises authority to examine and hold accountable the system in which it governs. This critical nexus, where representatives of the public in public education—school boards and their members—intersects with administrators of public education—superintendents and the systems they administrate—deserves examination. While processes school boards use for evaluation and the dispositions of board members could contribute to the style and quality of evaluation, the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent could provide insight into the conceptions and intentions of board members.

As such, superintendent evaluation could provide an excellent opportunity to consider the relationship between a school board and superintendent. The evaluation of the superintendent offers an occasion to consider perceptions and sensemaking of the roles and dynamics among board members and superintendents. How board members and superintendents negotiate this aspect of their relationship and work collaboratively to identify and clarify (or not) mutually

agreed upon expectations could have important effects on a school district. Although improved superintendent evaluation might lead to district improvement, research suggests current practices for superintendent evaluation typically lack a clear process with objective measures (Dawson and Quinn, 2010).

Sometimes boards completely neglect or provide a cursory, subjective, and inconsistent performance review of the superintendent. When boards conduct superintendent evaluation in this way, it might be indicative of dysfunction within the board-superintendent relationship and could suggest the board is not fulfilling an appropriate oversight role for the district. Inadequate performance evaluation and problematic board-superintendent relationships both may relate to the amount of turnover among superintendents and board members. It might be that neither the board nor the superintendent has adequate experience with or understanding of appropriate and effective superintendent evaluation. Some board members suggest they do not have adequate information and evidence on which to base a superintendent's evaluation. A more thoughtful process might benefit all parties, help to mitigate some of the inherent tension, and promote improved district outcomes.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1 *Purpose of the Study*

Examining the sensemaking of board members regarding superintendent evaluation may offer a vantage point that is unique when compared with other research on school boards. Most of what we know about how school boards function comes from research performed by current and former administrators. This study seeks to understand board members' conception of their role, their responsibility, and their relationship with superintendents from the board member's

perspective. Rather than merely focusing on inquiry *about* school boards and their members, the study gives voice to board members by exploring and discussing what board members indicate is important to them.

Specifically, this study investigates the factors school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent, and where they get information regarding the superintendent's performance. Exploring the factors and sources of information that school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent provides an opportunity to gain insight into how boards conceive of this relationship and what is important to them. Identifying the factors board members consider could open future opportunities to examine whether and to what extent researchers, policymakers, and the public believe these are effective. This could promote more substantive discourse regarding values, beliefs, and the purpose of public education. Identifying and examining the sources of information board members consider could illuminate previously known or unknown pathways for board members to gain insight into a superintendent's performance. Here again, this disclosing provides opportunities for discussion about how the process of superintendent evaluation might be improved.

1.2.2 *Research Questions*

Table 1.1 identifies the six interrelated research questions explored in this study.

Table 1.1. Research Questions

1. What factors and sources of information do school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent, and what do board members believe might be important to consider when evaluating a superintendent?
2. What is the relationship between board members' background and their perspectives regarding superintendent evaluation?
3. What is the relationship between board members' prior knowledge and experience in education or with performance evaluation and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?
4. What is the relationship between how school board members conceive of their role—in particular, whether they think of their role as a trustee or a delegate—and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?
5. What is the relationship between how board members conceive of their responsibility—to whom and for what they feel responsible—and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?
6. What do board members believe to be sufficient information on which to evaluate a superintendent?

1.2.3 *Examining Board-Superintendent Relationships*

In preparing new superintendents, Johnson (2012) advises that defining the relationship between the superintendent and school board is the key aspect for a superintendent to lead an effective school district. Carter and Cunningham (1997) suggest that the relationship between a superintendent and board most clearly defines a superintendency. However, Hoyle and Skrla (1999), referencing Blumberg (1985), Knezevich (1975), and Cuban (1985), suggest that the position of a superintendent is all about conflict. Hoyle and Skrla (1999) cite Blumberg (1985) as expressing the relationship is about “living with conflict.” Carter and Cunningham (1997) further express that the position of a superintendent throughout its history has been one of

conflict and has placed superintendents “in one quandary or another.” Often that quandary has something to do with the relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

Mountford (2008) specifically asserts that challenges among school boards and superintendents have continued to exist from the very beginning of board-superintendent relationships.

1.2.4 *Perspectives on the Value of School Boards*

These relationship challenges among boards and superintendents contribute to controversy about the relevance and value of school boards. Three prominent education policy voices express varying perspectives regarding the relevance of school boards. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige (as cited by Johnson, 2012) stated, “The effectiveness of school board governance is the single most important determinant of school district success or failure” (p. 91). Former Houston school board member Don McAdams (2006) claims that if school systems improve, it will be because of school boards. On the other hand, a prominent critic of publicly elected school boards, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education Chester Finn claimed, “The local school board, especially the elected kind, is an anachronism and an outrage... We need to steel ourselves to put this dysfunctional arrangement out of its misery and move on to something that will work for children” (as cited by Hess & Meeks, 2010). This variance of perspectives might be unsurprising, since school boards interact with and are the recipients of shifting expectations of federal and state legislation, the public, and the school systems. However, this variance in opinions could contribute to role confusion among board members. Shifting and unclear expectations can blur the distinction between education administration and education governance.

1.2.5 *The Role of a School Board*

School boards, as the governing body of a school district, are responsible for the overall vision and direction of the district. They enact policies as parameters that direct the administration of the school district. Plecki, et al., (2006) explain, “Governance is not leadership per se. Rather, governance creates the framework through which high-quality leadership can be exercised throughout the educational system” (p. 3). One of the primary ways in which school boards govern is through policies.

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.150.230(2) entitled “District school directors’ responsibilities” states,

It shall be the responsibility of each common school district board of directors to adopt policies to:

- (a) Establish performance criteria and an evaluation process for its superintendent, classified staff, certificated personnel, including administrative staff, and for all programs constituting a part of such district’s curriculum. . . .
- (b) Determine the final assignment of staff, certificated or classified, according to board enumerated classroom and program needs and data, based upon a plan to ensure that the assignment policy . . .
- (c) Provide information to the local community and its electorate describing the school district’s policies concerning hiring, assigning, terminating, and evaluating staff. . . .
- (d) Determine the amount of instructional hours necessary for any student to acquire a quality education in such district. . . .
- (e) Determine the allocation of staff time. . . .

(f) Establish final curriculum standards consistent with law and rules of the superintendent of public instruction. . . .

(g) Evaluate teaching materials, including text books, teaching aids, handouts, or other printed material, in public hearing upon complaint by parents, guardians or custodians of students. . . .

This statute delineates the authorized roles of school boards, as long as readers do not miss the words *adopt policies to*.

Another authority Washington state law (RCW 28A.400.010) affords to a school board is to hire a superintendent as the chief administrator to lead and oversee daily and routine operations of the school district. The law grants discretion to the school board to determine the qualifications and longevity of a superintendent. This latitude might contribute to relationship challenges.

Shober and Hartney (2014) noted, “We find strong evidence that both knowledge and focus are shaped by board members’ occupational background and political ideology” (p. 21). School board members’ background and dispositions may also affect the nature of board-superintendent relationships. In particular, if a board member has previously worked in education or has family members working in education, that could affect how they perceive their role. Political philosophy, age, gender, household income, level of education, regionality, and rurality are all examples of background that might relate to how board members conceive of their role (Shober & Hartney, 2014).

Clearly defined roles and expectations could promote increased collaboration among boards and superintendents and support constructive relationships. However, despite the existence of board-superintendent relationships for more than 100 years, challenges persist.

Furthermore, not much is known from the perspective of school board members about how they conceive of their role or their relationship with superintendents.

1.2.6 *The Importance of the Board-Superintendent Relationship*

The national and state school boards associations acknowledge the importance of and challenges with board-superintendent relationships. The Center for Public Education, part of the National School Boards Association (NSBA), promotes *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*. One of the characteristics is “Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust” (Barth, 2011). The Washington School Board Standards also underscore the need to work toward mutual trust and commitment through teamwork and clear communication (WSSDA, 2009). These standards highlight that effective school boards delegate authority through written policy and provide clear expectations for the superintendent’s performance and evaluation.

If we knew more about school boards and their members’ perspectives, we might better understand the degree to which an essential conflict between political and expertise power affects their relationship with superintendents. Hoyle (1986) discusses two types of power that he describes as *authority* and *influence*. He defines authority as a form of power that derives from a legal right to make decisions about others, and he defines influence as a form of power that comes from an ability to affect decisions by informal means (Hoyle, 1986).

While structurally, school boards have a formal authority over superintendents, a structural lens offers only a limited view for examining this relationship. Expertise and charisma are two specific examples of influence suggested by Bacharach and Lawler (1980). A school board and its individual members could have expertise or charismatic influence with a superintendent in multiple ways. Additionally, there are times when a superintendent has formal

authority over individual members, but perhaps more specific to this study, superintendents generally have a high degree of influence on school boards and their members.

Deborah Land (2002) reported findings about school boards in *Local school boards under review: Their role and effectiveness in relation to students' academic achievement*. This report resounds with references to the scarcity of research about school boards. However, in the years since her report, there have been increased efforts in examining school boards, their capacities, and their influence (Alsbury, 2008 & 2003; Delagardelle 2008; Fusarelli, 2006; Hess, 2008; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Lorentzen & McCaw; Mountford, 2008; Plecki, et al., 2006; Shober & Hartney, 2014). Many of these studies suggest a challenging but potentially constructive relationship can exist between a board and superintendent. (Chapter 2 discusses these topics further.) Nonetheless, in the past decade, there has been little examination of how this relationship is reflected in superintendent evaluation.

1.3 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

School boards derive their authority from the state, including state constitutions, legislatures, statutes, and authorized agencies. Hill (2002), as cited by Plecki, et al., (2006) explained, “In essence, ‘boards operate on a grant of authority from the state’ and are assigned duties by state legislatures” (p.10). This is important because states have delegated some governance decisions and oversight to the local school board. When states retain a strong role or decide to subsume a larger role, that can erode the authority and capacity for local school board governance. One area that Washington state partially defines and then leaves up to local governance by school boards is the process for superintendent evaluation.

Washington law requires that school boards evaluate district superintendents at least annually. The statute (RCW 28A.405.100) that stipulates criteria for superintendent evaluation

could be considered as a list of competencies and duties for superintendents. This statute has three broad requirements: a) The school board establishes evaluative criteria, b) The board establishes evaluative procedures, and c) The criteria include eight specified categories. These categories are:

1. Knowledge of, experience in, and training in recognizing good professional performance, capabilities and development;
2. School administration and management;
3. School finance;
4. Professional preparation and scholarship;
5. Effort toward improvement when needed;
6. Interest in pupils, employees, patrons and subjects taught in school;
7. Leadership; and
8. Ability and performance of evaluation of school personnel.

Washington provides a rich setting for exploring board-superintendent relationships as well as the factors and sources of information that school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent. Characterized by Spitzer (2006) as a populist state, the people in Washington have authority to initiate recalls, referendums, and initiatives. Spitzer (2006) explains that Washington's constitution is "overwhelmingly 'populist'" in both its content and effect, and that populist effect strongly influences court interpretations, political process, and citizens' understanding of the identity of their political community.

Citizens of Washington state are accustomed to giving their voice in matters of the government, especially when it comes to their public schools. Voters elect the Chief State School Officer—The State Superintendent of Public Instruction. By virtue of this statewide

election process, people in Washington may be more specifically aware of statewide as well as local issues concerning education governance than citizens in states without this level of direct involvement in public education.

Similar to school governance in other states, the Washington Legislature created school districts and established school boards—called “boards of directors” in Washington—to govern school districts. Each Washington school district has five school directors, except Seattle, the largest district, which has seven. (Seattle is also the only school district in Washington that has contiguous boundaries with a municipality.) There are 1,477 school directors in Washington providing local public governance and oversight for 295 districts. In Washington, local voters residing within their school districts elect all of the 1,477 school directors. Voters elect most Washington school board members from local wards called “director districts.” They elect the rest as “at large” members from within their overall district boundaries.

A 2015 report from the Fordham Foundation (Zeehandelaar, et al., 2015) discusses education governance in each of the fifty states in the U.S. and the District of Columbia and ranks them on three measures:

1. The degree to which states vest authority for public education governance at the state or local level
2. Whether states consolidate or distribute authority among institutions
3. The extent to which states encourage or restrict public participation in education policymaking

They rank Washington as thirteenth out of fifty-one in vesting more authority at the state than the local level for public education governance. Zeehandelaar, et al., (2015) rank Washington forty-third out of fifty-one for having education governance authority distributed among institutions,

rather than consolidated. They rank Washington as encouraging more public participation in education policymaking than forty-two other states (Zeehandelaar, et al., 2015).

This supports the likelihood that Washington may have a more informed and actively engaged public in education governance than is typical in most states. At the same time, they may have a more diffuse and perhaps convoluted system of public school governance than is typical. In a 1997 report on the conditions of public education in Washington state, Plecki, et al., (2006) wrote, “As currently structured, it is difficult to know who is in charge of or accountable for specific education policies” (p. 126). Pertinent to this study, this means that not only do Washington school boards have less authority than thirty-seven other states, the remaining authority is more diffuse than forty-one other states (Zeehandelaar, et al., 2015). This is important because in Washington, school boards do not merely share their authority with a state department of education, rather they share their authority with a state agency, a legislature, a state board of education, a professional educators’ standards board, and nine educational services districts. All this suggests that Washington board members may feel less empowered and more confused in their role than their counterparts in other states.

Even though the state established local school boards and delegated specific authority to them, such as the election of a district superintendent and placing tax levies on ballots, the state retains the authority for most decisions about governing public education within Washington. Washington is a good example of what Epstein (2004) described as a “tangled web” of school governance that is part of the social, cultural, political, and economic context in which Washington school boards evaluate their superintendents. Figure 1.1 highlights the complicated and diffuse governance structure of public education in Washington.

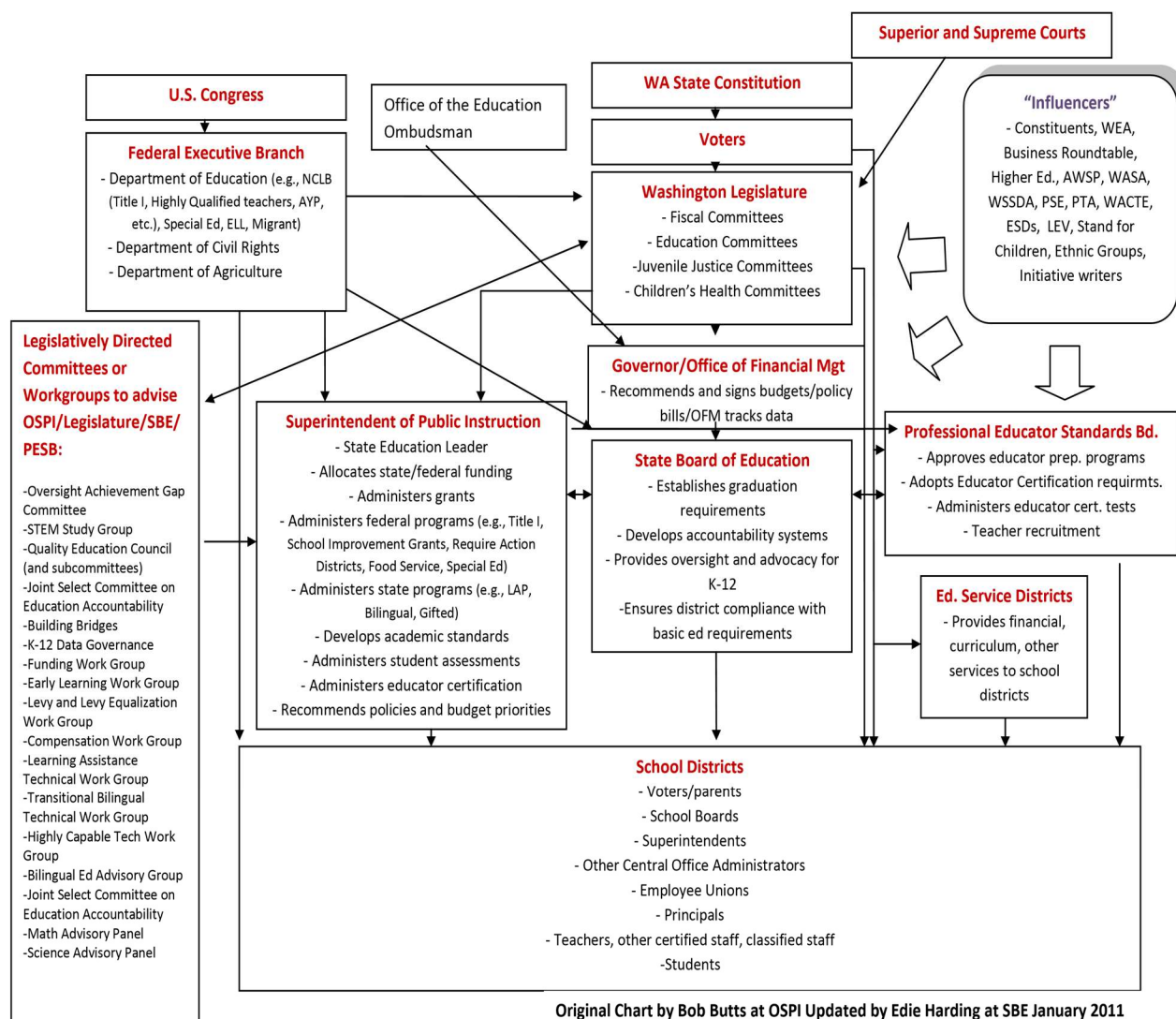


Figure 1.1. Washington state public education governance structure.

As part of this complicated structure, in 1942 the legislature authorized the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) as a state agency, "for the coordination of programs and procedures pertaining to policymaking and to control and management among the school districts of the state" (RCW 28A 345.010). In August 2012, WSSDA initiated a statewide initiative to develop and pilot multiple approaches and instruments for recommended use in superintendent evaluation in the state. In September 2012, WSSDA formally collaborated with

the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) to launch the initiative that this researcher developed as a proposal. The WSSDA Board of Directors served as an oversight committee and has final authority over which instruments and approaches they will recommend to Washington school districts.

The WSSDA Board established principles and components, based on promising practices from other states, to guide the initiative. Representatives from WSSDA and WASA, together with a representative from the Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) and a representative from OSPI, comprised a steering committee. The steering committee met quarterly to guide and monitor piloted approaches for superintendent evaluation. More than 40 school districts participated in four pilots throughout the state.

Recent legislation in Washington suggests there is a compelling public interest in improving the quality of performance evaluation for teachers and principals. In 2012, Governor Christine Gregoire signed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5895—a law that requires all Washington school boards to “establish evaluative criteria and procedures for all certificated classroom teachers and certificated support personnel” (p. 2). Notably, discussion of superintendent evaluation was not a formal part of the deliberations prior to the adoption of this legislation.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The critical importance of the board-superintendent relationship suggests a need to understand how board members and superintendents conceive of their relationship and what might help them work well together (Dillon & Halliwell, 1991; Goodman & Zimmerman, 1997; Shober & Hartney, 2014). Understanding how board members approach this relationship and their role in public education might provide insight into causes of challenges in school governance and

suggest ways to support improvement. While school boards are widely criticized, there is limited research about them (Goodman & Zimmerman, 1997; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Land, 2002). Inquiry from school board member perspectives and sensemaking is especially limited (Delagardelle, 2008). Additionally, there is little existing research on what board members think about this relationship and, in particular, the factors they consider when they evaluate the superintendent's performance (Dillon & Halliwell, 1991; Hess, 2002; Hess & Meeks, 2010).

In examining the factors and sources of information board members consider, this study may provide insight into reported challenges such as a lack of previous experience or understanding, as well as board members' conception of their role and conception of their responsibility. This study applies mixed methods to explore the factors and sources of information school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. Findings may suggest whether the perspectives of school board members support concerns about their ability to conduct performance appraisal of a superintendent. The study may also provide insight into reported challenges among school boards, including difficulties in relationships with each other and with superintendents.

The occasion of superintendent evaluation may provide a unique opportunity to examine aspects of the relationship. It might be a snapshot of boards exercising positional authority and fulfilling the responsibility they have to their state and public. This examination of board members' sensemaking when evaluating a superintendent may shed light on their perspectives of their relationship, roles, responsibility, and possible contributions to conflict. Coincidentally, current or former administrators, those working for administrators, or those preparing administrators, have conducted nearly all the research on board-superintendent relationships. A

former school board member, who is employed to help develop school boards, conducted this study. Issues of positionality and potential biases are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE INFORMING LITERATURE

2.1 TENSION INHERENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND BOARD-SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

An ongoing inductive review of the literature about school boards and their relationships with superintendents continued to guide this inquiry throughout the study. Other emerging studies of school boards reinforced consideration of how a board member's background such as prior employment in education and political philosophy might relate to the factors and sources they consider when evaluating a superintendent (Shober & Hartney, 2014). A recent report by the Fordham Institute (Zeehandelaar, et al., 2015) helped to situate this Washington study and describe how the data may and may not relate closely to school board perceptions in other states. Lorentzen and McCaw (2015) demonstrated a relationship between school boards having clearly stated superintendent goals based on student achievement and actual achievement on state tests. Additionally, Saatcioglu's (2015) discussion of brokerage (external relationships) and closure (internal relationships) by school boards highlighted the contextual complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the school board's dynamic role within a sociopolitical context.

The sociopolitical context includes these competing purposes of public education, identified by Labaree (1997)—democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. These purposes coexist within an innate tension of control and resistance. Allen and Mintrom (2010) suggest there is inherent conflict within the political values underpinning these three competing purposes of public education. Allen and Mintrom (2010) claim that this conflict results in organizational structures for schools that are contradictory in their practices and outcomes.

Higgins and Abowitz (2011) contemplate a framework for considering the extent to which schools are fulfilling public aims. Higgins and Abowitz (2011) pose questions for examining this ideal and suggest thinking of them as “productive tensions” (p. 370).

Creswell (2003) citing Thomas (1993) explains that critical research starts with a premise that all of cultural life is in a constant tension between control and resistance. This seems to be the case with board-superintendent relationships, which may exhibit tensions known to be inherent within public education. Acknowledgement of this tension, which could exist in any democratic form of public school governance, may be essential for understanding the tensions within school boards and between boards and superintendents. Plecki et al. (2006) explained that, “The political context and constant shifting of power inherent in education governance” (p. 28) often undermine board-superintendent relationships. For the purpose of definition, Hess and Meeks (2010) explain, *governance* “establishes the organizational mission, sets the tone, holds management accountable, and takes ultimate responsibility for outcomes.”

This study’s conceptual framework (Figure 2.1), presented later in this chapter, depicts the board-superintendent relationship and superintendent evaluation occurring within the context of international, national, state, regional, and local influences. Problems widely reported in the literature regarding board-superintendent relationships (Carol et al., 1986; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Land, 2002; Mountford, 2008; Plecki et al., 2006;), could stem from the political nature of the selection and role of school board members as well as the political nature of the selection and role of a superintendent. Carter and Cunningham (1997) describe the superintendency as a “highly politicized” (p. 3) job.

One might expect the political nature of local school governance—established by popular vote—to yield a shifting political landscape with every election cycle or appointment of a new

board member. For this reason, Björk (2008) suggests a political lens could be helpful when examining the board-superintendent relationship. Bolman and Deal (2003) describe a political frame as asserting that when there are enduring differences and scarce resources, conflict among members is unavoidable, and power is a key resource. This suggests that board member and superintendent positions are both political because they are addressing and distributing scarce resources within a local community (Bolman & Deal, 2003). As Bolman and Deal attest, there is no question whether organizations (such as school districts) are political—the question is what type of politics they have. Of respondents to the national survey reported by Hess and Meeks (2010), 94.5% of school board members joined their board after a successful election.

Hess and Meeks (2010) suggest that elections are a critical connection for any system of democratic governance. Even though a majority of school board members describes their elections as *easy* (Hess & Meeks, 2010), in large districts (15,000 or more students), more than a quarter of board members spent \$10,000 or more on their most recent election (Hess & Meeks, 2010). The political position of school board members as elected representatives from their community could suggest that board members are beholden to their electorate and inclined to retain favorability with a majority of voters. Consequently, the superintendents hired by these elected boards may be in a politically volatile role.

Björk (2008) noted that understanding the dynamic relationship of school boards, communities, and superintendents “provides a framework for understanding the use of formal and informal power and the micropolitics of superintendent-school board relations” (p. 71). Hoyle (1986) discussed two types of power—positional authority and influence. Influence as a form of power can come from information and expertise, control of rewards, access to and control of agendas, alliances and networks, control of meaning and symbols, coercion, and

charisma (French, Raven, & Cartwright 1959). Through a political frame, multiple and complex relationships may exist in a given board-superintendent dynamic. The political nature of board member selection and the political role of a superintendent in allocating and recommending allocation of scarce resources can lock the governance team in a juggernaut. Ultimately, this tension could catalyze unhelpful turnover of both superintendents and board members.

Additionally, some conflict may be due to a lack of specific advance preparation for board members and superintendents alike. Few previous experiences or training might help a lay-elected citizen understand the complex role of a school board member. Similarly, for superintendents, they may not typically have previous experience working for an elected lay-citizen board. Board members may not typically have previous experience working as part of a group that has supervisory or line authority over a professional administrator. Discussing the needs with administrators in an academic setting prior to selection as a superintendent may not provide opportunity to grasp fully, much less prepare administrators for working for a school board. Similarly, and perhaps more challenging, attempting to persuade school board members after election by the public of particular models for behavior, discussion, and decision-making could be a futile endeavor. While some, such as Carter and Cunningham (1997) lament the frequent turnover of superintendents, turnover of school board members may directly relate to that problem.

According to Alsbury (2003), politically motivated (involuntary) turnover on school boards correlates negatively with student achievement. Table 2.1 depicts Alsbury's (2003) designations of political and apolitical board member turnover:

Table 2.1. Political Versus Apolitical Turnover

Politically motivated turnover (Causes of involuntary turnover/defeat)	Apolitically motivated turnover (Causes of voluntary turnover)
Public pressure	Too time consuming
Dissatisfied with school programs	Satisfied all her/his goals
Time wasted on unimportant matters	Personal or family health
Interferes with personal business	Served long enough/someone else's turn
State/federal reform movements	Moved out of town or voter district
Conflict with other board members	
Teacher unions	

Alsbury's (2003) typology of apolitical (voluntary) turnover includes reasons such as health, relocation, satisfaction with goals accomplished on the board, lack of time, or an interest in letting someone else serve.

Alsbury's (2003) work builds upon the dissatisfaction theory, as described by Lutz (1977) and its impact on school board elections. The dissatisfaction theory suggests that when voters choose not to reelect incumbent school board members, often they are looking for whole scale change in the school district. Alsbury's (2001 & 2008) inferences point toward political dynamics, externally and internally, that affect the sensemaking of board members with superintendents and the communities they serve. How board members conceive of their role and think about their responsibility may represent various perspectives within the public and greatly influence school board evaluation of a superintendent.

Carol, et al. (1986) discuss specific challenges of boards working with superintendents, especially when there is turnover on the board. New board members frequently want a new superintendent (Carol, et al., 1986). Carter and Cunningham (1997) found that superintendents cite challenging relationships with school boards as the most common reason they leave a district. Board and superintendent turnover can erode or undermine support for the current

direction and programs within a district (Alsbury, 2008; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Waters and Marzano (2006) correlated superintendent tenure with student achievement and found that improvement can be demonstrated even in the second year of a superintendent's tenure. On the other hand, Alsbury (2008) discovered that a lack of superintendent turnover in smaller districts correlated with a decline in student achievement. Alsbury (2008) suggests that superintendents, who are able to sustain long tenure in school districts, often accomplish that by not having changes or reforms in order to keep peace and reduce conflict. It could be the case that superintendents with long tenure in a district have not had appropriate critique and review by their school board, or they may have sacrificed district improvement to appease board members.

When an elected school board evaluates a superintendent, Hoyle and Skrla (1999) describe the occasion as integrally connected with political dynamics. A gap between board members and superintendents' perception of the purpose of superintendent evaluation could help explain some of the tension within the board-superintendent relationship. Dillon and Halliwell (1991) found that superintendents identified strengthening working relationships with the community and between the board and superintendent as the most important purposes of superintendent evaluation. On the other hand, Dillon and Halliwell (1991) found that board presidents considered the greatest benefit of superintendent evaluation is that it "improves the instructional leadership role of the superintendent" (pp. 331-332). This gap in the perceptions of the purpose of superintendent evaluation raises important concerns for school districts. This type of difference in perspectives between board members and superintendents may illustrate the precarious nature of their relationship.

Petersen and Fusarelli (2006) reviewed the salient literature and noted that this "precarious" board-superintendent relationship:

1. Deters school improvement.
2. Affects the quality of educational programs.
3. Increases conflict over district instructional goals and objectives.
4. Weakens district stability and morale.
5. Negatively influences the superintendent's credibility.
6. Impedes critical reform efforts and collaborative long-range planning.
7. Results in an increase in the "revolving door syndrome" of district superintendents.

Each of these concerns could represent serious challenges for school districts. Conflict between boards and superintendents could diffuse and distract attention from educational priorities. Hindrances to school improvement, and long-range planning, might maintain ineffective programs or disrupt coherence throughout a district. Lack of credibility among district leadership could result in decreased public support for schools and decreased support of staff's strategic initiatives.

With the reported problems with the board-superintendent relationship and the implications of those problems for a district, it is not surprising that the act of superintendent evaluation might be problematic. Board development specialist Linda Dawson (2010) discussed how gaps in the perceived purpose of superintendent evaluation play out in practice and found:

Most superintendent evaluation "processes" (we use the term loosely) have little or nothing to do with job performance, and usually all to do with whether board members like the superintendent's style, appearance, or other subjective criteria. Most of the time, the evaluation is based on a checklist or values that were never discussed with the superintendent in advance. Result? The superintendent has little more than a vague

notion about what was expected during the period being evaluated, and certainly no idea how to predict the result of the process (p. 1).

Dawson (2010) suggests that boards and superintendents typically may not have an intentional or clearly understood practice when it comes to superintendent evaluation, and the practice they have may not be helpful for improving performance or the relationship. DiPaola (2003) concurred, that although 90% of superintendents received an annual evaluation, less than 10% said their board discussed performance standards with them at the time they were hired. Varied expectations due to different backgrounds, experiences, conceptions of responsibility, and conceptions of roles of board members could also contribute to lack of clarity and shared understanding of the purpose of and process for superintendent evaluation.

The reported confusion and conflict in board-superintendent relationships might be predictable if a school board is unclear in its expectations of the superintendent or not specifically identifying information and evidence upon which to base a performance appraisal in advance. In a case study of a school board's communication, Castor (2007) noted that board members come from diverse backgrounds and their only common tie may be board membership. Castor (2007) acknowledged that this could make them "particularly susceptible to misunderstandings and miscommunication" (p. 111). On the other hand, Peterson (1989) identified superintendent evaluation as an opportunity to enhance communication and clarify expectations for the relationship.

The literature suggests potential sources of tension in board-superintendent relationships. These sources of tension include:

1. The varied background and experience of board members (Castor, 2007)
2. Conceptions of responsibility (Allen & Mintrom, 2010)

3. Conceptions of roles (Lutz, 1977)
4. Factors and sources of information considered (Dillon & Halliwell, 1991).

2.2 BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

The demographics of board members may affect the nature of board-superintendent relationships as well as the factors and sources of information that board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. Hess and Meeks (2010) report that nationally school board members are more likely than the average American adult to be male, white, over 40, have school age children, have at least a Bachelor's degree, and have a household income above \$50,000 (see Table 2.2 below).

Table 2.2. Demographics of School Board Members and U.S. Adults

	School Board Members	U.S. Adults
Male	56%	49.2%
White	80.7%	74.1%
Over 40	95.4%	62.9%
School age children	38.1%	17%
Bachelor's degree	74.2%	29.5% (over 25)
Household income at least \$50,000	90.4%	50% (more than \$50,303)

Source: Hess & Meeks, 2010; pp. 20-21

In addition to general demographic information, it is plausible that experience with performance evaluation and/or a background of working in education might affect board member perspectives when evaluating a superintendent. DiPaola (2003) asserted that lay elected school board members typically lack the experience and expertise to evaluate consistently a superintendent's performance based on previously agreed upon evidence and outcomes. The accuracy of the assertion that school board members lack experience and expertise to perform superintendent evaluation needs to be tested.

Nationally, 27.1% of board members work in education (Hess & Meeks, 2010, p. 21). With five member school boards in Washington's school districts (except Seattle with seven

members), this could suggest that Washington school boards on average have at least one member with a background of employment in education. Additionally, with the extent of college graduates on school boards, it might be probable that a typical board member has a high level of previous experience with performance evaluation. It could be that board members do have the necessary experience and expertise to evaluate a superintendent, and other factors may contribute more strongly to concerns. On the other hand, it may be that the specific expertise and experiences of board members create additional complications.

One of these complications with superintendent evaluation could be that 10.2% of board members nationally have belonged to educator unions in the district where they are a board member (Hess & Meeks, 2010, p. 43). Again, in Washington this might infer that approximately one in two school districts has a former union member from their district currently serving on the board. Intriguingly, Shober and Hartney (2014) suggested that board members, who come from a background in education or business, know less about what it takes to improve student achievement than board members that come from other vocations. They found that board members with a background of working in education are more likely to state that school finances are a barrier to achievement and that teacher pay is the key to improving student achievement in their district, regardless of the level of teacher pay or funding in their district (Shober & Hartney, 2014). Hence, a background in education or experience with performance reviews might affect which factors and sources of information a board member considers when performing superintendent evaluation.

According to Chester Finn, (as cited by Hess & Meeks, 2010), school boards and their perspectives are clearly malefactors. He decries school boards and the perspectives they represent as impediments to educational reform and improvement. Finn suggests that board

members are more concerned with the well-being of the district (such as fiscal stability) than with educational improvement (Hess & Meeks, 2010). In his claims, Finn cites:

- 1) More than a quarter of board members are current or former educators.
- 2) More than a third in large districts (15,000 or more students) receive campaign contributions from their education unions.
- 3) Many regard their role like that of a corporate board of directors (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

Whether or not Finn's surmisings are accurate, board members' backgrounds and experiences could affect the way they approach their role of governing a school district. If a board member has never formally evaluated an employee, he might have trouble knowing where to start. On the other hand if a board member is used to a prescribed approach for evaluation, such as one used in a for profit corporate setting, she may be overly focused on financial goals with interest in adjusting financial compensation to the superintendent based on the financial position of the district. Background and experience may not only influence how board members approach their work, it could also help shape the way board members conceive of their sense of responsibility.

2.3 CONCEPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

Allen and Mintrom (2010), summarizing findings of others (R. A. Heifetz, 1994; R. E. Quinn, 2000; and K. E. Weick, 2001), wrote:

Work to address difficult social problems can start when one person or a small group of people are prepared to assume responsibility, even when their capacity for control might initially be highly constrained. The act of assuming responsibility can serve to unleash

creative problem solving on the part of others who might otherwise have felt immobilized by prevailing conditions.” (p. 446)

The ways in which school board members conceive of their responsibility and act accordingly may reflect the degree to which they think of themselves as capable of exerting positive influence on district outcomes. Allen and Mintrom (2010) discuss that, public schools, and the school boards that govern them, have two major responsibilities for sustaining democratic practice:

1. Developing young people with the skills and values to support cohesive, democratic practice.
2. Governing schools in ways that preserve and promote the public’s interest.

The extent to which school board members set aside their self-interest to act in the best interests of children may reflect a board member’s self-conception as a fiduciary for children (Shapiro, 1999, as cited by Allen & Mintrom, 2010). One could hope that a citizen running for a position, accepting a position, and/or taking an oath of office for school board service, is cognizantly accepting the corresponding responsibility commensurate with the position. However, how an individual conceives of that responsibility—what they are responsible for and to whom they are responsible—could have vastly different implications for how he or she conceives of the role, especially regarding their relationship with the superintendent and evaluating his or her performance. To whom board members conceive of themselves as responsible and for what they conceive of themselves responsible may affect the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent.

Allen and Mintrom (2010) assert, “Responsibility is manifest when representative actors face choices, understand the broader consequences of those choices, and choose options that are

likely to produce good and fair outcomes” (p. 439). The question of to whom and for what board members consider themselves responsible could be prerequisite for how board members think about consequences, options, and what is fair. A board member’s background and experiences could influence his or her awareness and understanding of the choices and consequences in decision-making. In addition, to whom and for what a board member feels responsible may influence a board member’s perspectives and decisions. While Higgins & Abowitz (2011) explain that we elect school board members at the local level to represent the collective interests of the entire district, board members may at times feel a responsibility to certain constituents such as staff or business interests (Finn, as cited by Hess & Meeks, 2010; Labaree, 1997). For example, a former staff member in a school district may feel it is logical and perhaps essential to consult with staff members when making a decision. Parents on school boards might naturally look to other parents when making decisions. Business people might strongly consider the opinions and perspectives of other business people in school district decisions. This could be a natural and rational course of action. Specifically pertinent to this discussion is: To whom do board members consider themselves responsible—fellow board members, the superintendent, voters, parents, students, minority students and communities in the district, teachers and staff, business and employers, the state government, the federal government, and/or others? To what extent and in what priority do school board members think of themselves as responsible to these constituents?

In addition to whom they feel responsible, board members’ background and experiences could influence how they conceive of the object of their responsibility. An individual with a background in finance might consider himself responsible for the fiscal matters of a school district. A board member with a background in community service and volunteerism could think

of herself primarily responsible for inclusiveness in district decision-making, services, and participation. Educators or former educators on school boards might consider their responsibility to teachers and staff a high priority. Health practitioners and nutritionists might naturally conceive of themselves as responsible for the nutrition of food service programs, physical education, and the physical-social-emotional well-being of the children. How board members conceive of what they are responsible for could affect the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent and influence their conception of their role.

2.4 CONCEPTION OF ROLE

Based on his research in India, Bailey (1965) proposed a framework for examining conceptions of roles in councils and committees. Bailey's (1965) depiction of an *elite council* suggests one end of a continuum, which he describes as a "ruling oligarchy" (pp. 9-10). At the other end of the continuum, an *arena council* is "a place in which the representatives of segments in the public come into conflict with one another" (Bailey, 1965, p. 10). In this model, elite councils are likely to come into agreement—often represented by unanimous votes. On the other hand, an arena council may more completely represent multiple voices of constituents and is unlikely to compromise or reach consensus.

Since Bailey's presentation of his paper in 1965, others have used this framework to consider conceptions of school boards. Lutz (1977) discussed the behaviors and distinctions between school boards functioning as an *elite* or an *arena* council. Lutz (1977) suggested, "It might be reasoned that the school board is always operating within a framework of fluid and conflicting values" (p. 126). Lutz (1977) uses the dissatisfaction theory to describe a pattern where, once the public is dissatisfied enough with a perceived lack of representation of their opinions or demands, they elect new board members as change agents. Change agents tend to

conceive of their role as an arena board member. Alsbury (2008) uses the terms *trustees* and *delegates*, in lieu of elite and arena. Alsbury (2008) and Lutz (1977) noted that the more a board functions as a trustee council, the more smoothly the school board and superintendent appear to operate. This can create greater stability for the superintendent, central office personnel, principals, teachers, support staff, students, families, and community. However, it could also mean less public vetting of ideas. While a board operating as delegates in a representative council may appear more receptive to ideas of individual members of the public, at the same time it could create less stability for the superintendent and not maintain a consistent course of action for the school district (Alsbury, 2008).

This conception of a board member's role as that of a trustee versus a delegate, and the way board members describe their role, could suggest the extent to which the school board is democratizing in terms of representing the needs and interests of individual students and constituents within the district. This may relate to the competing purposes of public education as described by Labaree (1997) and Higgins and Abowitz (2011). The factors and sources of information school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent may relate to these competing purposes of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility.

Situated in the critical junction between public policy and oversight and the daily administration of public schools, school boards may have a pivotal role that influences the degree to which public schools are public in form as well as in practice. Higgins and Abowitz (2011) discuss the distinctions between a formalist definition and a functionalist definition of public schools. As they express, "While a formalist would judge the 'publicness' of schools in terms of formal features such as funding and control, a functionalist would ask how well such a school performs its public functions or purposes" (Higgins and Abowitz, 2011, p. 367). In the

case of school boards and school governance, just because public schools are formally *public*, in that publicly elected or appointed board members govern them, does not ensure that those public schools are functionally public and serving the shared interests of all the people in the district. The extent to which public schools serve the interests of each and every child and the extent to which public schools are democratizing in developing values essential for democracy could relate to school boards' role and board members' conception of their role.

Superintendent evaluation may provide an opportunity to clarify the board's role (Peterson, 1989). It might also help improve board members' understanding of the role of the superintendent. The evaluation process could provide an opportunity to enhance collaboration for improvement of district performance and accomplishment of a long-term vision. However, it might be rare to find board members or superintendents that are comfortable with the level of clarity of expectations or the quality of the process or outcomes of their evaluation.

Considering the conceptualization of school boards as trustees vs. delegates, do board members consider it their role to support the superintendent, regardless of his or her recommendation? Is the role of the school board to challenge the superintendent, regardless of the recommendation or action? Alternatively, is there a balanced approach that includes both challenge and support, empowerment and oversight (Alsbury, 2015)?

Some authors suggest a unified board; more similar to a trustee board, might be a preferred role for boards in their relationship with the superintendent, each other, and their constituents. Johnson (2012) cites Goodman and Zimmerman's (2000) findings that "first and foremost, the board and superintendent must become a unified governance team, with a unity of purpose, a clear mission, and a shared sense of responsibility for action to achieve a long term vision" (p. 9). This "unified governance team" approach, supported by Johnson (2012), as well

as by guidance from NSBA and state school boards associations, seems to correspond more with improved student achievement than a representative council approach (Alsbury, 2008).

However, unified governance might imply a less functionally public role that promotes and provides active participation from community members, parents, staff, and students. This could limit opportunities for minority voices, unless the board consistently seeks representation and participation from them. This illustrates an inherent tension within public school governance. How a board member conceives of his or her role could be located within this tension and might influence the factors and sources of information considered when evaluating a superintendent.

2.5 FACTORS AND SOURCES

The factors and sources of information school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent could provide specific insight into how they conceive of their responsibility and role. While limited research exists to describe how board members conceive of their responsibility for evaluating a superintendent, Dillon and Halliwell (1991) suggested that superintendents and school board presidents would be the best sources for seeking understanding. A nationally representative study of U.S. school boards, conducted by NSBA in 2001, inquired about the factors school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent. Hess (2002), reporting on this study, suggested that the board's evaluation of the superintendent is the most significant component in a board-superintendent relationship. The study found that the three most important factors to board members during evaluation were, in order:

1. The board-superintendent relationship.
2. The morale of school system employees.
3. The safety of the district's students (Hess, p. 23, 2002).

Respondents overwhelmingly expressed that the board-superintendent relationship was “very important” (86.4%) or “somewhat important” (12.1%) in superintendent evaluation (Hess, 2002, p. 23). However, as previously noted, these relationships may be frequently problematic.

Since these relationships are reported as problematic, one might wonder if there are important gaps between what superintendents and school boards cite as priorities for their districts. However, collectively, board members and superintendents seem to think quite similarly in terms of the priorities for their districts. Hess and Meeks (2010) reported that the most urgent concern board members had for their districts was funding. At that time, 89.9% of board members surveyed reported that the budget and funding were extremely or very urgent (Hess & Meeks, 2010). The second most urgent issue identified by board members was improving student learning—79.1% considered it extremely or very urgent (Hess & Meeks, 2010). On the same survey and scale, superintendents identified budget and funding as 91.6% extremely or very urgent and improving student learning as 76.5% extremely or very urgent in their districts (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Overall, the responses from board members and superintendents on the 2009 inquiry were more similar than different. Perhaps challenges with their relationship and in particular challenges with superintendent evaluation stem from something much different than differing perspectives in the purpose of public education or the priorities boards and superintendents have for their districts.

2.6 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explores the factors and sources of information that school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. While the study inquires into factors and sources, the occasion of superintendent evaluation takes place within the context of an environment that includes international, national, state, and local influences. Multiple variables such as social,

cultural, political, and economic may affect the practice and outcome of superintendent evaluation. Recent events such as threats to school safety and scrutiny by the media and advocacy groups could also influence the practice and outcome of evaluation. While acknowledging these influences and the possibility of others as part of the context of evaluation, this study explores four key aspects of board members as they consider factors and sources of information for superintendent evaluation. These are:

1. Demographics and background
2. Experience with evaluation and in education
3. Conception of responsibility
4. Conception of role

The following illustration (Figure 2.1) represents the context of and concepts in this study:

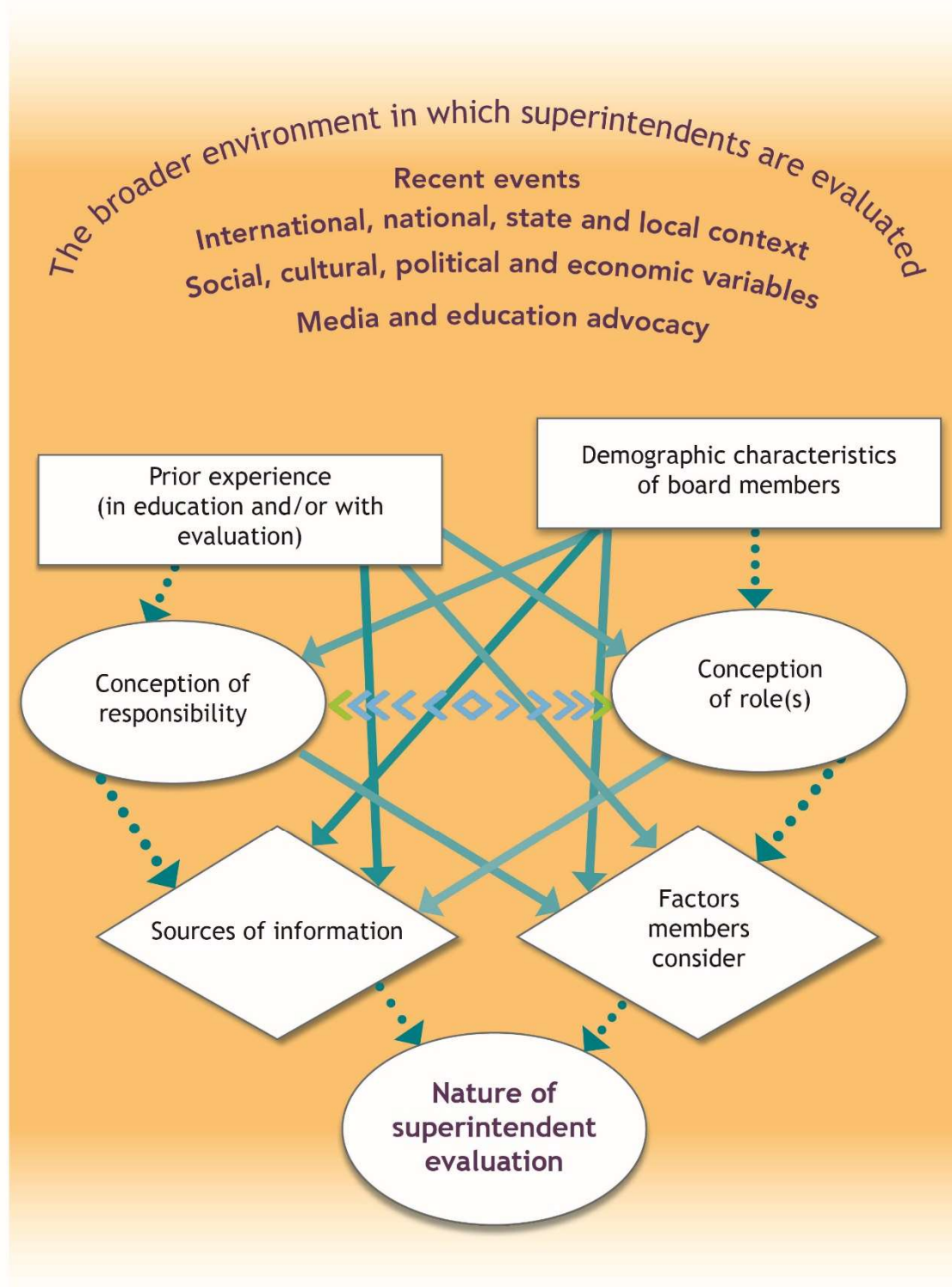


Figure 2.1. Conceptual framework for this study.

As depicted, superintendent evaluation occurs within external variables in international, national, state, and local contexts. External variables—although outside of the control of the school district—may affect perceptions of the performance of the district and the superintendent. Favorable circumstances such as perfect weather, national economic improvement, reduced crime, and improved transportation systems could affect the perception of performance in positive ways without a direct connection to the superintendent. Likewise, unfavorable circumstances such as acts of war, a tornado, a broken water pipe, and traffic congestion, might negatively affect perceptions of performance. External influences such as the media and education advocates could influence perceptions of constituents and board members. Whether or not individuals or groups are advocating for changes that are not viable, sustainable, or in the best interest of students, these voices could affect board member perspectives of the superintendent's performance.

In addition to the external context, relationships may exist among variables such as board members' background, employment in education and with evaluation, their conception of responsibility, their conception of their role, and the factors and sources they consider in evaluation. While there may or may not be a causal relationship or generalizable correlations among these variables, this study inquires into the possibility of relationships with suggestions for consideration and future study. The following two examples illustrate relationships we might find.

A board member, who is a former employee in a school district and received endorsements from labor groups, might consider climate survey data and input from staff members more strongly as a factor and source of information than other board members do. Board members without previous experience in evaluation may rely more upon the input of

colleagues and the superintendent than upon personal observation. We might find that there are compounding variables that suggest relationships. A young board member with children in the district who identifies as a liberal, may be more interested in parent satisfaction as a factor than a young, conservative board member, who even though she has children in the district considers financial management a more important factor than parent satisfaction. The literature and previous research cited below provides guidance for examining new data.

2.6.1 *Board members' background and experience could influence the way they think about and perform superintendent evaluation.*

Nationally, school board members are wealthier, more educated, more likely to be White, more likely to have been an educator, more likely to be male, and more likely to have children in school than the overall adult population (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Of the 27.1% of board members that currently work in education, Hess and Meeks (2010) found that 17.6% of them have belonged to an educators' union. Nationally, board members lean slightly conservative in their political views, but in larger districts, liberals outnumber conservatives. Some board members with school age children have those children enrolled in neighboring districts, homeschools, or private schools. Many board members have close family members employed by the districts where they serve (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Each of these attributes could relate to factors and sources of information that school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent.

Additionally, since board members are less diverse than the general population, they may have challenges representing the views and interests of minority members (Appleseed, 2011). Since school board members are more than twice as likely to have a college degree as the general population and are substantially wealthier on average, they could represent different desires for

students than the constituents they represent. Germane to this study, they may also bring a more elite or singular than pluralistic approach to their deliberation and decision-making (Lutz, 1977).

Shober and Hartney (2014) found that board members collectively “are not ignorant of much of what is going on in their districts” (p. 5). Ironically however, they found that “members who were never educators themselves are more accurately informed than their peers who once were (or still are) educators” (p. 5). They concluded that board members that did not have either an educator or a business background were more likely to focus on academics than other board members do (Shober & Hartney, 2014).

Also according to Shober and Hartney (2014), board members who identified themselves as politically moderate seem to have knowledge that is more accurate of what is going on in their districts than do their counterparts that self-identify as conservative or liberal. Shober and Hartney (2014) described self-identified moderates as “significantly more likely to have an academic focus” (p. 21). A board member’s background and experience could influence their disposition and approach toward superintendent evaluation. .

2.6.2 Board members’ conception of responsibility may influence the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent.

Allen and Mintrom (2010) assert, “Taking responsibility represents an act of leadership” (p. 446). Board members’ perception of the degree of their authority to lead—make a difference in the performance of their school district—may affect their approach to superintendent evaluation. Similarly, their perception of the authority of the superintendent over the instructional supports, academic day, financial allocations, administration, and instruction, might influence their perspectives of the superintendent’s responsibility and the degree to which they consider the superintendent responsible for related outcomes. What they perceive that the superintendent is

responsible for as well as the degree to which they consider him responsible for specific items and outcomes may influence them to consider certain factors and sources of information as more important than others.

Responsibility refers to a virtue or sense individuals or groups might have for their actions and the outcomes of their actions. As Allen and Mintrom (2010) describe, responsibility is what individual and collective actors demonstrate when they face choices, understand consequences of the choices, and select options likely to produce good and fair outcomes. Different from a role or function that individuals may fulfill regardless of the consequences, the construct of responsibility denotes a moral dimension of decisions and actions. In the current era, that some describe as an accountability era, it might be helpful to acknowledge that accountability, as an extrinsic function, is what people talk about when they perceive individuals or organizations are not behaving conscientiously, based on them fulfilling an intrinsic sense of responsibility (Allen & Mintrom, 2010). It could be that increased dictates from the federal and state governments, as well as increased pressure from parents, community, staff, and special interest groups could reduce school board members' sense of responsibility for educational outcomes. In other words, cries for accountability, may impede board members' otherwise intrinsic sense of responsibility for the decisions they make (Allen & Mintrom, 2010).

What board members express they feel responsible for can be vastly different from what various stakeholders feel they should be accountable. Board members and superintendents frequently cite that what they feel responsible for is educating children to fulfill their full potential (Hess & Meeks, 2010; Hess, 2002). Collectively, they see themselves as responsible for achieving this broader goal. According to Hess and Meeks (2010), some consider board members and superintendents' expressed aim of educating each child to fulfill his or her full

potential as an attempt to avoid accountability for student performance on tests intended to measure knowledge and application of mathematics and literary skills. Board members as well as administrators can be held accountable for failing to train children to perform well on language arts and mathematics exams. However, it is less likely that board members are held accountable for educating children with the social and citizenship skills necessary for sustaining a democratic society (Allen & Mintrom, 2010).

How school board members conceive of their responsibility to the broader public versus their responsibility to individual students may affect their considerations in superintendent evaluation. Allen and Mintrom (2010) discuss the need for school governors to strive for balance of broad public interests with the individual interests of parents and students. However, as indicated in the discussion above about educating children to fulfill their full potential versus educating children to perform well on standardized exams, board members may experience conflict when trying to balance the broader public good and the good of individual students. Moe (2000) calls this conflict “one of the ironies of democracy: the schools have difficulty contributing to the quality of democratic government precisely because they are democratically controlled” (as cited by Allen & Mintrom, 2010, p. 443). How school boards establish and adhere to democratic processes in their deliberations and decision-making could indicate the board’s sense of responsibility for democratic outcomes.

Some debate how shared responsibility can be identified separately and attributed to individual participants in an organization (Mäkelä, 2007; Sadler, 2007, as cited by Allen & Mintrom, 2010). This invites a pertinent philosophical question about how board members conceive of their individual and collective responsibility. Insight from individuals might aggregate to inform understanding of the collective’s sense of responsibility. Three questions

suggested by Allen and Mintrom (2010) serve to guide inquiry into individual board members conceptualization of responsibility:

1. Structure – Who are the responsible governors and how are these governors arranged?
2. Parameters – To whom are the governors responsible?
3. Content – For what are the governors responsible (p. 448)?

When considering structure, we want to know whether a respondent is the board president along with background information such as length of service and previous experiences with superintendent evaluation in the district. The formal authority of a board chair as well as delegated or expertise authority may be important aspects of the board's structure. When inquiring into whom board members conceive of themselves as responsible, it could be helpful to consider both the legal structure as well as an informal or perceived sense of responsibility. For example, did the board delegate portions of the superintendent evaluation process to one of its members or does a member have more experience with evaluation or educator evaluation than other members do? Similarly, understanding what board members are legally responsible for in hand with how they conceive of their responsibility could be insightful for this study.

What are the parameters and content of the board's responsibility? How board members conceive of the parameters of their responsibility—within what constraints of authority they think of their responsibility as situated—may help clarify what they think of themselves as responsible for. To whom board members consider themselves responsible—parents, students, voters, the superintendent, fellow board members, minority students and constituents, business and employers, the state government, the federal government, and/or teachers and staff may relate to factors and sources of information they consider in superintendent evaluation. Similarly, what board members consider themselves and/or the superintendent responsible for—

student learning, fiscal responsibility, staff satisfaction, parent or community satisfaction, district safety and/or the condition of facilities—may suggest the factors and sources of information they consider. Board members' conception of responsibility could relate to how they conceive of their role.

2.6.3 *Board members conception of their role may affect the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent.*

Different from, but related to a conception of responsibility, board members conception of their role could relate to their conception of their responsibility and influence the factors and sources of information they consider in superintendent evaluation. By role, I mean their purpose and function, as individuals and as a collective governing body. The conception of role relates to common concerns expressed about school board members of a tendency toward micromanagement (Danzberger, 1994; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Mountford, 2001; Walser, 2009). Do board members think it is their role to manage the school district, keep all the stakeholders happy, and personally ensure the safety and success of every child and staff member? Or, do they view their role as one of policy and oversight—to establish long-term goals and vision for the school district and ensure policies are in place designed to meet those outcomes (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000)? Do board members see their role as a balance of those two objectives, or something else entirely? Board members' conception of their role may suggest how they think about school boards in the continuum of public funding and policy directing administration and instruction, which results in student outcomes.

When new board members (and superintendents) assume positions within a school system, they may do so without a shared or common understanding of their roles. Danzberger (1994) claimed that school boards frequently appear dysfunctional because individual board

members lack a common definition of the board's role and are therefore incapable of charting a clear direction for their school systems. While scholars may not agree on the value or role of school boards, how board members conceive of their role might affect board-superintendent relations, superintendent evaluation, and district outcomes. For the purpose of this study, I am limiting the scope of role to whether board members view themselves as trustees or delegates, as described in the literature (Alsbury, 2008; Lutz, 1977).

The study draws upon the political theory of elite and arena councils proposed by Bailey (1965) and expanded by Lutz (1977) and Alsbury (2008 & 2001). The extent to which board members conceive of themselves as delegates from the people—giving voice to constituents—versus trustees for the people—selected to exercise judgment in the best interest of the public—could affect the factors and sources board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. Considering the extent to which board members act as a unit with limited public discussion and debate may reveal the degree to which they conceive of themselves as trustees or delegates. Castor (2007) explains that school boards face the “challenge of needing to act as a unit to accomplish organizational goals while at the same time consisting of members . . . who may have their own individual goals and/or assumptions” (p. 112). For this reason, inquiring of individual school board members as to whether they conceive of their role as representing the multiple voices of public opinion or speaking with a unified voice could suggest whether they view themselves more like a trustee or a delegate board member. This may have a direct relationship with the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent.

2.6.4 *The factors and sources of information board members consider when they evaluate a superintendent could be reciprocally influential.*

The factors, intentionally or circumstantially, that board members consider when evaluating a superintendent may directly relate to the sources they consider, and vice versa. Sources of information that come to board members by their initiation or through other circumstances could encourage consideration of specific factors. For example, constituents expressing concerns or compliments about district transportation, financial matters, or classroom assignments, might encourage a board member to look into those areas and consider those factors when they evaluate a superintendent. Similarly, if a board member is predisposed to consider certain factors, he or she may seek sources of information related to the factors that are of interest. The factors and sources of information that are of interest to a board member for consideration might relate to their perception of the purpose of superintendent evaluation.

The purpose of superintendent evaluation is rarely explicitly stated in the literature on this topic. However, the North Carolina Superintendent Evaluation Process outlines five items as the purpose of their process:

- Guide superintendents' reflection and improvement.
- Help higher education prepare new superintendents.
- Direct the goals and objectives of school districts for evaluating staff.
- Inform professional development for superintendents and other staff.
- Provide a tool for coaching and mentoring superintendents (North Carolina, 2010).

Of these purposes, guiding superintendents' reflection and improvement, directing alignment of the evaluation of the superintendent and other staff, and guiding professional development for the superintendent could each be important to school boards and their members. Board members

might also think of the performance evaluation as a basis for contract decisions, including compensation and retention. How board members conceive of the purpose of the performance evaluation could relate to which factors and sources they consider.

As previously noted, Dillon and Halliwell (1991) reported that there is a gap between how board members and superintendents conceive of the purpose of evaluation. This may reflect what board members and superintendents believe are the factors the board is considering during evaluation. Hess and Meeks (2010) found “superintendents are far less likely than board members to think that boards evaluate superintendent performance based on student achievement outcomes” (p. 14). Nonetheless, DiPaola (2007) asserted that achievement data in terms of improvement should certainly be considered in superintendent evaluation. There could be a high degree of variability in which measures and indicators of performance that board members and superintendents believe should be considered. This variability might also extend to other differences in the perceptions of which sources of information board members do and should consider during evaluation.

According to board members, one of their most frequent sources of information is their superintendent. Hess and Meeks (2010) found that 56.1% of board members “almost always” turn to their superintendent to get the information they need when making decisions. Further, 88.7% turn to their superintendents “often” or “almost always” (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Since board members value superintendents this much for information, there could be tensions, conflicts of interest, or lack of full disclosure regarding the information board members receive. Superintendents knowingly or unknowingly might be inclined to present some information while withholding other information.

Similarly, other sources of information such as fellow board members, parents and community members, students, state assessment scores, teachers, administrators, and other staff are all possible sources of information about a superintendent's performance for board members. As previously suggested, board members' background, experience, and conceptions of responsibility and roles may influence whether and to what extent these sources are considered during evaluation. Multiple sources of information as well as multiple factors might influence board members when evaluating a superintendent.

DiPaola (2007) is emphatic that, "a fair and unbiased evaluation of superintendent performance must be based on multiple sources of data that reflect performance in the many facets of the position" (p. 1). DiPaola (2003) offers guidance on the type of sources that should be used in superintendent evaluation:

1. Data that are the responsibility of the superintendent.
2. Data that reflect the responsibilities in the job description.
3. Data that links to student learning, leadership, and other key responsibilities reflected in performance standards.
4. Data that are of primary importance when considering the quality of the superintendent's performance.
5. Data that is the best available for specific performance responsibilities (p. 51).

While DiPaola (2007) and others recommend considering objective data when evaluating a superintendent, there is likely to be other sources of data that board members consider. In their role as elected or appointed officials, they are likely to hear from multiple constituents about the performance of the district and the superintendent. These sources of data may come through formal processes of surveys and reports, and they may come through varied and anecdotal

experiences. How board members consider observations, including their own, and the observations, concerns, and input of others, could affect the factors they consider when evaluating a superintendent.

While we do not know a lot about school board members, especially from their perspective, the research and limited theory we have suggests the questions above could represent important contributions to the body of knowledge about school board members, board-superintendent relationships, and superintendent evaluation. Even though superintendent evaluation takes place in a social, cultural, political, and economic context that has international, national, state, and local circumstances outside of the control of the school district, there may be common factors and sources of information that board members tend to consider when evaluating a superintendent. There may also be relationships among the factors and sources, and board members' demographics, background and experience, conceptions of responsibility, or conceptions of role. It could help to know whether regionality, urbanicity, district size, or tenure of board members relates to certain factors or sources of information. Ultimately, it seems appropriate and helpful to approach the data with an open mind and allow individual board member perspectives to speak through the data.

Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Exploring the factors and sources of information school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent called for using multiple ways for “seeing and hearing” (Green, as cited by Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study fit the needs for mixed methods inquiry as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007)—research in which a single data source might be insufficient, results need explanation, exploratory results need to be generalized, or multiple phases are the best way to meet a research objective. This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more rich understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of the factors and sources board members consider when evaluating a superintendent.

Mixed methods was most appropriate for this study because, as Creswell (2003) explains, this approach begins with constructing knowledge on pragmatic grounds of observation and interpretation and uses strategies to test that knowledge across a population. While quantitative methods can suggest possible relationships among multiple variables that may extend to the greater population, qualitative measures can more appropriately define and inform human nature and relationships, identified through personal experiences. Mixing methods allowed for exploring elements that may relate to the larger population, while at the same time providing concrete, vivid, and meaningful description with the potential for serendipitous findings and identifying new theoretical integrations (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS, AND SOURCES:

Research questions emerged from the literature and previous studies. These are listed in Table 3.1 as follows:

Table 3.1. Research Questions

1. What factors and sources of information do school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent, and what do board members believe might be important to consider when evaluating a superintendent?
2. What is the relationship between board members' background and their perspectives regarding superintendent evaluation?
3. What is the relationship between board members' prior knowledge and experience in education or with performance evaluation and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?
4. What is the relationship between how school board members conceive of their role—in particular, whether they think of their role as a trustee or a delegate—and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?
5. What is the relationship between how board members conceive of their responsibility—to whom and for what they feel responsible—and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?
6. What do board members believe to be sufficient information on which to evaluate a superintendent?

Each research question was explored both quantitatively and qualitatively, using data collected from observations, a survey, and interviews.

3.3 SEQUENTIAL EXPLORATORY DESIGN

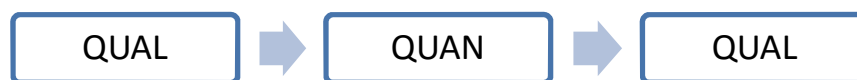


Figure 3.1. Sequential exploratory design.

A sequential-exploratory approach, as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) has at least two-phases that begin with collecting and analyzing qualitative data (see Figure 3.1). From the initial exploratory results, the researcher moves to further phases and collects quantitative data to analyze and test the qualitative findings. This study starts with that design and includes a third

qualitative phase to enrich and clarify findings from the first two phases. This sequential exploratory design can help develop a more complete understanding of phenomena than quantitative or qualitative methods alone might provide.

Mixing methods can have strengths, and it can have challenges. Mixing methods may enhance the credibility of the findings by using multiple sources of data to triangulate the findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Qualitative methods can provide context for general results from quantitative methods. Quantitative methods may suggest a greater or lesser strength of relationships than a qualitative process alone. In this manner, the methods can be mutually enhancing of each other (Creswell, 2003; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Potentially, there can also be challenges to this design. Observations of unique occurrences or responses to interview questions could suggest exploration into areas that are not as applicable across other settings. In this study, that could render findings in the second phase less useful than they might have been. On the other hand, the second phase may substantiate or challenge findings in the first phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This study's third phase seeks to clarify and support or challenge findings from the first two phases. Figure 3.2 illustrates the phases in this study.

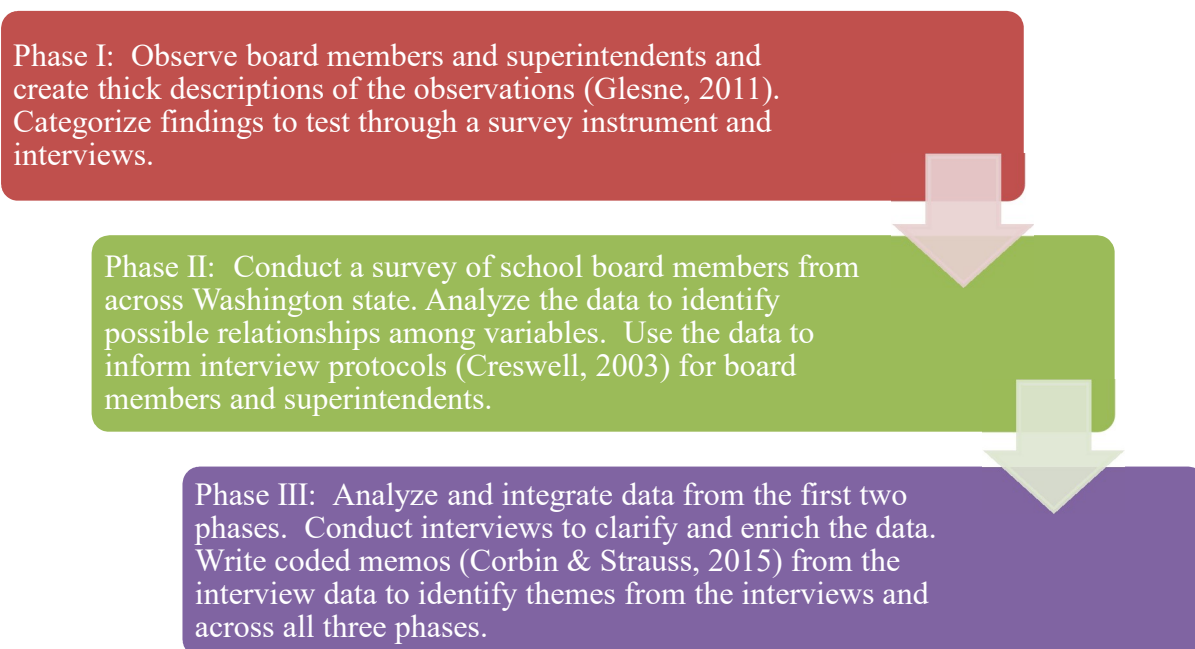


Figure 3.2. Overview of three research phases.

Phase I of this study used observations to inquire into the interactions and discourse among board members and with a superintendent. As Castor (2007) did in her analysis of language used in a school board meeting, this study applies a “relationally responsive social constructionist approach, as described by Shotter and associates” (as cited by Castor, p. 112). The conversations among board members and with superintendents suggested factors and sources of information board members considered when evaluating a superintendent. Examining these conversations provided insight into how the individuals conceive of their relationship, as well as their role and responsibility. Castor (2007) cites Burr (1995) to explain that typically a constructivist perspective assumes that the interactions and discursive practices of social actors create, maintain, and negotiate social reality. Castor (2007) noted that understanding underlying assumptions about communication is critical to understanding how board members can use communication to negotiate conflicts. This prompted me in Phases I and III, to pay close

attention to nuances in words and mannerisms that could help explain dynamics of the relationships among board members and with their superintendent.

3.4 OVERALL METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

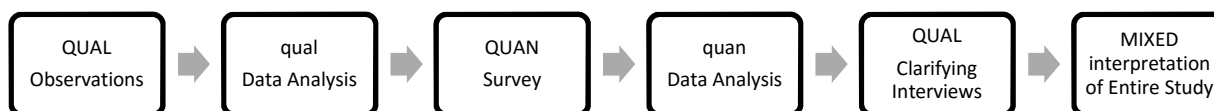


Figure 3.3. Outline of the methodological approach

As the primary instrument in this research (Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2013), throughout the study, I reviewed salient literature about school boards and superintendents, their relationship, the occurrence of superintendent evaluation, and the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. Chapter 2 highlights this review. The ongoing nature of the review enabled me to better integrate theory and method (Hart, 1998). The literature includes similar approaches to investigating school boards. The literature reported on previous studies that:

1. Analyzed data from surveys of school board members about the factors and sources of information they considered when performing their most recent superintendent evaluation, to look for trends and possible relationships among responses (Hess, 2002; Hess & Meeks, 2010).
2. Conducted interviews with school board members and superintendents to clarify and enrich understanding of existing data (Delagardelle, 2008; Shelton, 2015).
3. Applied understanding from interviews to analyze quantitative data from surveys, and used survey data to support and/or refute findings from interviews (Shelton, 2015).

Together with the literature review, observations from Phase I informed the survey design, specifically to ensure the survey included factors and sources of information board members referred to during these observations. As Glesne (2011) recommends, in collecting the existing data, I conducted analysis simultaneously with collection during the observations in Phase I and did the same during the interviews in Phase III. After closing the survey in Phase II, I began to analyze trends in the data to develop the interview protocols for Phase III.

All this created a continuity of the research that built upon and enriched the existing data. I compiled field notes throughout the phases to try not to lose the thoughts and their context as they occurred. My field notes include a reflective log that helped me keep track of my positionality. As I participated in observations, I kept notes and reflections in a column alongside the conversation notes. When I completed interviews, I wrote memos and used a coding scheme for analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This established a framework of relational categories and facilitated emerging understanding of the data. As Miles and Huberman (1984) articulate, this helped frame concepts, not necessarily specific actions and behaviors.

As highlighted by Merriam (2009), I was responsible for providing a holistic, multidimensional interpretation of my observations, since I functioned as the instrument for data collection as well as analysis in Phases I and III. In order to increase the credibility of the findings, I used two forms of triangulation—multiple methods and multiple sources of data. By employing observations, survey, and interviews, I sought to enhance the trustworthiness of this research. During the qualitative data collection stages, I used my reflective field log to consider my biases and assumptions during the research and presented these considerations as part of the study. The third phase provided an opportunity to solicit respondent validation by conducting member checks as part of my final data analysis. These strategies, as described by Merriam

(2009), helped improve the consistency of my findings. My audit trail, a standard component of qualitative research, documents how the data was collected and how decisions were made (Guba & Lincoln, as cited by Miles & Huberman 1984).

I analyzed the survey data from Phase II with descriptive and comparative statistics. The statistics package in Microsoft Excel 2013 was robust enough to conduct the necessary analysis and assisted with preparation of tables to display the data. I cross-tabbed responses and used descriptive statistics to compare background and experience with responses across other questions. I used the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 2.1 as an outline for cross-tabulating responses along the solid and dashed lines. This provided the opportunity to explore possible relationships among the data.

Using this mixed methods approach helped offset the limitations of only a qualitative or quantitative design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Qualitative data from the first phase may not be generalizable to other settings, but it provided inferences to inform development of the survey instrument and make suggestions for further study. Data collected from the survey provided findings that might be associated with other school board members. The interviews helped clarify and enrich the findings and suggestions from the earlier phases.

As Corbin and Straus (2015) discuss, this process provided opportunity to develop theoretical concepts, as I looked for questions that emerged from analysis of the data through the progressive phases. The data from Phase I guided the research instrument in Phase II, and data analysis from each of the first two phases informed development of the interview protocols for Phase III. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews in the final phase allowed the participants and me to explore topics as they emerged in a natural and increasingly informative manner. Finally, incorporating a comparative analysis of data from multiple sources—

observations, statewide survey, and interviews with board members and superintendents—allowed for synthesis of the data and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

3.5 TIMELINE

- In May—June 2013 – as part of the Washington Superintendent Evaluation Initiative that I was leading in my work with WSSDA, superintendents and school board members provided me with access to their executive session deliberations and discussions about the superintendents' performance. Because of my relationships with them, they afforded me that opportunity for research purposes that had the potential to improve the accuracy and meaningfulness of superintendent evaluation in the state. I observed three school boards and their superintendents as they discussed, deliberated, and completed a superintendent evaluation and took notes on the language and behavior of participants.
- In September—October 2013 – continuing work on the evaluation initiative, I designed a survey instrument for board members, based on the literature and observations, to explore the factors and sources of information they considered when evaluating a superintendent. The observations provided data that suggested possible survey response options and factors and sources of information that board members consider during evaluation.
- In October 2013 – I administered the survey to Washington school board members. The survey asked about previous experience with evaluation, employment in education, and involvement with the evaluation initiative and other training opportunities on evaluating a superintendent. I also collected data from respondents as to district size, urbanicity, income level, and regionality. The survey asked respondents to rank the three purposes of public education outlined by Labaree (1997). I selected this timeframe because most

Washington school boards would have evaluated their superintendent within the previous five months, and it was just prior to school board elections, where 707 of the 1,477 seats were up for election.

- In July 2014—December 2015 – I used descriptive and comparative statistics to analyze the survey data for trends, correlations, and possible inferences. I used initial findings to help frame interview questions for Phase III and drafted iterations of the findings for review by my committee.
- In December 2014—May 2015 – After approval from human subjects and input from my committee, I conducted interviews with five school board members and three superintendents to clarify and enrich the existing data as well as provide an additional set of data for analysis. I coded and analyzed the interview data for trends, themes and possible explanations of the earlier data.
- In March 2015—February 2016 – I continued to analyze the data, searching for themes and identifying which pieces of data corresponded with the themes. Incorporating ongoing literature review, personal reflection, discussions of findings with my committee co-chairs, and summarizing the data enriched and focused the study.

3.6 DATA SOURCES

3.6.1 *Phase I*

Phase I involved observing board members while they were conducting superintendent evaluation in three districts and identifying factors and sources of information boards considered during the evaluation. In each of these observations, the superintendents and board members granted permission for me to observe their practice by virtue of their trust and relationship with

me. I selected districts for observations based on my work with the state superintendent evaluation initiative. These districts were selected both by convenience and as a representation of the diversity of Washington school districts (see Table 3.2). I conducted each observation differently based on the availability of participants, culture of the board, and opportunities afforded to me as a participant-observer.

All three districts were familiar with me, and we had previously worked together in board development workshops and retreats that I had facilitated in each district. Additionally, nearly all participating board members and each superintendent had interacted with me informally multiple times during the previous six years. Table 3.2 depicts characteristics of each district:

Table 3.2. Characteristics of Observed Districts

	District A	District B	District C
Location	Rural, Eastern WA	Suburban, Western WA	Rural, Western WA
District size	2,501-7,500 students	15,001-25,000 students	501-1,000 students
Percent free & reduced lunch	Significantly higher than state average	Slightly below state average	Slightly above state average
Students of color	Significantly more than state average	Similar to state average	Significantly less than state average
Student achievement	Significantly lower than state average	Slightly higher than state average	Significantly lower than state average
Supt. tenure	10 years	4 years	4 years
Board members of color	2	1	0
Researcher role	Participant-observer	Facilitator-observer	Participant-observer
Evaluation instrument	Third year (Appendix B)	Piloting new framework (Appendix C)	Only verbal
Supt. role in evaluation	Prepared self-eval. Absent during eval.	Full participant	Full participant

3.6.1.1 District A

In May 2013, I observed Board A in Central Washington evaluating their superintendent. Board A began their superintendent evaluation immediately following a three-hour board business meeting. The board meeting included a work session with building representatives and

administrators to review a climate survey their district staff had recently completed. The review of the climate survey prior to superintendent evaluation was typical for them, as this board had been doing it that way for several years.

One male member and three female members were present. One of the females was Hispanic. The other three members were White, non-Hispanic. The missing board member, a Hispanic male, was out of the area due to a family emergency. The superintendent called him to have him join the session by audio conference, but the member was unable to participate. They proceeded with the four board members present.

I wondered whether the sequence of events—reporting on the survey data just prior to the performance review—would influence the discussion and outcomes. My initial impression was that this did not seem to influence much, if any, of the board member’s sensemaking and discussion. However, the notes and quotes from the observation revealed that climate and staff morale were more prominently on the minds of the board members when they performed the evaluation than I observed with the other two boards.

The superintendent introduced the process and projected a partially complete evaluation instrument as a self-evaluation. His pre-selected rating was 3 out of 4 in each area rated. A copy of the completed evaluation instrument is included in Appendix B. The superintendent suggested that the board complete the form that evening and proposed a process for them to follow. He would describe what he felt he had accomplished in each of the six areas for evaluation, respond to questions, and then step out while the board discussed the quality of his performance and modified the document on his laptop. He asked that a board member type the comments into the document and adjust the ratings to reflect the board’s opinion.

As the superintendent began the discussion, he mentioned that he did not “want a book,” referring to a lengthy description of his activities and evidence of performance. He asked if there were any questions about the process, and the four board members offered none.

The superintendent explained that his self-evaluation was like TPEP (Washington’s Teacher/Principal Evaluation Program) and what teachers and principals were being asked to do. Related to that, the superintendent mentioned he did not suggest any + or – on the four-point scale and asked the board to stick with whole numbers for its ratings. The superintendent explained that “Distinguished” (rating 4) should be truly outstanding—a superintendent that is teaching others, or writing books.

On the first rating area, “Relationship with the Board,” the superintendent discussed his efforts in the past year to maintain regular communication with the board through email and to stay current on the board’s policy system. The superintendent asked if there were any questions on this category, and there were none.

The second category for evaluation was “Community Relationships.” There was little support offered from the superintendent in evaluating this area, and there were no questions from the board.

The superintendent discussed the third area, “Staff and Personnel Relationships,” more in-depth. In his oral self-evaluation with the board members, he suggested that members “touch base with other administrators” about his performance and interactions with them. He stated, “I feel pretty comfortable with them being able to give you some feedback. Sometimes, I wish they could tell you more about my work and performance.”

This prompted a response from a member, who was visibly “taken aback” with a look of surprise and animated expression. She said, “I feel confused. In all my years on the board, I have never felt that it was our role to ask the administrators about your performance.”

Discussion ensued, primarily between the one member and superintendent, who stated, “Maybe this is something to explore more.” The superintendent suggested, possibly the board could use administrative team agendas as evidence of how he interacts with staff. The superintendent asked whether there were any questions, and none of the members offered any.

The superintendent reviewed his self-evaluation with the board on the fourth area, “Educational Leadership.” One member asked, “What do you believe is the role of the superintendent if a building is not implementing district initiatives with fidelity?” This question seemed to be pointed at something specific, but the superintendent did not offer a specific response. Rather, he indicated that this was something he and the board needed to consider in the future.

In the fifth area, “Business and Finance,” the superintendent’s self-reflection included that the district was in “positive financial health.” He cited his habit of advising the board early and “resolving problems quickly.” There were no questions or comments by board members on this category.

For the Sixth area, “Personal Qualities,” the superintendent discussed the descriptors for this area. He expressed that he felt they were the best judge of this area and that he believed he performed his duties in a professional manner. The four members wrote a lot of notes during this time. One member asked, “Are there ways for you to share information with us throughout the year?” The superintendent mentioned his use of email.

The superintendent talked about his leadership and asked if there was “anything else?”

One member said, “Thank you.” This first part of their process took 37 minutes, and then the superintendent left the room and went to his office.

The board president began the next process by expressing his appreciation for the superintendent’s “silent confidence.” He also mentioned, “The administrators have a good view” of him. Another member added, “There’s a huge difference in staff morale.” To which, the president affirmed, “He’s done a great job on improving staff morale.”

One board member had moved to the laptop to record ratings and comments.

The four board members discussed the superintendent’s performance for thirty-nine minutes. Toward the end, the board was obviously tired. There was light laughter and personal stories. At the same time, the board member scribing wove their comments into a brief narrative and adjusted the scores on the form. It could be that the time of day and length and content of previous meetings affected the board’s evaluation of the superintendent, but it is difficult to know in what ways.

When the superintendent rejoined the group, reviewed their ratings and what they wrote, he thanked them for their work. The entire process took one hour and sixteen minutes.

Themes emerged from the observation that I examined further through the survey in Phase II and the observations in Phase III.

3.6.1.2 District B

This board participated in a superintendent evaluation pilot with me throughout the 2012-2013 schoolyear. They were piloting a new superintendent leadership framework/rubric and process for evaluation. A sample of the framework is in Appendix C. This superintendent leadership framework was in development through a collaborative effort of eight district superintendents and boards members, the director of the superintendent preparation program at Washington State

University, a retired researcher and author from the Professional Educators Standards Board, an Educational Services District superintendent, WASA, and WSSDA. The framework is organized around six standards for performance that are similar to the 2008 ISSLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) Standards. These are:

- I. Visionary Leadership
- II. Instructional Leadership
- III. Effective Management
- IV. Inclusive Practice
- V. Ethical Leadership
- VI. Socio-Political Context

The framework went through multiple iterations during the 2012-2013 schoolyear.

Board members and the superintendent from district B were very involved in developing the framework and were familiar with its design and intent. It has 47 themes under the standards. Each theme, such as “Builds commitment to the vision,” has descriptions for unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, or distinguished performance. *Unsatisfactory* represents someone failing to or making limited progress at fulfilling the theme. *Basic* indicates the superintendent is performing at the minimum acceptable fulfillment of the theme. *Proficient* means the superintendent is fully meeting the expectations of that theme. *Distinguished* suggests the superintendent is exceeding what would be reasonable expectations for an accomplished superintendent in that area.

In addition to helping develop the framework, this board participated in a training I conducted with multiple boards the month before on how to use the framework to locate a superintendent’s performance. They had also gone through the framework two other times with

me during the previous month in discussion and training on how best to use the framework for evaluation.

In June 2013, I met with the evaluation subcommittee of Board B and their superintendent. Their district policy stipulates that a three-member subcommittee perform the evaluation of the superintendent. They held this meeting in executive session, since the purpose was to discuss the performance of a public employee. Just the three board members, the superintendent, and I attended. There was no board business before the executive session. This was a diligent review of the superintendent's performance, even though it was not the district's official evaluation of the superintendent's performance that year. The board committee was scheduled to meet again later in the month to complete the superintendent's formal written evaluation for that school year.

The superintendent introduced the process. He stated, "You have the handouts in front of you that I've prepared for you." The handouts included the latest iteration of the framework, a summary rating sheet, goals sheet, and appendix F that listed possible evidence for evaluation. He mentioned that he had prepared a narrative online for them of his self-evaluation.

The superintendent continued, "Now I'm going to go through what we have and where we are." By the end of our time together this morning, the superintendent stated, I need to know "what you would like for me to prepare for August." The preparation for August was to set up the following year's formal evaluation, which they would base on the framework. The superintendent mentioned they would need to come to agreement on definition of terms.

About ten minutes into the discussion, the superintendent was still directing the conversation and added, "Here's a thing I didn't mention"—the Washington School Board Superintendent Evaluation Guide (WSBSE). The workgroup that developed the framework for

evaluation had also drafted an implementation guide for how to use the framework as an evaluation instrument. The board members were seeing this document for the first time.

The superintendent had placed several supporting documents online for board member access. He distributed paper copies of the materials to each of us. Next, he added, “Let’s do the thing you’re not familiar with. Here’s appendix F,” which had a list of possible evidence and artifacts for consideration in evaluating the superintendent’s performance.

After two hours and fifteen minutes of discussion, the board president called the executive session to a close, and resumed discussion in “open session,” though no one else was in the room. This was important procedurally, because the board moved from discussing the superintendent’s performance to discussing the process for evaluating performance the next year. In particular, they discussed how superintendent goals would be used in evaluating performance in their new system, and they focused on the type of evidence they would need to evaluate performance both against the framework of standards and for the goals. They discussed the possibility of designating three opportunities to evaluate performance during the coming schoolyear and then adjourned the meeting.

Due to our relationship and previous work together, after the evaluation session two of the board members and I agreed it could be valuable to discuss their process and sensemaking more in-depth. Immediately after the participant-observation with Board B, I interviewed two of the participants to clarify and enrich the data. I used a digital voice recorder during the follow-up interview. The audio recordings captured in the board members’ voice their perspectives of the factors and sources of information that were important to them during the evaluation. This was helpful for understanding the sensemaking of these school board members, particularly in

light of the new approach to evaluation that they were piloting. Their comments also helped to inform development of the survey used in Phase II and the interview protocols used in Phase III.

3.6.1.3 District C

Board C was the least formal in its approach to the task. They went into executive session immediately after a regularly scheduled board business meeting in June 2013 to discuss the superintendent's performance. The five board members and the superintendent were the only ones in the room. The board president announced the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the performance of a public employee. The superintendent explained that this was a verbal evaluation of the superintendent, and that the written evaluation occurs in the winter.

The superintendent digitally recorded their meeting and explained to the board members that he was recording their session to share with me for research purposes to help improve superintendent evaluation in the state. Each board member was familiar with me, so this announcement and their acknowledgement situated me as a participant-observer in their discussion. The superintendent, who was completing his fourth year in the district, led the conversation about his performance. He was self-critical, and asked for specific feedback.

While the conversation was cordial, even familial, the board seemed serious and sincere in their assessment and comments. This was a mid-year, informal review, and they did not use a written instrument or have a written summary. During their discussion, board members identified six specific areas of commendation with discussion of one area for improvement.

The board president began the verbal performance evaluation by commending the superintendent for his communication with the board. Toward the end of their discussion, the board president interrupted and asked, "So anyway, [superintendent], this is not part of your

evaluation, but since we're all sitting here together, is there anything we've done or said, or is there anything that makes your job harder that maybe we shouldn't be doing?"

The superintendent replied, "I'm fine."

No votes were taken or decisions made. The president asked for a motion to go out of executive session. The session lasted just under twenty-two minutes.

After completing the three observations, I analyzed the data to identify themes and sources of information that the boards had considered. Those themes, reported in Chapter 4, along with previous studies reported in the literature helped to inform the survey instrument for Phase II of this study.

3.6.2 *Phase II*

Phase II involved an online survey (see Appendix D) of all school directors in Washington for which I could obtain a valid email address. This included 1,179 of the 1,477 school board members. I deployed the survey as part of WSSDA's statewide superintendent evaluation initiative. The survey included questions on the conceptual framework in this study: demographic characteristics of board members, previous experience with evaluation and background in education, conception of responsibility, conception of roles, sources of information, and factors considered during superintendent evaluation. Where practical, the questions mirrored the survey questions and response options that Hess (2002) and Hess and Meeks (2010) used. This allowed for comparison of the sample with the samples from the national studies and analysis of how Washington board member responses compared with their national counterparts. Specifically, response options to the factors and sources of information considered in superintendent evaluation follow those Hess and Meeks (2010) reported. This

allowed for comparison of the samples and findings of Hess and Meeks (2010) and Shoher and Hartney (2014).

Chapters 1 and 2 of this study outlined the rationale for selecting the survey questions. A question on the competing purposes of public education, as discussed by Labaree (1997) and Higgins and Abowitz (2011)—democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility—allowed me to cross-tabulate responses with the demographic and background questions and responses to the factors and sources of information considered during superintendent evaluation. As with the Hess and Meeks' (2010) survey questions, I included a question on political philosophy. Analysis of data from responses to this question, as well as responses to questions about education level and previous experience of working in education, could add to emerging understanding proposed by Shoher and Hartney (2014).

I used Survey Monkey for the data collection. Survey Monkey provides its own analytics and displays of the data as well as an Excel format for export. I deployed the survey on Thursday, October 24, 2013, through a mail-merge email (see Appendix E) with the link to the survey. One week later, on Thursday, October 31, I sent a follow-up reminder email to encourage a good response rate. Table 3.3 identifies the rate of response:

Table 3.3. Rate of Survey Response

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
202	73	7	1

Of those receiving the email, 283 completed the survey, for a completion rate of 24%.

Appendix H contains tables identifying the demographics of the 283 respondents to the survey. Overall, demographics of respondents are similar to those of the national study (Hess & Meeks, 2010) although the national study intentionally oversampled large districts. The

distribution of the age of respondents in Washington was similar to the national study (Hess & Meeks, 2010). In the Hess and Meeks (2010) report, 95.4% of board members surveyed were 40 years of age or older. In the Washington survey, 94.7% of respondents were 40 years of age or more. Appendix H (Table H.28) shows this comparison.

On the date the survey deployed, October 24, 2013, WSSDA had records of the gender for 1,139 of the 1,477 school board members in the state. Their records indicated 465 (40.8%) were female and 674 (59.2%) were male (personal communication, December 1, 2015). On the other hand, 48.7% of survey respondents indicated they were male and 48.3% of respondents indicated they were female, with an additional 3.0% that declined to respond. This suggests that the survey may have unintentionally oversampled female school board members.

Similar to the national study (Hess & Meeks, 2010) respondents were more likely to be White than the population they represent. The Washington survey had a slightly higher percentage of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander respondents than the percentage in the state and a higher percentage of American Indian or Alaskan Native respondents than the percentage in the state. In the categories of Black or African American, Asian, Hispanic, and more than one race, respondents were less likely to select those choices than the demographics of the state represent. Appendix H (Table H. 33) has comparisons of the race of survey respondents with the U.S. Census data for Washington and the U.S. and the national (Hess & Meeks, 2010) survey participants.

Respondents to the Washington survey were more likely to have some post-secondary education than respondents to the national study did; however, they were less likely to have advanced degrees than those in the national study (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Nearly two-thirds (64.0%) of Washington board members responding had some college experience up through

completion of a bachelor's degree. On the other hand, 48.3% of participants in the national study had some college up through completion of a bachelor's degree. As illustrated in Appendix H (Table H.30), respondents to both the national and the Washington survey are more likely to be high school graduates and two to three times more likely to be college graduates than the national average for adults over 25. Chapter 4 discusses the responses.

3.6.3 *Phase III*

The research in Phase III involved semi-structured interviews with Washington school board members and superintendents to clarify and enrich understanding of data from Phases I and II. I interviewed five board members to provide enhanced understanding of the mixed data from the observations and survey. I selected participants for the interviews that represented the diversity of school board members and superintendents in the state. To the extent possible, the board members selected for interviews represented the characteristics and background of survey respondents from Phase II (see Tables 3.4 & 3.5). None of the board members or superintendents that participated in the observations in Phase I also participated in the interviews. Additionally, no board members, or superintendents participating in interviews were from the same district.

Participants in these interviews represented both genders, White and minority members, the eastern and western regions of the state, and variance in age, district size, urbanicity, and length of service. These interviews were conducted by telephone, with both note taking and audio recording to ensure a complete collection of the data. Note taking helped with the pace of the interviews (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). These steps assisted with reflection during and after the interviews. The interviews lasted 35-60 minutes. There were approximately 30 minutes for structured interview questions and responses with the remainder of the time spent in open-ended

conversation. Due to my relationship and previous experiences with the participants, it is probable that they spoke fully and frankly with me, as discussed by Glesne (2011). Functioning as a participant-observer likely reduced the effect of my presence and its influence on the co-participants. Table 3.4 illustrates the diversity represented by participating board members.

Table 3.4. Board Member Interview Participants

	Tenure	ESD	Gender	Ethnicity/ Race	School age Children	Above \$50,000	College Degree
B1	8	189	Male	White	No	Yes	Yes
B2	14	171	Female	Hispanic	No	Yes	Yes
B3	3	105	Female	White	Yes	Yes	No
B4	5	189	Male	White	No	Yes	No
B5	1	123	Female	White	Yes	Yes	Yes

Additionally, I interviewed three Washington superintendents that represent a gender, tenure, and regional cross-section of superintendents in the state. These interviews provided an opportunity to enrich findings from the board members through comparison and contrast with the data from the board member interviews. These telephone interviews took 40-60 minutes with approximately 30 minutes for structured interview questions and responses and up to 30 more minutes for open-ended conversation. Similar to the interviews with board members, due to my relationship and experiences with the participants, it is likely that they spoke fully and frankly with me (Glesne, 2011). Again, functioning as a participant-observer may have reduced the effect of my influence on the co-participants. Table 3.5 below illustrates the diversity represented among interviewed superintendents.

Table 3.5. Superintendent Interview Participants

	Tenure in District	Tenure as a Supt.	ESD	Gender	Ethnicity/ Race	Education Level
S1	10	8	189	Male	White	Doctorate
S2	17	14	101	Male	White	Doctorate
S3	1	4	121	Female	White	Masters

3.6.3.1 Interview Data

Interviews took place from January to March 2015. Each interview was a rich learning opportunity, as I recorded the sensemaking of five school board members and three superintendents while they described their understanding of their roles and the rewards and challenges they find in board-superintendent relationships.

After scheduling interviews, by phone, email, Facebook message, and text, I emailed consent forms to each participant. No one that I contacted to participate turned down my request, but one suggested his board colleague might better match the criteria I wanted for my last participant. I followed the interview protocols (see Appendices F and G) in each of the eight interviews. This provided a structure for the phone calls and the opportunity to collect responses collated around the interview questions. As a participant-observer in the research, I asked clarifying and probing questions when responses were unclear or related to additionally relevant information to the study. I observed an experience Glesne (2011) describes in that the longer the participants talked, the more they seemed to be speaking authentically with less apprehension about how I might judge responses.

I shared the interview protocol with participants in advance. One board member and one superintendent took the opportunity to write out responses to the questions and share those with me prior to our interview. Those participants seemed to be more clear and specific in their responses; however, each participant provided additional understanding that helped to enrich and deepen this study. Specific findings are provided in the Chapter 4.

At the beginning of each interview, I requested the participant's permission to audio record our conversation. I used two Apple iPhones for each call, having the caller on speakerphone, and the second phone beside it as a recording device. This allowed me to have

my hands free to type notes during the interviews as well as record the interviews. Taking notes throughout the interviews helped with the pacing and engagement of the participants and myself as a co-participant. Upon completion of the interviews, I thanked each participant, reminded them of my commitment to confidentiality, and asked each one if they would be available for follow-up member-checks if needed. Each one expressed they would be available and willing to continue participation if I had follow-up questions for them.

After the first three interviews, I began transcribing the audio recordings using transcription software from Wreally Studios. Transcribing the conversations between interviews allowed me to improve my interview skills as the study progressed. In the first few interviews, I realized that I was interrupting conversations with my own interjections and commentary. I was also using “um,” “uh huh,” and not enunciating my words and questions as clearly as possible. My diction and enunciation greatly improved in the later interviews.

Chapter 4. FINDINGS

This chapter reports findings from this mixed methods study. As illustrated throughout this chapter, using multiple sources of data collection and analysis helped to crystallize and triangulate the data. The data include observations of board members evaluating superintendents, results from a statewide survey of board members, and interviews with board members and superintendents. This chapter identifies findings, and the next chapter discusses possible implications for theory, suggestions for further study, and limitations.

Overall, the data suggest that school board members want a superintendent to develop and maintain consistent, comprehensive, respectful, and influential relationships with the community, parents, staff, and the board. Examples of this permeate the data. Board members speak about leadership attributes they expect in a superintendent such as visibility, communication, influence, organizational skills, fairness, and meeting goals. These attributes form the core of board members' focus when evaluating a superintendent. Importantly, board members want results. They are looking for and expecting results from a superintendent's leadership that they can observe as increased staff satisfaction, strong community support, and improved student success.

The job of a superintendent seems to be never-ending. Board members and superintendents alike talk about the fact that the superintendent's performance is always on display and undergoing evaluation by staff, parents, community members, and board members. They talk about how every interaction with board members, conversation, and experience contributes to perceptions of performance and ultimately the superintendent's formal evaluation.

The display of the superintendent's performance is most visible during formal board meetings. There, members observe and assess everything from the presentation and format of

background materials to the level of engagement and participation of the superintendent. In particular, members pay attention to how she interacts with and responds to staff, community members, parents, and board members.

Exploring the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent provided a lens to examine how board members conceive of their role, responsibility, and relationship with each other and their superintendent. This chapter identifies fourteen claims. Table 4.10 at the end of the chapter summarizes those, and chapter 5 discusses them further.

The research questions provide an outline for this chapter, as follows:

1. Factors and sources board members consider when evaluating a superintendent
2. Background of board members and their perspectives on superintendent evaluation
3. Relationship of prior knowledge or experience with factors and sources
4. Relationship of conception of role with factors and sources
5. Relationship of conception of responsibility with factors and sources
6. Sufficiency of information on which to evaluate a superintendent
7. Nature of superintendent evaluation and board-superintendent relationships

4.1 FACTORS AND SOURCES BOARD MEMBERS CONSIDER

Research Question 1: Factors and Sources of Information

What factors and sources of information do board members consider when evaluating a superintendent, and what do board members believe might be important to consider when evaluating a superintendent?

Themes from the observations and interviews show an overlap of the factors and sources of information school boards consider when they evaluate a superintendent. Some factors such as the superintendent's communication with the board are also a source of information about

performance. The substance reported as well as the manner in which it is reported could be factors in evaluation. Some communication takes place in board meetings, which superintendents (and staff) typically orchestrate. The quality and content of items such as the agenda, background materials, and reports from others reflect on the superintendent's performance. Additionally, these items are a potential source of information regarding the superintendent and his or her performance in multiple areas. Table 4.1 summarizes factors and sources of information board members and superintendents suggested board members considered in their most recent superintendent evaluation.

Table 4.1. Factors and Sources Board Members Consider When Evaluating a Superintendent

Factors	Sources of Information
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. With the board b. With the community c. With staff 2. Relationships <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. With the board b. With the community c. With staff 3. Visibility & Involvement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. With board members b. With staff & schools c. With parents & community 4. Student Achievement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Achievement gap b. State assessment data c. Other indicators 5. Leadership & Influence <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Anticipating problems b. Effect on staff c. Respect in community d. Performance of the team 6. Meeting Goals <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. District outcomes b. Advancing the district 7. Financial Management <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Efficiencies b. Fund balance 8. Board Meetings (& board work) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Preparation b. Participation 9. Staff Satisfaction & Morale 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal Observation <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Board meetings b. Interactions with superintendent c. Community events d. Observing staff 2. Superintendent <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Regular communication b. Reports at board meetings c. Every interaction 3. Student Achievement <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. State assessment data b. Other tests c. Graduation rates d. Other indicators 4. Informal Input from Others <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fellow board members b. Parents c. Principals d. Teachers & other staff e. Community members 5. Formal Input (if available) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Staff satisfaction b. Parent satisfaction c. Community satisfaction 6. Financial Reports 7. Board Meetings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Orderliness & efficiency b. Sufficiency of information 8. Classroom Visits

Claim 1: School board members are observing and evaluating the superintendent's performance in every interaction they have.

During the interview with a board member, I asked, "Thinking about your recent superintendent evaluation, what factors did you consider?" Responding to that question, he expressed multiple factors and sources of information:

We've got . . . his [the superintendent's] verbal commentary and presentation in the formal discussion, but that said, I think the real material—fill-in the blanks and understand how well the superintendent's doing—comes from each director's individual and all directors collective observations of the superintendent and the superintendents staff's performances through the whole year. Every interaction that the board member has with the superintendent and even with members of staff, every interaction, written, oral, as well as classroom visits, and for that matter discussions with parents, hearing their view on particular programs or how they think the district is doing—discussions with teachers, community members. There are, additionally, observations everybody makes as we are at full board meetings, formal board meetings, at study sessions, small group meetings, one-on-one conversations and emails back and forth from the superintendent. Every one of these things counts in my [mind], and my fellow directors would say the same thing. It comes from, additionally, participating in meetings that he probably would lead with staff, but we're present for some reason, or lawyers, or architects, or community members. . . . It comes from monthly dashboards he provides. . . . Fortunately, or unfortunately, it's informed by observing the superintendent's response to a particular crisis.

Other board members and superintendents corroborated the factors and sources in this illustrative summary.

4.1.1 *Factors Board Members Consider when Evaluating a Superintendent*

The observations of boards evaluating a superintendent highlighted board members' interest in four main factors when evaluating a superintendent: Relationships, leadership, financial

management, and district performance. The interviews substantiated these factors. Figure 4.1 illustrates the interconnectedness of these factors.

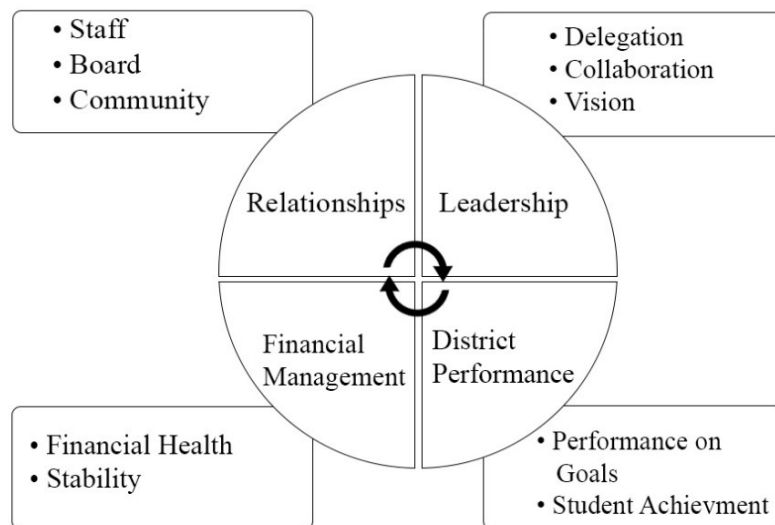


Figure 4.1. Factors board members considered during the observations.

There was much more discussion about relationships and leadership than financial management or district performance. Discussion of relationships with staff included morale, visibility, fair treatment with high expectations, and transparency. Relationships with the community included visibility, involvement, engagement and collaboration with, and responsiveness. As participants discussed the superintendent's relationship with the board, they considered ample and frequent communication, accessibility, and equal treatment of all members.

Table 4.2 provides responses to survey question nine about the factors board members considered in their most recent formal superintendent evaluation. The national comparisons are from the data reported by Hess and Meeks (2010). Overall, responses from Washington board members are similar to the national responses. However, in Washington there seemed to be greater interest in parent satisfaction, community engagement, and effective working

relationships. The largest difference between Washington and national responses was parent satisfaction. National respondents were more than three times more likely to indicate parent satisfaction was only somewhat important or not important at all (11.4% nationally and 3.3% in Washington) in their most recent formal superintendent evaluation. There also seemed to be a stronger interest in district safety among Washington board members. The timing of national incidents of mass violence in schools might have influenced responses in Washington.

Table 4.2. How Important Board Members Considered the Factors to be during their Most Recent Formal Superintendent Evaluation

Factor	Extremely and very important		Moderately important		Somewhat and not important	
	Washington	Nationally	Washington	Nationally	Washington	Nationally
Financial management	97.8%	94.6%	1.9%	3.8%	0.4%	1.6%
Communication	97.4%	—	1.9%	—	0.7%	
Effective working relationships	96.3%	90.5%	3.4%	7.7%	0.4%	1.9%
District safety	90.7%	76.9%	7.5%	16.2%	1.9%	6.8%
Student achievement data	88.1%	91.2%	10.5%	6.2%	1.5%	2.6%
Met goals	90.3%	94.4%	7.8%	4.7%	1.9%	1.0%
Community engagement	89.2%	81.8%	8.2%	14.3%	2.6%	4.0%
Perception of supt's leadership	86.7%	—	10.8%	—	2.6%	—
Graduation rates	80.6%	—	14.8%	—	5.6%	—
Community satisfaction	80.7%	—	14.4%	—	4.8%	—
Parent satisfaction	78.9%	61.2%	17.8%	27.5%	3.3%	11.4%
Staff satisfaction	78.8%	—	18.0%	—	2.2%	—
Bond or levy passage	72.6%		17.7%		9.8%	
Condition of district facilities	66.8%		26.1%		8.1%%	
Student satisfaction	67.8%		25.5%		6.7%	

4.1.2 *Board-Superintendent Relationships as a Factor*

Claim 2: Board members want the superintendent to demonstrate respect for them through thorough, two-way communication. They are also watching closely for how and whether the superintendent demonstrates respect for others when communicating with them.

The interviews in Phase III with board members and superintendents provided an opportunity to clarify, enrich, and challenge the mixed data from the first two phases. That data suggested the need to explore conceptions of board-superintendent relationships further. For this reason, the interview protocols for board members (Appendix F) and superintendents (Appendix G) inquired into the nature of the relationships. Communication, respect, and trust emerged as themes that are important to board members that they receive from superintendents, and it was important for them to see the superintendent demonstrate respect in communication with others.

Veteran members, in particular, are attune to and thinking about the nature of their relationship with the superintendent. One veteran member discussed his assessment of the superintendent's approach to the relationship. He stated, "It's very professional in the sense that the superintendent personably, personally, and properly makes sure that he doesn't become close friends with any one of the five directors." He explained further that the superintendent "corresponds [with] and meets their [fellow board members] needs, or meets their questions, responds to their inquiries as a good two-way communication with each one of the five people, as well as communications with small groups of them or larger groups of them."

Perspectives of the superintendent's respect for board members hinged upon assessments of his or her style and thoroughness of communication with board members. One board member articulated that he needs and expects respect from a superintendent. He feels satisfaction from:

1) being able to share his ideas and thoughts with the superintendent, 2) being able to understand the superintendent's ideas and thoughts, 3) being able to meld those together for improved understanding. The participant referred to "a level of mutual trust that the superintendent values the input from the board member and believes that the knowledge that they share is important enough for the district." He emphasized the importance of the superintendent respecting the values and beliefs of board members.

During this portion of the interview, he moved to first person, which led me to think he was especially speaking of himself, and his particular need to feel respected by the superintendent for his background, perspectives, and contribution. This board member continued, "I think that's one thing that I've been able to do as a board member is share my ideas and thoughts but also be able to understand the superintendent's ideas and thoughts." He also discussed the importance to him of understanding his fellow board members' ideas and perspectives. He explained, "I say that is because you may not always agree in circumstance or in a vote, but you need to understand why this person took this position or why they don't, why they believe in it or don't believe in it. I think that's very important." This board member explained why superintendents need to take time with each board member in thoughtful communication. He said, "Members of the board typically are not from an educational environment prior to coming on the board, so there's outside forces that have affected them throughout their lives," and they are going to "bring those experiences forward." He emphasized, "A superintendent needs to respect those values and those beliefs." The board member also discussed the importance of the superintendent explaining to board members why, if their ideas might not work in the district. It was most important to this board member that the superintendent take time with each member to "understand where that person's coming from—

where those beliefs were built from—so there’s the true understanding and mutual trust, instead of just turning off that board member.”

4.1.3 *Communication as a Factor*

Claim 3: Board members view communication from and with the superintendent to be of paramount importance when reviewing the superintendent’s performance.

“You continue to keep us informed of almost everything that goes on in the district” was the opening statement the board president expressed in the observation of District C when they began their discussion of the superintendent’s performance. Second, the board president commended the superintendent for his communication with staff, based on secondary evidence that he had not heard anyone complaining about their workload or what was happening in the district.

When the superintendent in the observation in District A began discussing his self-evaluation with the board, the first thing he addressed was maintaining regular communication with the board throughout the past year. At that time, the superintendent was completing his tenth year as superintendent in the district. In the written narrative the board provided in his evaluation, they commended the superintendent for his responsiveness to them and to community concerns (See Appendix B).

Nearly all (97.4%) of survey respondents in Phase II rated communication as an extremely or very important factor they considered during their most recent evaluation of their superintendent. Even though a slightly higher percentage (97.8%) rated financial management as an extremely or very important factor in their most recent superintendent evaluation, board members in the interviews overwhelmingly emphasized communication as the most important

factor they considered. This included communication with the board, staff, the community, and the state legislature.

For example, one board member mentioned that the teachers' association president had told her the superintendent did a great job communicating on an issue. Another board member considered communication by the superintendent with him to be a sign of respect. He stated, "So, the biggest thing . . . for me . . . was interaction with me as a board member and whether I was . . . respected as a professional. That was really important, because I felt that if they [the superintendent] didn't value my knowledge and my input, the lack of communication back and forth was going to be in detriment." This board member talked at length about the importance of trust as a prerequisite for open communication. He said, "The reason I wanted to bring that part about the trust, in order to have a true, open discussion about, a lot of time these discussions happen during difficult situations or when you're seeing negative data results. . . . If you have a mutual trust . . . you can really say what's on your mind and that allows people to get into more in-depth conversation."

Frequent and ample communication with the board may be an acquired skill that superintendents develop over time. Superintendents interviewed described that they had learned the importance of communication with the board throughout the course of their career. One superintendent discussed the importance of what he called "Friday notes." He described them as "a summary of high points" wherein he attempted "to tell the story about, I visited these schools, I was at these community events. We had meetings and discussed certain topics." He explained that repeatedly every board member he had ever worked with expressed, "That is the single most important thing I do that lets them know what we're doing." This type of communication is not just about news and events, so the value of this communication is not simply so board members

can be “in the know.” The superintendent described the value of this type of communication is that board members can be fully informed of progress, challenges, and potential upcoming decisions they need to make.

This same superintendent explained in the first part of our interview, “It’s part of my responsibility to give the school board good information, sufficient information of high enough quality, they can make good decisions for things.” Giving the board sufficient and high quality information may demonstrate respect for a school board and its role. The superintendent expanded on this, “I make fewer recommendations now, but I’m clearer about what I’m supposed to be doing and providing the school board with the evidence that the results they want are being reached by the organization.” (In this district’s superintendent evaluation process, progress on goals feeds back into how the superintendent is evaluated.)

Another superintendent also stressed the importance of communication with the board as a factor in her most recent performance review. She mentioned the timeliness of communication in urgent situations. She also stressed the importance to the board of her creating positive relationships through two-way communication with her staff. When speaking about what board members may need to know when considering evidence of performance, the superintendent stated, “I think that communication is key.” She emphasized the importance of her communicating the rationale for decisions, so that if a staff or community member voiced a complaint or concern about her work board members would understand the thinking behind her decision-making and actions. This does not ensure they will agree with her decision. It means they have insight into her rationale, which could help them have more support for her judgment or action. This superintendent also referred to the importance of her weekly communication in Friday briefings. She writes these to staff and shares them with the board. This weekly account

of her planning and deliberate actions provides the board with ongoing understanding of her communication style and working with staff. She views these briefings as an important source of information for the board when evaluating her performance.

One board member lamented the lack of collective data from district staff about the superintendent's performance. She suggested that school boards should have annual surveys from staff that measure staff satisfaction and provide insight into whether staff are appropriately challenged. One of the items she stated that she would like to have data for is the superintendent's communication with staff. In particular, she is interested in knowing how well the superintendent communicates priorities of the district with staff.

Another board member likewise suggested that one of the criterion board members should consider when evaluating a superintendent is how well he communicates with his team. This board member evaluates multiple employees as part of her work. When discussing those evaluations, she mentioned communication as the first criterion she considers when evaluating employee performance.

While board members and superintendents alike mention the importance of written (typically email) communication and updates by phone, they also cherish "sitting together with the superintendent." One board member spoke of the importance of the "process of the five board members sitting with the superintendent." It may be difficult to overstate the importance to board members of sitting together as a group with the superintendent, having a conversation about performance—goals, expectations, hopes, measures, improvement, and growth. From their comments in interviews, sitting together in conversations with the superintendent helps board members feel more like full participants in the district decisions. The importance of communication as a critical area of performance suggests an interrelated factor—the presence or

visibility of the superintendent—may also be important. Board members and superintendents alike refer to the importance of the superintendent’s visibility in the community and in the schools.

4.1.4 *Visibility and Involvement in the Community as a Factor*

Claim 4: Board members view the superintendent’s visibility and involvement in the community as an important factor when evaluating a superintendent’s performance.

One board member strongly considered community involvement as a factor when evaluating her superintendent, and she offered a specific reason—“I really like the fact that the superintendent is out in the community, attending the Kiwanis, being part of the community, because I don’t want us to go out to the community only when we’re looking for levies or bonds.” She continued, “I think it’s important to keep in touch with the community, so that’s another thing I look at as an individual.” Another board member expressed, community visibility was a requirement for positive relationships with community members.

A different board member offered a series of questions that he mentally processed during his board’s last evaluation of their superintendent’s performance. He mentioned, “Connecting with the community itself: How did they [the superintendent] interact with the community? How did they represent the district when they were out in functions? How did they get the community involved in our schools . . . ?” In addition, he shared, “Did they get the community members to value the schools? Did they change their thought process?”

Superintendents that may be naturally inclined to be highly visible in the community, participating in school and other community events, may find this to be a strength or advantage regarding their performance. While most board members interviewed mentioned the importance of community visibility and involvement, one superintendent emphasized community

involvement and visibility more than the other superintendents did. Reflecting on her previous and current assignments as a superintendent, she offered, “I have had boards that are very . . . active in the community. . . . I think that they emphasize my involvement in the community, and so I think that they look at my visibility and involvement in community activities” as a factor of performance.

Later in the interview, the superintendent added, “In my opinion, the role of the superintendent in a community is [a] very visible and pivotal position, so I don’t think there’s any way to discount the fact that the community has to have . . . a level of comfort with their superintendent.” She was in her first year as the superintendent in that district. The tenure of the superintendent may relate to the degree of consideration the board gives to community involvement and visibility; however, data from this study’s survey does not suggest a relationship between superintendent tenure and the importance board members place on community involvement.

4.1.5 *Visibility in the Schools as a Factor*

During the observation in District A, the board chair mentioned that at a party in his yard on the previous Fourth of July, a 5th-grade student noticed the superintendent and mentioned that the superintendent worked at the school office. This boy did not indicate the superintendent’s name or role. The board member offered this as evidence that the superintendent was “visible in the schools.” This anecdotal sensemaking as a data point was undisputed by the rest of the board. However, the board wrote in his evaluation, “We noticed a decline in your visibility within the schools and would like you to continue to maintain a regular presence in the buildings.” The fact that this was a mid-size (2,501-7,500 students) district for Washington and a small community may have enhanced the expectation that the superintendent be visible in the schools.

While the board in District C, a small rural district in Western Washington, did not explicitly mention “visibility” in the schools during the observation, they commended the superintendent for his in-person communication with staff on district planning. The board in District B, a large (15,001-25,000 students) suburban district in Western Washington did not mention visibility in the schools as a factor in the superintendent’s performance. Additionally, in discussion with the board president and one other member following the observation, there did not seem to be the expectation that the superintendent would be visible in the schools.

On the other hand, a superintendent in a large district (7,501-15,000) in Western Washington noted that on her recent evaluation of performance, “They received . . . positive input from staff. So, staff comments that I’m accessible, I seem to be everywhere, every day, and every evening, that I’ve visited schools and classrooms, and so they’ve received input from staff about my visibility, in addition to what they’ve seen.”

4.1.6 *Student Achievement as a Factor*

As noted in Chapter 1, Washington law requires that school boards evaluate a superintendent, among other criteria, on their “Interest in pupils, employees, patrons and subjects taught in school” (RCW 28A.405.100). Visibility in schools and the community could demonstrate interest in these four areas, and a noticeable focus on as well as improvement in student achievement might also be identifiable interest in pupils, employees, patrons, and subjects taught in school.

When it comes to looking at objective outcome measures for evaluation, school board members have varied levels of confidence that state test scores are a reliable indicator of the system or superintendent’s performance. This may have affected the percentage of survey respondents that indicated student achievement data was an extremely or very important factor

(88.1%) when evaluating the superintendent. This was lower than the national response (91.2%) reported by Hess and Meeks (2010). Board members interviewed expressed frustration with the constantly changing state assessment system. That may contribute to why only 72.6% of survey respondents considered state assessment data as an extremely or very important source of information when evaluating a superintendent. One board member described the frustration around this, “In an organization where the ground shifts as much, both the demographics, the testing methods, all sorts of things, the Common Core standards . . . to some extent process indicators become more relevant and useful than endpoint indicators.”

Another board member discussed challenges with incorporating the state student test score data into superintendent evaluation. He said, “I think it would be a little more difficult if you . . . started to incorporate student test scores . . . because you have to look over multiple years to see if there’s growth. So, if a superintendent hasn’t been within your district for many years, it’s . . . hard to . . . rate them on that, especially in our state where the standardized test was changing.” He explained, “You really can’t get a baseline. You’re kind of estimating what it should have been. . . . You have to look at other factors that affect that.” He mentioned the challenge with attribution of state test score data to a new superintendent. He also echoed the lack of confidence and frustration board members have with changing the test.

One board member suggested alternative indicators of student achievement that are important to him. He said, “I think we’ve put a lot of stock in how good are the systems that we’re developing to do the job. How are they, the systems, being evaluated, besides just the product of the system—the achievement test outcome as an example?” He asks:

How do we use more [than] the achievement test data? Do we know how often our chorus is invited to perform at the state level? . . . [Do we know] how good others think

our music program is, even though there's no standardized test for music? What's happening in our foreign language teaching, from dual language to kindergarten through now 8th grade, to four years of Spanish in the high school and conversational Spanish for native speakers, etc.? All that sort of thing gets weighed in there.

An additional board member also suggested other measures for achievement such as, "How many of our students are taking AP classes?" and "How many of our minority students are doing honors courses?" While a different board member suggested everything in the district should focus on student achievement, she did not suggest specific measures for achievement. Yet another board member said her fellow board members thought the focus of the superintendent's evaluation should be student achievement but expressed, "I think it's hard to measure. . . . How do you be fair about measuring it?" On the other hand, she suggested boards should evaluate superintendents based on "how they're holding schools accountable for student achievement." This board member articulated a struggle boards have with including specific measures of achievement in superintendent evaluation. She said, "Our superintendent . . . is . . . resistant to a number goal, because for whatever reason, it might not be attainable. She continued, "If it's not met, what are we doing to get there? . . . Is it too high of a stretch goal? Or, does it need to be reset? Because, I don't think there's anything wrong with resetting goals after you evaluate them. . . . But, I think you have to look at all of the evidence to see what's being done to reach that."

4.1.7 *Board Meeting Preparation and Participation as a Factor*

One of the most visible and consistent sources of information that every board member has is the formal board meetings. It may also be an important factor when board members consider the superintendent's performance. Board members take note, not only during the board meetings,

but they also note the superintendent's care and preparation for the board meetings. They are at least observing and forming opinions, if not mentally evaluating the superintendent's performance during the board meeting. This was the first and most extensive factor that one superintendent mentioned her board considered during its most recent formal evaluation of her performance. She viewed multiple aspects of the board meetings as a factor in her performance evaluation. These included: Preparation for the board meeting, presentation of board packets, conducting the meeting, and follow-up after the board meeting. She expressed, "Certainly, I think that they see that as a major product of the superintendent's work on twice a month basis. . . . They considered that performance globally in those board meeting cycles . . . as a part of my evaluation."

This superintendent explained that she believed the board meetings also provided an opportunity for her to demonstrate her delegation and technical skills. She referred to her ability to delegate questions and presentations to staff as well as her own ability to answer questions from the board as factors her board considered when evaluating her performance. She also talked about the formal board meetings as a place for the board to see her "ability to future plan—trying to fit the pieces of what's going into which board meetings, etc." She mentioned, "I think the staff input [in meetings] allows them to know where I'm devoting my energies, how I'm being a part of the community."

Another superintendent had a very detailed understanding of board meetings as a factor in his performance evaluation. He viewed the formal board meetings as an opportunity for him to intensely listen to what the board and individual members discussed, so he could ensure they had what they needed to do their job well. He explained, "I'm a really good listener. When I hear them talking about something that they'd like, well, you know, I make a note of that, and

then I go, okay, how can I deliver what they want?” He talked about his processing and assessing whether what he was hearing the board discuss was possible. His processing included whom he might need to speak with and whether the board might have consensus on future items. This superintendent shared a model that he uses to frame this process. It is discussed in Chapter 5. He offered an example, “They’ll say ‘we’d really like to talk about soft skills for our students, and let’s schedule that up for our next board meeting.’” He explained that he would show up at the next meeting with a plan, meaningful material to cover, and who would help with it. He talked about giving the board homework assignments to read and make sure they had all they needed for a valuable conversation. Afterward, he would have all the pieces lined up for another meeting in the future. He provided questions to his board to assure there was a meaningful conversation and the board was not “fumbling around.” He stated that putting all these pieces together, “reflects on my performance as well.”

While board members interviewed did not express the same type of detailed description of board meetings as a factor they considered when evaluating the superintendent, each one did specifically mention observing the superintendent in board meetings as an important aspect of performance evaluation. Neither board members nor superintendents mentioned board meetings as a factor in superintendent evaluation during the three observations. The only mention that one superintendent offered of board meetings concerned avoiding controversy. To which he said, “They don’t want to have controversy in the newspaper and on the radio—Heaven forbid, at a board meeting.”

4.1.8 *Superintendent’s Leadership as a Factor*

Ultimately, board members consider the overall performance of the school district as a system when evaluating the superintendent’s performance. The superintendent in District B mentioned

he could not be *Distinguished* in a category, because they fell short in the “systemic nature” of improvement. Board members in each district observed spoke of the superintendent’s positive effect on the performance of principals and staff. They viewed improvement in principals as a direct reflection of the superintendent’s leadership.

One board member spoke to this and said, “I would want people to evaluate the performance of the team that the superintendent has put together, and how well that team, the product of that team and the district is addressing board goals—moving towards a board vision.” Another board member also emphasized performance toward a specific outcome of goals and vision; however, he carefully articulated that the vision and goals had to be a collaborative product of the board and superintendent working together. He said, “I think that’s really important that . . . they work together to find what they believe together as a collaborative team—what that vision, mission, and the purpose of the district, and then . . . how it relates to the learning environment as a whole. . . . I think that’s important that they all are on the same wavelength and they understand what that vision and mission is.”

Another board member describes, “We all agree that the goal is learning. There’s no dispute there, so that’s at the top of the page, and it’s a big word—covers a whole host of different kinds of things. We’re all there for that. . . . We hire the superintendent to lead our efforts there.” Board members believe there is a relationship between the superintendent’s leadership and staff satisfaction. One board member explains, “Teacher job satisfaction, which I always count as an important facet for a quality organization, and I count on the superintendent to be one of the people who make that happen.”

4.1.9 *Financial Management as a Factor*

Claim 5: Board members may view financial management as an essential but routine responsibility as opposed to something that they always consider strongly as a factor of the superintendent's performance.

Even though a slightly higher percentage of survey respondents indicated that they considered financial management (97.8%) extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent than they did any other factor, financial management may not be a commonly considered factor in superintendent evaluation. In the three observations and eight interviews, the brief references to finance and budget had more to do with communicating with the board than managing finances.

Budget and financial management had only passing references in each of the three observations. During the observation of evaluation in District A, the superintendent's self-reflection included that the district was in "positive financial health." He cited his habit of advising the board early and "resolving problems quickly." There were no questions or comments by board members on this category. Similarly, the observation in District C included brief mentions of financial management. The board president commended the superintendent for keeping the board updated on the financial stability and standing of the district. Later, the superintendent mentioned that he was conservative with the budget and there was an increase in fund balance from increased enrollment and increased efficiencies. In the observation in District B, the board identified *Effective Management* as an obvious strength of the superintendent and discussed while the district was "solid financially," this had not been an area of focus. The board identified that they and the administration had not been assessing fiscal stability over time, as the framework describes for Distinguished. "I think we're solidly in Proficient," the superintendent

added. “That’s not where I have placed my highest priorities.” That was the extent of their discussion of anything related to financial management.

With one exception, the five board members interviewed did not mention financial management or the budget as a factor they considered or that boards should consider when evaluating a superintendent. When discussing evidence they had of the superintendent’s performance, one board member mentioned, “We have great evidence . . . that our budget is great. . . . We have high reserves. We actually have some complaints from the community because of that. But, I’m conservative, and I feel very strongly that we need to . . . have reserves.” Even in this account, the board member did not suggest that she considered financial management as a factor in her superintendent’s most recent formal evaluation. However, her words suggested it would have been a consideration if the district had challenges in that area.

One superintendent did not mention financial management or the budget as a factor his board considered when evaluating his performance. The only mention another superintendent had of the budget was his process for discussing with the board what their capacity would be for programs and projects in the next year. When discussing what additional evidence and sources of information a school board might consider when evaluating a superintendent, the third superintendent had some recommendations *if* the board were evaluating the budget as part of her performance. She suggested considering her “ability to be mindful and plan for expenditures to support student achievement—how are we doing that? What does that look like? How are we deciding where to infuse funds into the program? So, it might be more process oriented.”

Financial management was not a major factor in the superintendent evaluation in these 11 districts (3 observations and 8 interviews). On the other hand, board members and

superintendents seemed to be very concerned with communication, visibility, and relationships as factors when evaluating the superintendent's performance.

4.1.10 *Sources of Information Board Members Consider*

Several factors board members consider are also sources of information for them. Examples of these include communication, student achievement data, board meetings, and community involvement. This section discusses the data identifying these and additional sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent.

Board meetings can be a public showcase of the work of a school district (and a superintendent). One board member expressed that board meetings were a good opportunity for board members to observe the superintendent's performance. He mentioned not only formal meetings but also board study sessions and small group meetings with the superintendent. One superintendent emphasized the importance of board meetings as a source of information that her board relied upon in her recent performance review. As previously mentioned she described board meetings as a great place for the board to observe her skills, planning, and community involvement." In these ways, the board meetings can be both a factor in the superintendent's performance appraisal as well as an important source of information for the board about her performance.

Another board member spoke about the observations everybody makes at board meetings and how those become a source of information when evaluating the superintendent. A board member and a superintendent both spoke about how the process their district's use for superintendent evaluation includes a component of evaluation in each meeting. On the other hand, a different board member spoke about how important it is for board members to be engaged in other opportunities to confirm what they hear at board meetings.

Board members expressed that what they were not hearing was important as a source of information for them. A long-term board member and lifelong community member in his district, the board president in District C expressed to the superintendent, your communication with the staff on your district planning “has got to be good, because they’re all on board, and I never hear of anyone complaining about the workload or what’s happening, and they understand.” He later added, “I haven’t heard any complaints,” regarding the extra work that teachers and staff had to do to meet the goals, and he acknowledged it had been difficult for them. The president continued, “I haven’t heard one complaint. Additionally, the way you have handled staff discipline issues has kept that out of the paper and kept them from being blown out of proportion. Again, you’ve done a great job there.”

On the other hand, a long-term board member in District A commented, “This year, I haven’t heard him [the superintendent] talking about being in the schools . . . haven’t seen him there . . . “haven’t heard he was there.”

What board members hear, and do not hear, from staff and the community seems to be important. Neighbors, friends, family members, perhaps anyone and everyone can be a source of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. In an interview, one board member expressed that even superintendents from other districts can be a source of information.

The survey in Phase II provided an opportunity to gather broader input from Washington board members about the sources they consider when evaluating a superintendent. Question 11 asked: *How important did you personally consider the following sources of information to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?* Table 4.3 shows how

important respondents considered nine sources of information when conducting their most recent formal superintendent evaluation.

Table 4.3. How Important Board Members Considered Sources of Information during their Most Recent Formal Superintendent Evaluation

Source of Information	Extremely and very important	Moderately important	Somewhat and not important
Personal observation	89.8%	8.7%	1.5%
The superintendent	85.7%	11.8%	2.6%
Fellow board members	81.9%	13.2%	4.9%
State assessment scores	72.6%	21.7%	5.7%
District administrators	74.1%	18.9%	7.0%
Parents and community	72.5%	22.6%	5.0%
District teachers	67.3%	26.2%	6.4%
Other district staff	63.1%	27.8%	9.1%
Students	51.3%	32.7%	16.0%

4.1.11 *Personal Observation as a Source of Information*

Claim 6: Personal observation may be the most important source of information many board members rely on when evaluating a superintendent.

Board members interviewed spoke at length about the importance of personal observation as a source of information when evaluating a superintendent's performance. One board member described using personal observations in discussions with community members and staff. He said, "I make sure as a point to not ask somebody directly. I just kind of observe what's happening." He explained, "In order for you to do your job the way that you were elected to do, you have to . . . be out talking to people, to be in schools observing things."

During the interview with one board member, he spoke repeatedly about the importance of personal observation. After discussing the different ways and opportunities board members have to observe personally the superintendent, listed in Section 4.6 of this chapter, this board member shared that he had recently asked his superintendent what he thought about the factors

board members considered when evaluating him. He said, I asked the superintendent “what he thought would be the factors to include in a recent evaluation. His summary was absolutely every interaction [the board member] observes, or communication with the superintendent come into that evaluation. And, the better those communications and observations are, the better the evaluation is.”

In the observations in Phase I, the conversations board members and superintendents were having with each other during evaluation, suggested insight from personal observations and experiences was very important to them—as was their personal sensemaking of observations and experiences reported to them by fellow board members, staff, students, community members, and the superintendent. One board member affirmed this idea of valuing not only her own observations but also the observations of her fellow board members. She said:

There’s five board members, and everybody has different perspectives, and they all hear different things. And, they all talk about their own observations. I think I rely a lot on the observations of the other board members, because they all have skills, especially longer standing board members or people that have more time to spend in the schools than myself. They bring their perspectives, and then we are able to share our opinions. This board member greatly valued this idea of the five of them sharing their different opinions and perspectives based on personal observations. She discussed how they helped her get a more complete understanding of things. She shared, “I listen to a lot of their thoughts and their observations. . . . So, I’d say I probably rely on my fellow board members and their perspective.”

Later in the interview, this board member explained further, “I know that I can trust what they’re saying.” She explained that this took time. Very importantly, she looks for confirmation

of what they are saying. She stated, I will “listen and try to figure things out for myself through observation.”

This board member also shared another aspect of the importance of personal observation. She said, “If you don’t work with people on a daily basis, how do you really know what’s happening? But, I think that you can get a sense, because you can see how . . . they interact at meetings and things to know how they interact when I’m not around.”

4.1.12 *The Superintendent as a Source of Information*

The superintendent is an essential and perhaps problematic source of information board members consider when evaluating the superintendent. I asked one board member, “In what ways and to what extent did you rely upon information from the superintendent when evaluating her performance?”

He replied:

That’s a really a difficult question to answer. . . . You want to put the trust in your relationship with your superintendent. So, you hope that the information that they’re sharing with you is truthful. And, sometimes, you may know different when you receive that information, so if . . . I hear the superintendent is giving me some information that . . . I’ve heard to be inaccurate, then I’ll have to rephrase a question in a manner that either seeks out a different answer or seeks out more information, so that I’m more informed as a board member.

This board member explained, do “you just believe everything the superintendent says is factual and truthful? . . . That could lead to problems, because then you’re no longer doing your due diligence and doing your background feedback to validate those things that should be validated.”

He discussed his approach to validating information from the superintendent. He said, “That’s

why I allow people to share their insight to me, instead of me seeking out that insight. Because, if I'm seeking it out, that sends a signal to . . . a superintendent, that . . . my board does not trust my actions, or . . . the information that I share with them. . . . You're hoping to have things validated from having people share things with you, without you seeking it out."

Another board member discussed similar struggles with this. I asked, "What are your thoughts about the evidence that you had as a basis for your most recent superintendent evaluation?" She replied, "That's always the hard part, I think, for a board, because usually the evidence that we are given is given to us by the superintendent."

One superintendent recommended his Friday notes "as a best practice as a superintendent to their school board." He explained that the Friday notes are "organized along the functions of my executive team." This superintendent sees the Friday notes as an opportunity "to tell the story. As previously mentioned, he believes that every school board member he has worked with says the Friday notes are "the single most important thing I do that lets them know what we're doing." He affirmed "So, that's a source of information my school board members would tell you was really important to them." Another superintendent mentioned that "staff anecdotes"—information board members receive from district staff—help them to triangulate the information and reports they receive from her.

I asked a board member, "In what ways did you, or even does your board, rely upon information from the superintendent when evaluating her performance?" She replied, "I think most of the evaluation is, even this new evaluation, the board members are like, well we want to know what the superintendent thinks is most important." She explained, "I think everything is about, viewed through her eyes, and I know that we also have other observation, but I think 90% of it is through what she feels." This board member shared concern with changes their board

was considering for superintendent evaluation in their district for the future. She said, “They [fellow board members] just want the superintendent to tell us what she wants to improve upon next year. I just don’t think that’s the role of the board.”

4.1.13 *Classroom Visits as a Source of Information*

Board members talked about visiting schools and classrooms. They discussed individual and collective visits. One board member explained that he used to do classroom visits on his own. He mentioned doing this in his first two years as a board member and having lunch with teachers. He would write the principal, and they would set a date and time. He said, “I’m sure it made [the superintendent] a bit uncomfortable, but he didn’t ever say ‘no,’ and so, I did it.” He said it supplied him with “interesting” information. This board member shared that the reasons he does not do individual school visits anymore is because they are time consuming and that he learned a lot that he does not need to repeat.

Instead, this board member participates “every few months” with the whole board visiting classrooms and gaining an overview of a school. He describes these as “pretty hokey,” as the students and staff all know they are coming. Even with that, he expressed surprise that students and staff seem “so used to people wandering in and out of their class, they never bat an eye.” He takes this as indicative of what they are doing when guests are not in the room.

4.1.14 *Staff as a Source of Information*

Each board member interviewed spoke of conversations with district staff, including principals, teachers, and other staff. One board member even discussed speaking with other superintendents to gather information and perspectives on the superintendent’s performance. She said, “The last superintendent evaluation that I did, everything I relied on was from what I’d heard from the

principals. . . . I also interviewed a couple of other superintendents . . . that I really respected.” She stated, I asked them “what they had done.” However, her fellow board members may not have been supportive of her approach, as she disclosed, “My evaluation was shot down to the point that I don’t think anything I said was even included.”

In contrast, a veteran board member, talked about how he used to have lunch with teachers and principals but does not do that anymore. He said, “Principals of course don’t give me any information, nor do I want them to.” He talked strongly against board members seeking out information from direct reports of the superintendent and said, “It fully undermines the superintendent’s relationship with the principal.” On the other hand, he also discussed conversations with teachers as one way to find out “how the district is doing.”

4.1.15 *Community Members as a Source of Information*

Board members view the community as an important source of information regarding the superintendent’s performance. One board member looked to community events and interactions as an opportunity for him to gain feedback on the superintendent’s performance. He expressed, “You’re able to reaffirm the information that you’re hearing throughout the year of the activities of the superintendent’s performing. . . . Everywhere you go, you should be looking for . . . feedback to reaffirm that things are happening.” He explained his approach as not asking directly but making an effort to observe the interactions at community events with the superintendent. Specifically, he considers, “How do they respond when the person walks in the door or when they’re doing a debrief somewhere? Are they respectful? Same thing in return. Is the superintendent respectful back to these people?”

One superintendent affirmed that it might be important for community input to be included as a source of information regarding the superintendent’s performance. She said, “I

think that . . . community input should be taken into account somehow.” However, one board member, a full-time educator, offered caution when receiving input from staff or community members, “I know it can be overwhelming, and you can get probably a lot of wrong information. . . . But, I think you can get a better picture.”

4.1.16 *Additional Factors and Sources Board Members Might Consider*

Research Question 1 also asked what board members believe might be important to consider when evaluating a superintendent. Board members believe it might be important to consider specific information in a formalized manner. For example, one board member mentioned they could use an annual formal survey of teacher job satisfaction to monitor and compare year to year. He also suggested a quantitative assessment of community satisfaction. He reiterated that he has this information informally, but it could be helpful to have it more formally. This is in contrast to what another board member described as “gossip-level discussion about how it’s going.” He mentioned that he used to hear more of that but he does not “have any special inside tracks anymore.”

During the observation in District A, the superintendent mentioned administrators as a potential source of the information regarding his performance. The details of that were something he said they needed to explore. Board members discussed a 360-evaluation¹ as something to consider when evaluating a superintendent. Chapter 5 includes thoughts and suggestions on this idea.

1. A 360-evaluation generally includes feedback from peers, subordinates, supervisors, customers or clients, and self-evaluation.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF BOARD MEMBERS AND THEIR PERSPECTIVES

Research question 2: Background of Board Members and their Perspectives

What is the relationship between school board members' background and their perspectives regarding superintendent evaluation?

School board members interviewed spoke about how their vocation and community involvement related to the factors and sources of information they considered when evaluating a superintendent. A board member who owns a small business and is extremely involved in his community through participation in Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce, and city government, emphasized the importance of the superintendent's involvement in the community. He described how community leaders and their perceptions influenced his assessment of the superintendent's performance. He talked about being in meetings and watching the interaction between the superintendent and others.

Another board member who worked as a guidance counselor in a nearby district spoke about the needs of children and the importance of considering life skills as part of student achievement. A board member who had a degree in accounting and had previously worked as a state auditor lamented the lack of statistical data when evaluating the superintendent. A board member trained in the medical profession spoke at length about observation skills and understanding the effect of the superintendent's leadership "by walking around." A school board member, who evaluates numerous employees in her job, described her process for performance reviews and how that related to her approach to superintendent evaluation. The background and additional experiences of participants in this study was a continual backdrop in every interaction we had.

4.2.1 *Characteristics of Participants in the Observations*

The observed districts represent some of the diversity of districts in the state. While not an exact representation, the districts provided some diversity of size, socioeconomic status, regionality, ethnicity, gender of board members, and student achievement. Table 3.2 identifies characteristics of districts in the observations.

4.2.2 *Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

Nearly one-fourth (24.7%) of the respondents to the Washington survey reported they were retired. Nearly half (49.1%) reported they were working full-time (40 or more hours per week). Another 14.6% reported working half time (up to 39 hours per week). More than one-third (34.1%) were currently unemployed. Another 6.7% indicated they were not employed and not looking for work. Some (0.8%) were disabled. Some were students (0.4%). Only 1.5% indicated they were unemployed and looking for work. Appendix H (Table H.31) shows the respondents' employment status. The national study (Hess & Meeks, 2010) did not report the employment status of participants, other than that 27.4% were retired, and 72.6% were not retired.

It seemed important to consider whether having children in school, particularly within the district in which the board member serves, might relate to the factors and sources of information board members considered when evaluating a superintendent. Forty percent (40%) of respondents to the survey currently had children attending the school district in which they served.

The U.S. Census reported the median household income for 2009-2013 in the U.S. was \$53,046 and in Washington state was \$59,478. Data from the national survey (Hess & Meeks, 2010) is not reported here, because its groupings of income ranges is vastly different from those in this study's survey. Appendix H (Table H.32) shows the distribution of household income of respondents to the Washington survey.

Hess and Meeks (2010) reported that nationally over half of board members had served longer than five years. They found that Board member tenure did not vary much with district size, although medium to large districts were less likely to have members with under two years of service. Similarly, slightly more than half of respondents to this study's survey, 50.2% had served on their board for six years or more.

The survey also asked whether the respondent was the board chair during their most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent. I inadvertently oversampled board chairs. If participants matched a random sample, 20% of respondents would have been board chairs. The number of board chairs in Washington is 295 (number of districts) of the 1,477 school board members, which is 20.0%. However, 27.4% of survey respondents were currently serving as their board chair.

It was important to know whether respondents had actually participated in a formal evaluation of a superintendent. It was plausible that board members serving less than one year may not have participated in an evaluation of a superintendent. First year respondents to the survey comprised 3.6 % of the total. However, 5.9% of respondents had not participated in a formal evaluation of their superintendent. It is possible that a board member was absent when their board evaluated the superintendent. It is also possible that some board members had recused themselves from participation due to a conflict of interest such as mutual business or

other connections with the superintendent. It is also a possibility that some school boards were out of compliance with the law regarding evaluation.

The timing of the evaluation could influence the factors and sources of information a board member considers during superintendent evaluation. For example, since the survey was in October, events of the previous three months, included starting a new schoolyear, fall extracurricular activities, the public release of state test scores, and possible last minute changes due to budget and enrollment projections might affect which factors and sources of information were more strongly considered. On the other hand, activities such as graduations, staff retirements, and formulating the district budget would have been more closely related to events that were six months to a year ago. As shown in Table H.4, slightly less than half (48.1%) of respondents had evaluated their superintendent within the previous six months.

While the timing of the superintendent evaluation might relate to board member perspectives, it is also possible that the tenure of the superintendent could affect which factors and sources board members consider when they evaluate a superintendent. For example, board members might be less likely to attribute the condition of facilities, district finances, student achievement, and staff satisfaction with a first-year superintendent than they would with a superintendent that had been in the district three years or more. Table H.5 shows how long the superintendent had served in that position at the time of respondents' most recent formal superintendent evaluation. Two-thirds (66.6%) had served in that position for five years or less.

WSSDA provided multiple training workshops on superintendent evaluation during 2013. The survey asked whether respondents had participated in training on superintendent evaluation in the past year and whether their district was participating in the Superintendent Evaluation Initiative. This allowed for analysis of the data to include whether training on conducting

superintendent evaluation and/or participation in the evaluation initiative might relate to the factors and sources of information board members considered when evaluating their superintendent.

If a school board member had participated in training on superintendent evaluation, there was a greater likelihood that they responded to the survey. Although it is hard to know the percentage of board members that had participated in training on superintendent evaluation in the past year, Table H.13 shows that more than one third (35.5%) of respondents had. Ninety-eight (98) of the 276 respondents to this question indicated they had participated in training or workshops on superintendent evaluation within the past year. Of the sixty-four (64) participants that indicated whom had provided the training or workshop, sixty-two (62) mentioned Phil Gore and/or WSSDA. This suggests a possibility that some respondents may have been more likely to participate in the survey because of their relationship with me, as well as their potential interest in the topic.

As Table H.14 (Appendix H) shows, less than one-third (28.2%) of survey respondents said their district was currently participating in a superintendent evaluation pilot. When the survey deployed, 26 districts were participating in the evaluation initiative. This included 130 school board members or 8.8% of the 1,477 board members in the state. This indicates an oversampling of participants from the superintendent evaluation initiative pilots that were underway.

4.2.3 *Characteristics of Survey Respondents' Districts*

From the observations in Phase I, it seemed that the factors and sources of information school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent might relate to the size, urbanicity, and regionality of the district. For example, in the smallest district (C, 501-1,000 students),

which was located in a rural area, the conversation was less formal, they did not use an instrument or rubric for evaluation, and there was no written summary of their evaluation. In that district (C), as well as in District A, a rural district with 2,501-7,500 students, both boards held their evaluation conferences immediately following regular board meetings. On the other hand, District B, in a suburban area with 15,001 to 25,000 students held a special meeting on a different day to conduct the evaluation. They used a complex rubric that describes a superintendent's performance against six standards with 47 themes (see Appendix C). The observations suggested board members and superintendents may approach superintendent evaluation differently based on district size, urbanicity, and/or regionality.

Responses to three additional survey questions helped identify characteristics of school districts to be able to examine the data for relationships between district size, urbanicity, and regionality with board member responses to other questions. In 2014, the median-size school district in Washington, Mabton, had 900 students (Personal Communication with WASA December 30, 2015). As Appendix H shows, slightly less than one third (33.1%) of survey respondents were from districts of less than 1,000 students. In 2014, 153 out of 295 (51.9%) of Washington school districts had 1,000 or less students, which shows oversampling of medium and large size school districts.

Not only district size but also urbanicity may relate with the factors and sources school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent, as well as the other areas of focus in this study. Appendix H shows the percentages of respondents that indicated whether their districts were rural, suburban, or urban. For those familiar with the geography of Washington state, it is not surprising that nearly three-fourths (74.8%) of respondents describe their school district as rural.

For regionality, the survey asked respondents to identify which of Washington's nine Educational Services Districts (ESD's) included their district. The review of the literature in Chapter 2 and the observations in Phase I suggested that regionality may relate with demographic characteristics of school board members, their conception of their role, their conception of their responsibility, and which factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent. Appendix H lists the percentage of survey responses from board members in each ESD. Among the nine ESD's the response size ranged from a low of 14 from Yakima, ESD 105 to a high of 53 from Northwest, ESD 189.

4.2.4 *Characteristics of Superintendents Interviewed*

Superintendents that participated in interviews with me represented some of the diversity of superintendents in the state. To the best of my knowledge, none of them had participated in workshops that I facilitated on superintendent evaluation within the prior year. However, one of them was involved with the statewide superintendent evaluation initiative. One of the superintendents was retiring at the end of schoolyear 2014-2015. Each of the superintendents shared reflections of their learning that included changes in their perceptions of the role of a superintendent and their relationships with school boards. Those reflections are included in the discussions and claims within this chapter and in Chapter 5.

4.2.5 *Claims Based on Board Member Background*

Multiple relationships may exist in the data around demographic characteristics, prior experience, conceptions of role, conceptions of responsibility, and the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. There seems to be some general relationships or trends with length of service, age, gender, regionality, size of district,

and urbanicity. However, caution is in order, as there also appears to be exceptions and personal, potentially unique opinions within the data.

Analysis of the data included disaggregation of results as suggested by the literature and conceptual framework in this study. This includes comparisons of responses based on demographics and the background and experience of school board members. As discussed in Chapter 3, we wanted to know whether a background of working in education or experience conducting performance evaluation related to the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. Characteristics such as political philosophy, education level, income level, district size, regionality, and length of service may relate to which factors and sources of information are important to a board member when evaluating a superintendent. The stronger possible relationships the data in this study suggests are reported here.

4.2.6 *Length of Service and Support for the Superintendent*

Claim 7: There seems to be a relationship between how long Washington school board members have served and how important they consider supporting the superintendent, and his or her recommendations, as part of their role.

When asked, “How do you perceive your role, as an individual, and the board’s collective role in your relationship with your superintendent?” a board member in her fifteenth year of service replied, “As an individual, I see my role as a team member, and the board’s collective role is a collaborator with the superintendent.” A board member in his ninth year of service replied to the same question, “We’re willing to disagree with him at some point, but that’s rare. We’re his support.” A board member in his sixth year of service replied, “I believe they [the board and superintendent] truly have to be a working unit and a collaborative team. . . . It’s important that

the two of them not be seen as we're your supervisors or your boss. . . . They have to be unified as a team." A board member in her fourth year of service replied, "Anybody has bosses or upper management or something, somebody always is like, just let me do my job, and we'll figure it out. I think that the board needs to understand that's the role and let them [superintendent and administrators] do their job."

On the other hand, a member in her second year of service responded, "I just feel like they've [her fellow board members] had a very laid back approach. Whatever the superintendent says goes, and I feel like we could have a much more active role in helping to direct where our school goes." Responses to the survey (Table 4.4) support the tendency that the longer one is a board member, the more likely he or she may feel that supporting the recommendations of the superintendent is an extremely or very important part of the role of a school board member.

Table 4.4. Length of Service Compared with Supporting Superintendent Recommendations

Q16. Percent responding that it is extremely or very important for a school board to support recommendations of the superintendent	Q1. How long have you served on your school board?					
	Less than 1 year	1 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20 years
	66.7%	70.5%	67.2%	71.9%	84.8%	90.0%

In the observations, long-term presidents with more than twenty years of service in two of the districts consistently guided the evaluations in ways that demonstrated support for the superintendent and his performance. The president of Board C began their discussion of the superintendent's performance by commending him for his communication with the board. Another long-term board member followed that with, "I think you're doing a great job of keeping us informed. I haven't been surprised by one of our parents, or teachers, or community members, so that means you're doing a good job." I wondered whether other board members

had concerns about the superintendent's communication and if they did, whether they would have had the courage to express those. Again, during the conversation, the board president said, we "couldn't ask for anything more I don't think." Later, the board president commended the superintendent for advocating with the legislature on behalf of all districts in the state and described his communicating that information with the board as "phenomenal." He added, "I kinda feel like, yeah, he's our guy!" To which a newer member responded, "I always feel so lucky that we have him."

In further demonstration of support, toward the end of the evaluation conference, the board president (District C) asked the superintendent, "Is there anything we've done or said, or is there anything that makes your job harder that maybe we shouldn't be doing?" Each example of his leading the conversation may have been proper and appropriate; nevertheless, I wondered to what extent it might have been influencing the opinions and possibly stifling the comments of other board members.

Similarly, a long-term board member that was president of Board A during the observation seemed to offer consistent support for the superintendent and lead the board toward a more favorable outcome than if any one of the shorter-term members had been leading the conversation. He began the conversation by expressing appreciation for the superintendent's "silent confidence." He immediately followed that with, "The administrators have a good view" of him. This prompted two more members to offer positive comments on the same topic.

4.2.7 *Length of Service and Consideration of Student Achievement*

Claim 8: There may be a relationship between length of service and the likelihood that board members consider student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent.

Interviews with the two longest serving board members focused much more on student achievement than the interviews with the other three. They are also the oldest two of the five board members interviewed. They both have worked in K-12 education. Both board members are over 55 years of age. One is female, and one is male.

As shown in Table 4.5, generally, the longer a school board member has served on a board in Washington, the more likely they are to consider student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent. Of those serving five years or less on their school board, 83.8% indicated they considered student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent. Of those serving six years or more, 92.0% considered student achievement extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent. Of those serving less than six years, 83.9% considered student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent.

Table 4.5. Length of Service and Consideration of Student Achievement Data as an Extremely or Very Important Factor when Evaluating a Superintendent

Q9. Percent responding that it is extremely or very important to consider student achievement data as a factor when evaluating a superintendent	Q1. How long have you served on your school board?					
	Less than 1 year	1 to 3 years	3 to 5 years	6 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	More than 20 years
	100%	85.5%	81.3%	90.1%	93.6%	94.7%
Response Count	4	62	64	71	47	19

Similarly, board members with more years of service are more likely to consider state assessment scores as a source of information when evaluating the superintendent. Of board members serving less than 6 years, 64.8% of them considered “state assessment scores” extremely or very important source of information when evaluating the superintendent. On the

other hand, 75.6% of respondents serving 6 years or more on their board considered state assessment scores extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent.

However, the board member with the least tenure but also female stated, “I think everything should always be on student achievement.” It is difficult to know to what extent length of service relates with a greater likelihood that board members consider student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent, and/or whether this relates more with other factors such as gender, age, or regionality.

4.2.8 *Regionality*

Claim 9: There seems to be a relationship between regionality and the likelihood that board members considered student achievement extremely or very important in their most recent evaluation of their superintendent.

The board member interviewed from North Central ESD (171) referred to student achievement throughout the interview. When I asked, “What additional evidence and sources of information might a school board consider when they evaluate a superintendent?” She responded, “How much did we reduce our achievement gap over the year? Over the last two years, five years?”

Delagardelle found in her research in Iowa (2002) that there were regions of the state that had much higher student achievement than other regions. Similarly, there may be a relationship between regionality and student achievement in Washington. This study did not explore the potential relationship between student achievement and regionality. However, there seems to be a relationship between regionality and the likelihood that board members considered student achievement data as a factor when evaluating a superintendent.

Table 4.6 shows responses to consideration of student achievement data as a factor compared with regions of respondents. Of the 21 board members from ESD 171 (North central

Washington) responding to the survey, 100% of them considered student achievement extremely or very important when performing their most recent superintendent evaluation. By contrast, of the 21 board members responding to the survey from ESD 112 (Southwest Washington), only 71.4% considered student achievement extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent.

Table 4.6. Percent of Respondents from Each ESD that Considered Student Achievement Data Extremely or Very Important as a Factor in their most Recent Superintendent Evaluation

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Northwest – ESD 189	90.2%
Olympia – ESD 113	90.0%
Northeast – ESD 101	89.2%
Puget Sound – ESD 121	91.7%
North Central – ESD 171	100%
Vancouver – ESD 112	71.4%
Olympic – ESD 114	75.0%
Pasco – ESD 123	93.3%
Yakima – ESD 105	78.6%

This is consistent with data from the board member interviews from these regions (ESD's). The board member interviewed from ESD 171 spoke about the need for relentless focus on student achievement with objective data for which to evaluate the superintendent. She spoke about multiple measures of student achievement and the need to address the achievement gap in her district. This board member also worked in public education in that region. She spoke strongly about the achievement gap between students of lower socioeconomic status and the rest of the students. She expressed that she would like to see student achievement and closing the achievement gap as goals for the superintendent and part of the criteria for evaluation.

On the other hand, the board member interviewed from ESD 112 only mentioned student achievement after I had asked specifically about that as a measure of the superintendent's

performance. She mentioned that her fellow board members were interested in student achievement as a measure of the superintendent's performance, but thought it was difficult to measure. This board member talked about having goals for the superintendent, and she mentioned, "Student achievement . . . is a harder one to set a goal on."

4.3 RELATIONSHIP OF PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WITH FACTORS AND SOURCES

Research Question 3: Prior Knowledge and Experience

What is the relationship between board members' prior knowledge and experience in education or with performance evaluation and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?

4.3.1 *Prior Experience Working in Education*

Claim 10: There does not seem to be a strong relationship between whether a board member has worked in education and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent.

One might expect that prior experience working in education would relate to the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. One could expect that especially experience working in the district in which one serves as a board member would relate to specific factors or sources of information they consider. However, the data in this study lent little to no support for such hypotheses.

Approximately one-third (33.5%) of Washington school board members responding to the survey had experience working in education (see Table H.25). More than one out of six (17.8%) have worked as a teacher in public education. That is close to an average of one person per school board (20%), and suggests that many boards have a member that has experience with performance evaluation as a public school district employee (see Table H.25).

Additionally, nearly one out of five (19.7%) survey respondents or their close relative currently work in the school district in which they serve as a board member (see Table H.26).

Nevertheless, there did not seem to be a relationship between whether a board member or his or her family member worked for the district and consideration of individual factors as extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent. Respondents, who they themselves or a close family member were currently employed in the district they served as a board member, were less likely to consider each of the fifteen factors extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent. The difference was minor for most of the factors such as met goals (89.8% and 89.9%). The largest difference was staff satisfaction as a factor, and the results seemed counterintuitive. Only 72.0% of respondents, who they or their family member currently worked in the district, considered staff satisfaction extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent. This compares with 82.0% of respondents, who they or their family member did not work for the district. Responses for consideration of each of the factors are listed in Table 4.7. The only board member interviewed, who currently worked in education in another district, did not mention staff satisfaction as a factor she considered in the most recent evaluation of her superintendent.

Table 4.7. Percent of Respondents that Considered Factors Extremely or Very Important in the Most Recent Superintendent Evaluation and Employment in District

Factor	Respondent or their family member employed in the district	
	Yes	No
Financial management	94.0%	98.6%
Communication	98.0%	97.1%
Effective working relationships	94.0%	96.6%
District safety	88.0%	90.8%
Student achievement data	87.8%	88.4%
Met goals	89.8%	89.9%
Community engagement	83.7%	90.3%
Perception of supt's leadership	84.0%	86.9%
Graduation rates	78.0%	80.6%
Community satisfaction	80.0%	80.8%
Parent satisfaction	76.0%	78.4%
Staff satisfaction	72.0%	82.0%
Bond or levy passage	69.4%	74.1%
Condition of district facilities	64.0%	67.5%
Student satisfaction	64.0%	69.3%

There also does not seem to be a relationship between whether a school board member or their family member had worked in education and the likelihood that they considered student achievement data extremely or very important when performing their most recent formal evaluation of their superintendent. Of survey respondents that had never been employed in education, 88.3% indicated that they considered student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent. This is similar to those that had worked in education. Of those respondents, 88.5% indicated they considered student achievement data extremely or very important in their most recent superintendent evaluation (Appendix H, Table H.25). The exception is those that had been employed as a public K-12 administrator – 100% of

them considered student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent.

While I did not interview any board members that had been public K-12 administrators, the three superintendents I interviewed provided insight into what administrators may be thinking. One superintendent stated, “I think the state of Washington . . . is looking at student achievement. And, I don’t know exactly what that looks like, but I look forward to a time when . . . that’s looked at in superintendent evaluations, not just my own, along with everyone else’s. I think it’s an accountability piece.”

Another superintendent discussed factors he believed his board members considered during his last evaluation. This superintendent discussed the importance of incorporating student achievement data in his evaluation. He explained, “In my case, because we don’t get results for the student testing until late August, the board takes the month of September to kind of allow us time to present . . . that information. . . . In October is when they do my evaluation. . . . When you start tying superintendent performance to results, you got to wait until the results are in.” These superintendents’ perspectives support the idea that administrators may believe student achievement data should be a factor considered in superintendent evaluation.

4.3.2 *Prior Experience with Employee Evaluation*

Claim 11: A majority of school board members have experience with employee evaluation prior to becoming a board member.

Some have suggested that school board members may lack experience with employee evaluation prior to board service (DiPaola, 2003). However, results from the survey indicate that a supermajority (80.8%) of board members responding evaluated an employee prior to school

board service, and a majority of them (55.4%) have shared the responsibility for evaluating an employee as part of a group (see Appendix H, Tables H.23 and H.24).

Open-ended comments on this question suggested a wide array of settings where board members had shared responsibility for evaluating employee performance. Comments included: “As a supervisor at my place of employment,” “In a military career . . .,” “As a certificated teacher, I have held shared responsibilities of evaluating classified staff.” “I have served on non-profit boards . . . evaluate the executive directors,” and “As a law firm partner evaluating associates.”

Claim 12: School board members with experience evaluating employees prior to their school board service are less likely to place as much importance on single factors or sources of information when evaluating a superintendent.

There seems to be a relationship between prior experience with personnel evaluation and the way board members approach superintendent evaluation. Generally, with three exceptions, board members that had evaluated an employee ten times or more prior to joining a school board gave less importance to any one factor when evaluating a superintendent than members with less or no previous experience. One factor seems to be worth special attention. Board members with a lot of prior experience with performance evaluation were much less likely to consider the condition of district facilities an extremely or very important factor in their most recent superintendent evaluation (59.7% compared to 79.6%). Table 4.8 compares the percentage of respondents who considered the factors extremely or very important during their most recent superintendent evaluation with the extent of prior experience respondents had with employee evaluation. This may suggest that board members with more prior experience with evaluation are generally less

likely to place importance on any one factor and more likely to consider multiple factors when evaluating performance.

Table 4.8. Percent of Board Members that Considered the Factors Extremely or Very Important Compared with Previous Experience with Evaluation

Q9. How important did you personally consider the following factors to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?	Q23. Prior to becoming a school board member, how many times had you formally evaluated an employee?			
	More than ten times	Five to ten times	One to four times	Never
Community satisfaction	81.4%	88.0%	78.0%	77.6%
Parent satisfaction	78.6%	84.0%	70.7%	79.6%
Financial management	96.4%	100.0%	97.6%	100.0%
District safety	90.6%	92.0%	87.5%	89.8%
Bond or levy passage	71.0%	64.0%	70.0%	87.5%
Effective working relationships with others	94.2%	100.0%	97.5%	98.0%
Met goals	89.3%	96.0%	92.5%	87.8%
Communication	95.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Community engagement	87.1%	88.0%	90.0%	93.8%
Student achievement data	87.0%	92.0%	80.5%	95.9%
Your perceptions of the superintendent's leadership	80.7%	92.0%	92.5%	93.9%
Condition of district facilities	59.7%	76.0%	67.5%	79.6%
Staff satisfaction	79.1%	72.0%	85.0%	83.3%
Student satisfaction	64.3%	72.0%	69.2%	77.1%
Graduation rates	80.0%	88.0%	67.5%	85.4%

Additionally, board members with prior experience with employee evaluation generally placed less importance on any one source of information. Table 4.9 provides those comparisons.

Table 4.9. Percent of Board Members that Considered the Sources of Information Extremely or Very Important Compared with Previous Experience with Evaluation

Q11. How important did you personally consider the following factors to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?	Q23. Prior to becoming a school board member, how many times had you formally evaluated an employee?			
	More than ten times	Five to ten times	One to four times	Never
Personal observation	88.8%	84.0%	92.3%	93.8%
Perspectives of fellow board members	79.1%	84.0%	71.8%	85.4%
The superintendent	83.0%	87.5%	90.0%	87.5%
Parents and community members	74.6%	80.0%	71.8%	76.6%
Students	50.7%	56.0%	48.7%	60.4%
State assessment scores	73.3%	68.0%	61.5%	74.5%
District teachers	74.6%	76.0%	76.9%	75.0%
District administrators	78.0%	72.0%	76.9%	83.3%
Other district staff	64.6%	60.0%	66.7%	72.1%

When I asked a board member, who annually evaluates multiple employees for her job, “What factors are important to you—that may be different from what the rest of the board seems to care about?” She replied, “I don’t think that there’s any one that stands out for me, or that’s any different. I think that some of the board members would want to base it solely on student achievement, but I think you have to take all of them. . . . I think they’re all important.”

Similarly, when a long-term superintendent with five veteran school board members discussed the factors and sources of information his board considered in his most recent evaluation, he expressed it as a summary of multiple factors. He said,

I think that my reflection on our work is helpful to them. . . . I think they weigh heavily on their own personal perceptions of my work, both as a group and how they interact with me individually. . . . They get feedback both formally and informally. . . . They consider survey data, but . . . they don’t really use that. We tried a survey . . . and they

didn't think it was all that helpful. It raised more questions than it answered for them.

So, my sense is that they . . . kind of summarize things.

Multiple variables may contribute to this type of synthesis when it comes to superintendent evaluation. It could relate with the tenure of the superintendent, previous experience of board members, tenure of board members, district culture, and perhaps simply that they have not had serious conflict among the board and superintendent in recent years. This superintendent also expressed, "I don't know if there were things that were going south, if that would be the case. We've had a pretty steady relationship." The example from this superintendent and his district may point toward the importance of how board members conceive of their role.

4.4 RELATIONSHIP OF CONCEPTION OF ROLE WITH FACTORS AND SOURCES

Research question 4: Conception of role

What is the relationship between how board members conceive of their role—whether they think of their role as a trustee or a delegate—and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?

The conversations among three school boards and with their superintendents in the observations provided insight into how board members conceive of their relationship, as well as their role and responsibility. The board members participating in the three observations were respectful in their conversations with each other and together with their superintendents. Board members seemed to take their responsibility seriously and reflected upon their appraisal work aloud with member-checks throughout the discussions.

Board members view their role as an important link between the community and the superintendent. They talk about their expertise as community members and the value of coming

from a variety of backgrounds that includes their vocation, community involvement, knowledge, and interests. One board member outlined his role as having five parts. Figure 4.2 illustrates how each of these parts might fit on a trustee (representative from the people) to delegate (representative of the people) continuum.

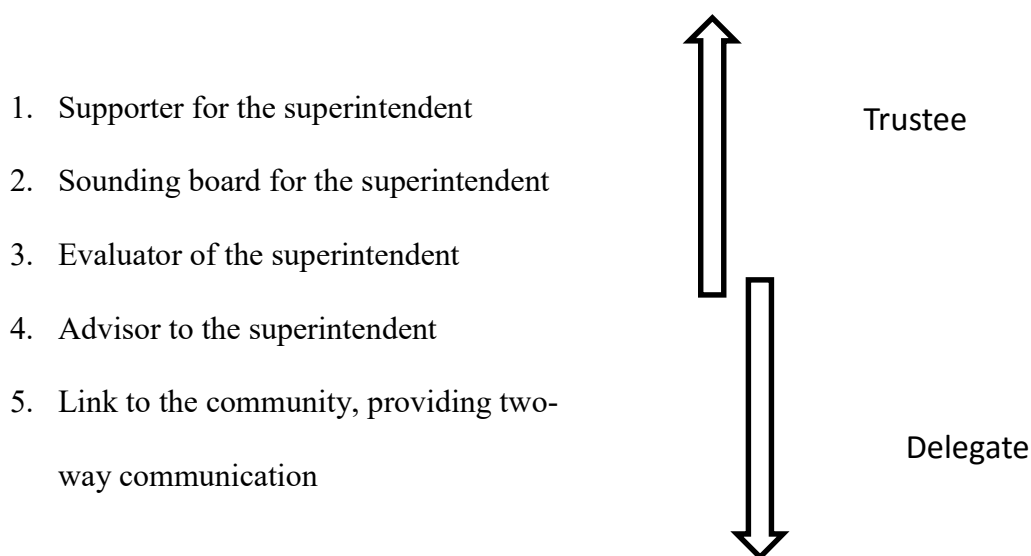


Figure 4.2. Trustee—delegate continuum.

Similar to data from the survey, individual board members can conceive of their role as both a delegate and a trustee, and adjust quickly based on the nature of the situation. One board member emphasized his involvement with the community and included that as part of fulfilling his role in learning about the superintendent’s performance. He stated:

“I’m active in community organizations. I’m active on subcommittees for school district committees. I’m active in being out in the community quite a bit, as well as in the schools. . . . I think that’s the role of a school board member, is to make sure that they’re out there listening to their constituents, because that’s where you get the feedback about the performance of the superintendent.”

This statement aligns more with a delegate conception of role than that of a trustee conception. However at times, this board member, as well as each of the board members interviewed, sounded more like a trustee than a delegate. Differences in the interview participants seemed more related to longevity than anything else.

In exploring the conception of role, the survey asked board members to rate the importance of five aspects of board service that relate to a trustee or delegate conception of board roles. Survey question 16 asked: *How important is it for a school board to do each of the following*” and provided five items for response. Table H.16 (Appendix H) lists the percentage of responses on each item. Respondents to the survey overall typified more of a trustee conception of their role than that of a delegate. The overwhelming majority (92.5%) believe it is extremely or very important for the board to speak with a unified voice. A supermajority (74.1%) believe it is extremely or very important to support recommendations of the superintendent. Both of these tendencies relate more to a trustee conception than a delegate conception.

Notwithstanding, when asked to rate aspects of a delegate conception, an overwhelming majority (93.2%) also believe it is extremely or very important to consider multiple and diverse opinions. A supermajority (88.7%) indicated it is extremely or very important to discuss and debate all aspects of an issue. However, less than one-third of Washington board members responding (30.2%) believe it is extremely or very important to act according to public opinion. Additionally, nearly one out of five (19.3%) indicated it is somewhat or not important at all to act according to public opinion. Near this threshold of 20% is important, because it suggests that an average of one member per board holds this perspective.

4.4.1 *Longevity and Conception of Role*

Claim 13: There seems to be a relationship between the length of time a person has served on a school board and the likelihood that they conceive of their role more as a trustee than as a delegate.

A veteran board member said, part of our role is “as a supporter for the superintendent. . . . We have our superintendent’s back when it comes to people challenging him. . . . We’re his support.”

On the other hand, a board member in her second year described her superintendent as doing a great job but lamented the way her fellow board members deferred to the superintendent, even regarding her evaluation. She did not conceive of her role as one that needs to support or back the superintendent.

Board members with longer tenure responding to the survey were more likely to consider “support recommendations of the superintendent” as extremely or very important for a school board. While 68.7% of respondents serving less than six years thought that was extremely or very important, 79.2% of respondents serving six years or more thought it was extremely or very important for a school board to support recommendations of the superintendent. In addition, board members with more tenure are more likely to consider the superintendent extremely or very important as a source of information when evaluating the superintendent. Board members with six years or more of experience (87.5%) were more likely to consider the superintendent as an extremely or very important source of information when evaluating the superintendent than board members with less than six years of experience (82.4%).

4.5 RELATIONSHIP OF CONCEPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY WITH FACTORS AND SOURCES

Research question 5: Conception of responsibility

What is the relationship between how board members conceive of their responsibility—to whom and for what they feel responsible—and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent?

Board members think of themselves as responsible actors and take their responsibility seriously. One board member expressed, “I really take to heart that I’m responsible for all our kids in our district—first and foremost. And, then second, I’m responsible to the taxpayers of the community, and the stakeholders in the community, and then those parents who have kids in our school.”

This was consistent with findings from the survey. Question 17 asked: *In your work as a school board member, how important do you consider your responsibility to each of the following . . . ?* Respondents (95.9%) considered their responsibility to students in their district to be extremely or very important. They (92.9%) considered their responsibility to the voters in their district extremely or very important. In addition, 95.6% considered their responsibility to parents in their district extremely or very important. Table H.17 (Appendix H) lists responses to the question about how important board members consider their responsibility to categories of people. This question provided an opportunity to respond to an open-ended prompt: “Who else do you feel responsible to?” Responses focused on three areas:

1. My own beliefs and standards
2. Public and citizens, including non-voters
3. Students above all else, for the best possible education

It could be important to consider to whom school board members do not feel as responsible. More than a majority (55.8%) of respondents indicated that they felt extremely or

very responsible to Washington business and employers. Slightly less than half of respondents (49.3%) said they felt extremely or very responsible to Washington state (i.e. the state board, legislature, & OSPI). This was somewhat intriguing, because, as discussed in Chapter 1, school boards operate under a grant of authority from the state legislature (Hill, as cited by Plecki, et al., 2006). Just over one-third (34.0%) of board members responding indicated they considered their responsibility to the United States (i.e. Congress & the Department of Education) extremely or very important.

Another survey question and its responses may help in understanding how board members conceive of their responsibility. Table H.18 (Appendix H) shows responses to Question 18, which asked participants to rank the importance of three objectives in public education. This question prompted frustration from respondents, which they shared in an open-ended dialog box in question 19. Comments about the question suggested some respondents saw each purpose as similarly compelling:

- Ranking above is simplistic. All three must be considered when providing a curriculum for each student.
- These are all important. Ranking is a false choice.
- As we prepare our students as economically productive, we are preparing them to be productive participants in our society, which will elevate their social status if they were born in a lower status. It will elevate their self-esteem and awareness of their responsibilities within our society.
- The three items in #18 are equally important and profoundly intertwined. If we do our job well, all three outcomes should follow.

- We are charged with educating students for their role in American society, not turning out widgets for participation in the economic system.
- By ranking “helping students rise above the social status into which they were born” third, that doesn’t mean it’s not a high priority.

While “Developing economically productive individuals” and “Preparing citizens for participation in a democratic society” nearly tied in the ranking by Washington school board members, the objective of “Helping students rise above the social status into which they were born,” was less popular with 53.6% of respondents ranking it third. Nonetheless, board member comments suggest they see these objectives as interconnected.

4.6 SUFFICIENCY OF INFORMATION ON WHICH TO EVALUATE A SUPERINTENDENT

Research Question 6: Sufficiency of Information

What do board members believe to be sufficient information on which to evaluate a superintendent?

Claim 14: There could be challenges with the accuracy, completeness, and sufficiency of information board members have when evaluating a superintendent.

Observations and interviews suggested school board members could have subjectivity and bias and concerns with that when it comes to sufficiency of information. Examples of this include:

1. The student mentioning that the superintendent worked at the school illustrated that the superintendent was visible in the schools.
2. One board member suggested another board member should accompany her on visits to principals, so that person could serve as a “bias filter.”

3. Another board member expressed, “When I look at information, I want to see statistics. . . . It’s really difficult for me not to have . . . the statistical backup.”

A supermajority of school board members, 83.9%, (Appendix H, Table H.6) were very satisfied or satisfied with the outcome of their most recent formal superintendent evaluation. More than two-thirds, 76.1% (Appendix H, Table H.7), were very satisfied or satisfied with the process the board used for their most recent formal superintendent evaluation. Nearly the same percentage, 76.9% (Appendix H, Table H.8), were satisfied or very satisfied with the sufficiency of information and evidence on which they had to base their most recent formal superintendent evaluation. However, this lack of concern about the process, outcome, and sufficiency of information was not consistent among all board members. In fact, these percentages suggest that on average a board could have one member that is unsatisfied with the process, sufficiency of information, and/or outcome of the board’s most recent superintendent evaluation.

Most, not all, school board members rely heavily on the superintendent for providing information regarding his or her performance. Some board members interviewed questioned the validity of relying on this evidence for evaluating performance. The board member with the least tenure expressed serious concerns about the nature of this evidence. Board members from District B in the observations consistently spoke in terms such as, “I think we have been shown evidence of improvement in professional development.” This was a consistent and two-way conversation with the superintendent. At one point, he asked, “What evidence would you need that you don’t have to support a Distinguished?”

On the survey responses, more than an average of one member per board (23.1%) (Appendix H, Table H.8) indicated they were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the sufficiency of evidence they had on which to base their most recent formal superintendent evaluation. Board

members with more years of service on the board seemed more satisfied with the sufficiency of evidence than board members with less time on the board. Of members with less than six years on the board, 71.2% of them were satisfied or very satisfied with the sufficiency of evidence, compared to 82.1% of members with six years or more on the board.

Additionally, of board members that were not satisfied with the sufficiency of evidence they had on which to evaluate the superintendent, 67.9% of them considered the superintendent an extremely or very important source of information when evaluating the superintendent's performance. This contrasts with respondents that were satisfied with the sufficiency of evidence, as 89.7% indicated they considered the superintendent to be an extremely or very important source of information. This suggests that individuals unsatisfied with the sufficiency of evidence may have more serious concerns with the evidence supplied by the superintendent.

While lamenting that the superintendent reports much of the evidence of performance, one board member described an important element of her own sensemaking. "But, a lot of the evidence is just what's been, this is what I've done. And, most of it's been reported on a regular basis, so we know it to be true." She articulated this sensemaking clearly—there is a consistent story that the superintendent has been giving to us. This could be an important point for both superintendents and board members to note and consider when discussing the superintendent's performance. A consistent story was also what one member suggested he looked for in conversations with multiple sources.

4.7 NATURE OF SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION AND BOARD-SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

4.7.1 *Superintendent leadership*

The observations modeled a flow of conversation (Allen & Mintrom, 2010) that may represent the relationship of a superintendent with a board. In each observation, superintendents initiated the conversation, and board members responded to the conversation. In the same manner, the superintendents introduced the themes, criteria and process for the board to consider, and the boards responded by following the lead of what the superintendent suggested.

Two board members spoke about a need to feel respected and valued by superintendents. Superintendents observed and interviewed did not suggest they felt this need from board members. Overall, board members and superintendents observed and interviewed showed a tremendous respect for each other as well as respect for their own role and responsibility. Board members and superintendents alike may want to pay attention to this topic, as it seems intimately connected to critical indicators of the capacity and effectiveness of the work such as communication, collaboration, and satisfaction of staff and community.

4.7.2 *Concerning Micromanagement*

Board members, at least veteran members, are concerned about micromanaging and perceptions of micromanaging. This concern corresponds more to a trustee (for the people) conception than a delegate (from the people) conception. Moreover, this is something board members grapple with, as evidenced by the interview data. A board member discussed devoting time to his work as a responsibility of his role. He mentioned taking time to talk with people and be present in schools making observations. He drew a distinction that this was not micromanaging the

superintendent but rather responsible and diligent school board service. He saw this as a necessity to affirm decisions made in business meetings and make sure the district was moving in the direction he and the board believe it should be. This board member stated:

In order to do your job correctly, you have to devote time to it. . . . It's unique to each district how much time you need to add into it, and how successful you want to be, but I think in order for you to do your job the way that you were elected to do, you have to . . . be out talking to people, to be in schools observing things. That's just part of the role that we perform, and that's not doing, and I don't want to say that's being micromanaging your superintendent in any manner. That's just reaffirming that the decision[s] that you're making in your business meetings are either being addressed in the schools, or the actions that you've taken are moving forward and moving your district in the direction that you and your board believe you should be moving.

This concern with micromanaging was recurring in conversations with board members. There seemed to be ongoing grappling with this in each board member interview.

One superintendent expressed delight in not contending with micromanagement. He suggested his experience was different from many of his colleagues. He said, "I get so wrapped up in the day to day functions of the district—and I had the luxury of having a board that gives me a lot of latitude and trust—and so you know they're not hovering over me all the time." This superintendent appreciated that the board was not hovering over him, and at the same time understood his role as that of an advisor and a servant. He expressed that he viewed his role as "a servant role, because I'm serving the board. . . . I'm seeing that I get the work done, that they expect and that they need to have done for the community."

4.8 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter reported on themes from the interviews, mixed with data from the observations and surveys, to provide a labyrinth that builds upon previous studies and provides guidance for theory and further studies. This chapter does not attempt to exhaust all that could be said about the data from the study. Rather, the chapter makes 14 claims among the findings. Table 4.10 lists them, and Chapter 5 discusses them as a collection and further explains some of their interrelationship.

Table 4.10. List of Claims

Claim 1	School board members are observing and evaluating the superintendent's performance in every interaction they have.
Claim 2	Board members want the superintendent to demonstrate respect for them through thorough, two-way communication. They are also watching closely for how and whether the superintendent demonstrates respect for others when communicating with them.
Claim 3	Board members view communication from and with the superintendent to be of paramount importance when reviewing the superintendent's performance.
Claim 4	Board members view the superintendent's visibility and involvement in the community as an important factor when evaluating a superintendent's performance.
Claim 5	Board members may view financial management as an essential but routine responsibility as opposed to something that they always consider strongly as a factor of the superintendent's performance.
Claim 6	Personal observation may be the most important source of information many board members rely on when evaluating a superintendent.
Claim 7	There seems to be a relationship between how long Washington school board members have served and how important they consider supporting the superintendent, and his or her recommendations, as part of their role.
Claim 8	There may be a relationship between length of service and the likelihood that board members consider student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent.
Claim 9	There seems to be a relationship between regionality and the likelihood that board members considered student achievement extremely or very important in their most recent evaluation of their superintendent.
Claim 10	There does not seem to be a strong relationship between whether a board member has worked in education and the factors and sources of information they consider when evaluating a superintendent.
Claim 11	A majority of school board members have experience with employee evaluation prior to becoming a board member.
Claim 12	School board members with experience evaluating employees prior to their school board service are less likely to place as much importance on single factors or sources of information when evaluating a superintendent.
Claim 13	There seems to be a relationship between the length of time a person has served on a school board and the likelihood that they conceive of their role more as a trustee than as a delegate.
Claim 14	There could be challenges with the accuracy, completeness, and sufficiency of information board members have when evaluating a superintendent.

The calculus of the research suggests that school boards want superintendents to exercise consistent, comprehensive, thorough, respectful, and effective leadership with staff, the community, and the board. One board member stated unequivocally that when board members

evaluate a superintendent, “They’re evaluating leadership.” In this vein, board members are constantly observing, perceiving, and appraising the leadership affect of the superintendent – how a board member *feels* and perceives others feel about the superintendent and his or her influence in the district and community. Second, board members are looking for the effect of the superintendent’s leadership. This includes staff satisfaction and/or cooperation toward the district’s objectives and the level of support in the community for the district and the superintendent. It also extends to sound financial management and improvement in student learning measured by specific and general indicators. Board members seem to be less concerned with test scores and more concerned with functional literacy and skills such as following directions.

Board members—especially experienced members—seem generally to take a *trust first and then verify* approach toward a superintendent. One board member shared, they do not want to signal to the superintendent that that they do not trust him or her. Nonetheless, they are nonplussed if they perceive they are receiving mixed messages from a superintendent and/or have information that refutes what the superintendent has presented. Because of an enormous sense of responsibility—as one board member stated, she was responsible for all the district’s kids, and responsible to the taxpayers, community, and parents—board members want confirmation that information is accurate. This sense of responsibility on one hand might motivate a new board member toward behaviors that come across like micromanaging, or like a delegate member, and responsibility displayed by veteran members could come across like *rubber-stamping* (blindly approving whatever the superintendent requests) or a trustee member.

As this study suggests, less experienced board members (both time in the position and with employee evaluation) tend to consider single factors and sources of information more

important than board members with more experience do. More experienced board members seem to take a more holistic approach to superintendent evaluation and consider multiple factors and sources of information more equally when evaluating a superintendent. All of this relates to board members' conceptions of their role.

Chapter 5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As The Fordham Institute proposed, “The fact that board members can influence achievement, even loosely, merits much more attention—surely by scholars but also by voters, parents, taxpayers, and other policy-makers” (Shober and Hartney, 2014). We do not know enough about school boards, their members, or their effects on school systems. Whether, how, and to what extent, school boards or their members affect student outcomes deserves further investigation. However, whether school board members influence student outcomes, the fact that they oversee the disbursement of more than \$600 billion annually for educating nearly fifty million K-12 public school children (NCES, 2014) calls for more insight into and understanding of the perspectives they consider when evaluating a superintendent.

This study extends the concern identified by Land (2002) and calls attention to the need for further in-depth examination of the perspectives of school board members. This study exposed and interrogated factors and sources of information that school board members consider when they evaluate a superintendent. As such, causal claims are not in order here. However, the data suggest several relationships that might exist among the variables identified within this study. These variables include prior experience with evaluation or working in education, demographic characteristics, conceptions of responsibility, conceptions of roles, and the factors and sources of information board members consider when evaluating a superintendent.

Board members and superintendents alike spoke of their dispositions and attitude toward each other and the respective roles they fulfill. The dispositions, conceptions, and behaviors of board members and superintendents deserves further review. Respect for each other’s role seems

to be foundational to effective working relationships among them. Giving the board sufficient high quality information may be one way a superintendent demonstrates respect for a school board. Correspondingly, board members view communication with them from the superintendent as a signal of respect.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

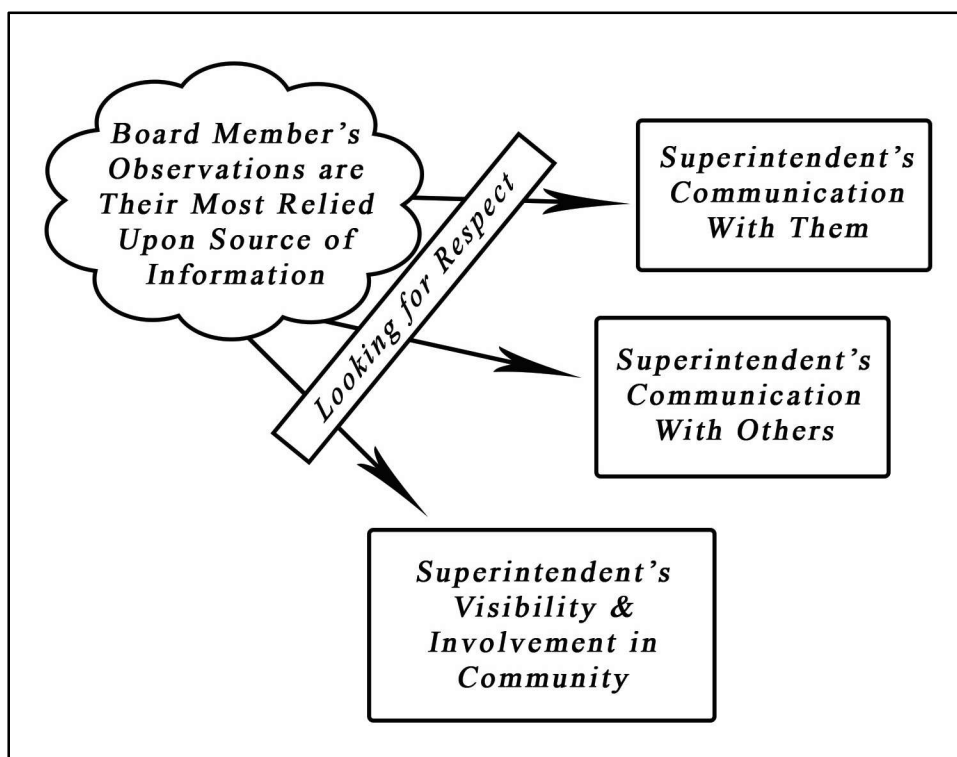


Figure 5.1. Interrelationship of claims.

Figure 5.1 illustrates interrelationships among some of the findings. Discussion of respect permeated the interviews with school board members and superintendents. Different board members approach respect from and for a superintendent from different vantage points. Board members seem concerned with knowing a superintendent respects them and values their input. They also express concern for both the superintendent demonstrating respect for others and whether others show respect for the superintendent. They are observing and watching for this in

particular. Carter and Cunningham (1997) assert that the superintendent's role is "to position the school district in the community; doing so naturally entails being in touch, getting involved, building respect and trust, and generating broad and vital support" (p. 64). Perhaps, generating support, among the board and within the community, signals to a board member that a superintendent is serving in the best interest of the district.

When it comes to financial management, board members, in general, want to trust that the superintendent is prudent and responsible. They mentioned financial management in all three observations, but board members and superintendents did not express concerns or emphasis on the topic. Board members and superintendents interviewed did not place much emphasis on the topic either. However, when asked about the importance of financial management on the survey, 97.8% of board members expressed they considered it extremely or very important as a factor in the superintendent's evaluation.

There seems to be a relationship between the length of service and items within the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1)—conception of responsibility, conception of role, and the factors and sources board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. Figure 5.2 depicts some of this relationship. It seems that the longer one serves on a school board, the more likely they are to conceive of themselves as a trustee for the school district than a delegate to the school board. Board members with more tenure are more likely to support a superintendent and his or her recommendations, while at the same time they are more likely to consider student achievement data when evaluating a superintendent. Fordham laments this tendency as "the board of directors syndrome" (Hess & Meeks, 2010, p. 6). They suggest that school board members are more likely to act as fiduciaries of public trust rather than agents of change.

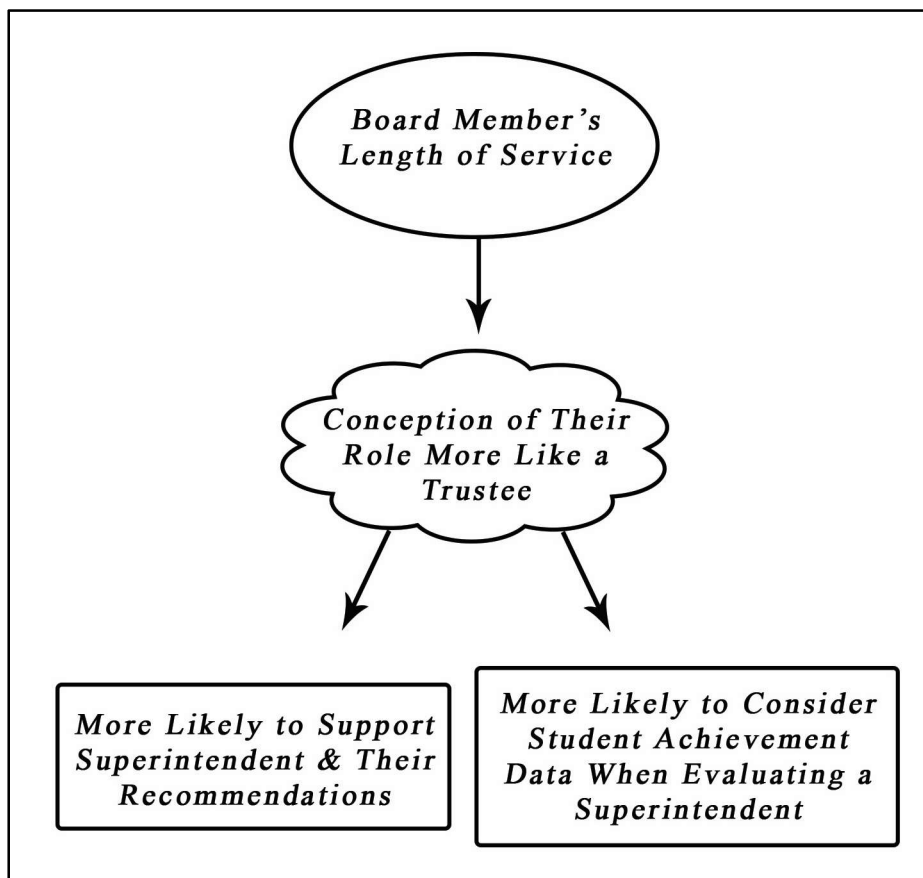


Figure 5.2. Implications of length of service.

This study suggests, the longer one serves on a school board, the more likely they are to conceive of themselves as fiduciaries of the public trust.

It makes sense that a board member over time may tend to move from an outsider perspective and conception to an insider conception. The process of assimilation into a group and system could lend itself toward greater commitment to a group and affiliation with its perspectives. We might also expect a school board member, given additional information and understanding of the inner workings of a school district, to move toward improved trust and confidence in the system. This includes moving more toward a conception of ownership and responsibility toward the welfare of the system and preserving the status and operations of the

system. These characteristics generally align more with a trustee conception than a delegate conception of a board member role.

Length of service seemed to relate to a conception of role and a conception of responsibility. Board members with more years of service seemed more committed to backing a superintendent. They not only discussed this as part of their role, but they demonstrated it when leading evaluation conferences about the superintendent. In the survey data, those with six years or more of service were more likely to consider their responsibility to fellow board members, the superintendent, and parents in the district to be extremely or very important than those with less than six years of service. Those interested in education reform might consider board member tenure as an impediment to change. On the other hand, those concerned with superintendent turnover, dysfunctional school boards, and how that may relate to decreased student achievement, could be interested in board member tenure as an opportunity to increase stability within school systems.

In this study, previous or current experience in education did not appear to affect the factors or sources of information that school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. The one suggestion from the survey data that those working for a district may be less concerned with staff satisfaction as a factor of the superintendent's performance was surprising to me. Because of the large number of school board members that have previous experience or are currently employed in education, this is an area for further investigation.

Board members with experience evaluating employees prior to their school board service are less likely to place as much importance on single factors or sources of information when evaluating a superintendent. It might be the case that school board members with prior experience evaluating employees could diffuse and mitigate the effect of board members with

more singular areas of focus in the evaluation. The process the board uses for evaluation could also affect the extent of the effect of individual board members. For example, if the board follows a process of reaching consensus on items, such as the three boards in the observations, individual board member's affect may be greater on each other than if a board followed a process of individual ratings and mathematical averaging of scores. It is possible that result could be positive or negative for the superintendent, and it is possible that result could be beneficial or detrimental to the school system. It is important to note that board members have an effect on each other and on each other's perceptions regarding the performance of the superintendent as well as the outcome of the evaluation. Of the nine sources of information for response in the survey, board members were more likely to consider fellow board members an extremely or very important source than six of the other sources of information (see Appendix H, Table H.11).

5.2.1 *Additional Considerations*

There seemed to be a relationship between gender and the likelihood that a board member considered student achievement data as a factor when evaluating a superintendent. However, the data was not certain, and there was not enough differentiation between male and female board members interviewed to make a claim based on gender. That may be partly because another factor, age, relates to the likelihood that board members consider student achievement data an extremely or very important factor when evaluating a superintendent. Here again, there is not enough data and participants to make a claim, but there might be a relationship between age and the consideration of student achievement as a factor.

Two of three female school board members interviewed referred to student achievement and closing the achievement gap. Both of these board members lamented a lack of focus on this in information from their superintendent and in discussions with fellow board members. One

member explained: “I do think we have a good superintendent. . . . But . . . I feel like her focus gets shifted . . . I think everything should always be on student achievement. That should be our number one area of focus, and everything else should come underneath that.” She discussed the placement of staff and the superintendent’s focus on the care for them. She explained, “We have to have a place to put these people . . . But, that’s not the most important, because that will get taken care of if we’re focusing on achievement.”

A possibility of a relationship between gender and student achievement data was anticipated. Nelson (1988) wrote about the frustration Anna Louise Strong, elected in 1916 as the first female board member in Seattle, had with the areas of focus and discussion by her fellow board members regarding everything except the welfare and achievement of students. Strong described:

Questions of education they never dealt with; they referred them to the superintendent.

The interest of the board members was in gas and heating contracts, new buildings for important new areas, [and] the spending of public funds. For me those sessions were the most completely boring hours of my existence, spent in long debate over various makes of electric switches or plumbing fixtures, with never a word on the aims or methods of education (as cited by Nelson, 1988, pp 13-14).

Of those responding to the survey and answering the question about gender, 92.6% of females considered student achievement data extremely or very important when evaluating a superintendent. On the other hand, only 83.2% of males indicated student achievement data was extremely or very important when evaluating the superintendent. One board member emphasized the need to focus on student achievement as a factor when evaluating the superintendent. She spoke about multiple measures of student achievement and the need to

address the achievement gap in her district. She said, “I’m in a school district that’s 85% or even 86% free and reduced. . . . We have an achievement gap. We’ve had an achievement gap.” She continued, “If we were looking at factors, that would be one factor that I would consider as a goal for our superintendent, is how are you going to reduce our achievement gap?” She also suggested measures of achievement other than test scores such as the number of students taking AP classes and the number of minority students taking honors courses. She expressed frustration with their current approach to superintendent evaluation, which did not include consideration of these factors. She said, “Those are some questions that I ask them [the superintendent], but they’re not considered part of the evaluation.”

There may be other differences in the consideration of factors based on gender. Here again, while the survey responses suggest possible relationships, the observations and interviews did not suggest enough strength for these relationships to include them as claims in Chapter 4. Table 5.1 lists a cross-tabulation of the importance board members placed on 15 factors by gender. Females responding were more likely to consider 13 of the 15 factors extremely or very important than their male counterparts. Community satisfaction was the only factor male respondents were more likely to consider extremely or very important. Equal percentages of female and male respondents considered parent satisfaction extremely or very important. The biggest difference was in staff satisfaction, where 90.0% of females and 70.4% of males considered it extremely or very important. The second largest difference was in student satisfaction (75.8% and 60.8%), and the third largest difference was the condition of district facilities (73.6% and 58.7%).

Table 5.1. Percent of Female and Male Board Members who Found Factors Extremely or Very Important when Evaluating a Superintendent

Q9. How important did you personally consider the following factors to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?	Q27. Are you male or female?	
	Female	Male
Community satisfaction	76.2%	83.3%
Parent satisfaction	77.0%	77.0%
Financial management	100.0%	95.2%
District safety	91.7%	88.1%
Bond or levy passage	74.2%	71.8%
Effective working relationships with others	96.7%	95.2%
Met goals	91.7%	88.1%
Communication	99.2%	95.2%
Community engagement	91.7%	85.6%
Student achievement data	92.6%	83.2%
Your perceptions of the superintendent's leadership	90.1%	82.5%
Condition of district facilities	73.6%	58.7%
Staff satisfaction	90.0%	70.4%
Student satisfaction	75.8%	60.8%
Graduation rates	82.2%	76.4%

Possible gender difference in the factors board members consider when evaluating a superintendent needs further testing before claims or theories are in order. The same is true for claims based on age as well as other background characteristics. Both the youngest and the oldest interviewees emphasized consideration of student achievement as a factor in superintendent evaluation. The oldest was male, and the youngest was female. The oldest two interviewees both emphasized student achievement as a factor in superintendent evaluation. One was male, and one was female. Gender becomes important, perhaps more important in states other than Washington. In Texas, for example, only 22% of school board members are female (personal communication with The Texas Association of School Boards, October 13, 2015.) Among the reasons one might argue for increased diversity and representation on school boards,

whether school board members are more likely to consider student achievement as an extremely or very important factor when evaluating a superintendent, could be vital.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

5.3.1 *Further Research*

This study's findings have suggestions for further research on school boards and the way they govern. Knowing more about the factors and sources of information boards consider when evaluating a superintendent could be valuable for:

1. Board member reflection and growth.
2. Superintendents' practice.
3. Assistance with school board and superintendent development.
4. Guidance on superintendent evaluation.
5. Further research on school boards and their effects.

This study offers insight that could be valuable to superintendents and superintendent preparation programs for understanding what is important to the board members that employ superintendents. Better understanding the factors and sources of information that school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent could help inform further research into school governance configurations as well as broader policy implications for improved governance in our current system. Similarly, examination of board members conception of their role, conception of their responsibility, and their prioritization of the purposes of public education can provide insight for further study and reflective practice by board members, superintendents, those studying them, those working to improve their practice, and policymakers.

State and national policymakers may want to consider application of this study. Improving the value of superintendent evaluation touches upon multiple aspects of the dominant school governance configuration in the U.S. School board members are sometimes tentative about their role, as board members shared during interviews. While statutes describe legal responsibilities of school boards, the language can add to uncertainty about the role of school boards and their members. For example, Washington statute requires that each board of directors “elect” a superintendent (RCW 28A.400.010). This statute stipulates that the superintendent “shall have such qualifications as the local school board alone shall determine.” That could be subject to some of the broadest possible interpretations and further exacerbate role confusion among board members and superintendents.

Typically, school board policy and superintendent contracts speak to when and how evaluation is to take place. However, some board members are unfamiliar with their superintendent’s contract, and it is not common for school boards and superintendents to have a job description for the superintendent. Superintendents and board members could benefit from the clarity of well-defined job descriptions. They could experience less frustration, more clarity of expectations, and better ongoing mutual understanding of their duties and performance. Ultimately, school governance might also be more functionally democratic and democratizing if board members and superintendents had better clarity on roles and expectations of each other. It behooves all parties to strive for a democratic and democratizing public education system.

Higgins and Abowitz assert (2011):

Public school governance can and does work well when it is constructed by and for the public through attention both to the laws and policies of official representative bodies, as well as to the publics born of school needs, issues, and conflicts. Enacting school

governance within the context of this tension requires a unique balancing act for leaders.

The need for this kind of constructed governance will hold true as long as government-supported public schools remain locally controlled in some significant case (p. 378).

More research is needed regarding the degree to which governance structures are democratic and democratizing. The current, dominant structure of elected school governance needs to be evaluated along with alternative governance structures. The tensions discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, and other possible and/or necessary tensions could create a starting place for examining structures and practices that best serve the interests of the public and their schools.

5.3.2 *Motivation for service*

It could be helpful to know more about what motivates a person to want to serve on a school board, both short-term and long-term. Board members frequently cite altruistic motivations for school board service. These often include statements such as “I just wanted to give back...” However, school board members receive benefits, potentially tangible and intangible, for school board service. One board member spoke about the privilege of inside information, understanding, and influence as a benefit of, if not a pre-service motivation for school board service. Beyond various possible personal benefits of school board service, it could be helpful to know more about what board members want to influence or change and what they want to sustain within the school district.

5.3.3 *Relationships with Political Philosophy*

Cross-tabulation of the survey data suggests that if Washington school board members claim to have a politically moderate philosophy, they may be more likely to be the president of their

school board than if they indicate they have a liberal or a conservative political philosophy.

Consider the data in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Respondents' General Political Philosophy Compared with whether they were the Board President

Q3. Were you the board chair/president during the most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?	Q34. What is your general political philosophy?		
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative
Yes	18.3%	50.0%	31.7%
No	26.0%	40.9%	33.1%

This was not specifically within the conceptual framework or scope of this study, and there is not data from interviews or observations to support this as a claim. However, the survey data suggests there may be something about this of interest for further research.

5.3.4 *Theories for testing*

Data and findings from this study suggest multiple theories for testing. Each of the claims in Table 4.10 needs further testing. Some concepts emerged naturally, as I identified themes from the observations and interviews, cross-tabbed survey data, and mixed data from the three phases.

There seems to be the likelihood that long-term, veteran board members and board presidents are more supportive of the superintendent and inclined to evaluate the superintendent more favorably than other board members do. This seemed to be the case in each of the observations. Two of the presidents (Districts A and C) had each served more than 15 years and seemed to steer the conversation into a favorable as well as speedy outcome. The president of Board B was in his first term. He seemed less hurried than the other two but also pre-disposed toward evaluating the superintendent favorably.

5.3.5 *What Board Members Bring to the Board*

One board member found the notion offensive that they “have no formal education and cannot be presumed to know anything about education, or for that matter education management” He suggested that idea undervalues what they bring to the relationship, particularly those attending conferences and becoming students of leadership. This board member referred to the professional knowledge and experiences that his fellow board members brought to the board and the importance of them sharing their expertise with the superintendent. He spoke about the need for board members to bring “study habits and collaboration skills to the job that allow them to learn some of the particularities about . . . quality leadership.” He added, “And, if you’re not learning it every minute, oh, then you’re not all that [valuable].” If board members bring valuable knowledge, skills, and dispositions to their role, what are those? How might a community look for those in candidates? In addition, how might board members further develop those attributes?

5.3.6 *Superintendents, Get Lucky*

Each of the three superintendents that I interviewed stated that they were “lucky” or “fortunate” to work with the boards and board members that they had. I think something else besides luck was happening. While I invited the three superintendents to participate in this study because I knew them and considered them thoughtful people with reflective practices, it is possible that I inadvertently prescreened them based on characteristics that they have, which relate to working with school boards. In retrospect, I believe that I may have selected them partially because of the courtesy and respect that they had previously shown to me. If that is the case, it may be that superintendents, who knowingly or unknowingly demonstrate respect, cultivate a culture of

respect around themselves. This is a phenomenon worthy of further exploration—especially a superintendent’s respect for the role of the board deserves further exploration by researchers. In what ways does a superintendent’s demonstration of respect relate to other outcomes for a superintendent, board, and district?

5.3.7 *Professional Growth for Superintendents*

Superintendents identified a pathway of professional growth that they had progressed in their work with school boards and developed understanding of the importance of supplying a school board with as much information as possible around important decisions. They related this to a growing respect for the importance of the board’s role. They also indicated their professional growth included making fewer recommendations to a school board and making those strongly with ample supporting rationale. Whether or not this is a common growth trajectory for superintendents, and implications for how that relates to other items and indicators, deserves consideration.

5.3.8 *360-Evaluation*

Board members discussed aspects of a 360-evaluation as something to consider when evaluating a superintendent. In the observation in District A, a board member demonstrated surprise when the superintendent suggested the board could learn from other district administrators more about his performance with staff. This caused me to wonder what other surprises might board members and superintendents have if they were more fully informed about the ideas and interests of each other. I wondered what conversations the board and superintendent had not had with each other, why, and what the implications of that might be.

Three board members in the interviews spoke about 360-evaluations and particular aspects of a 360-evaluation. Board members expressed the need to have formal input from staff, community, parents, and students. It could be helpful for boards to monitor trends in feedback from these groups. However, caution is in order regarding the use of the information when evaluating a superintendent. The emphasis should be on trends and changes over time, as opposed to one-off comments by individuals. Carefully formalizing a process to receive this data and identifying specific guidance is something that needs specific research. Since board members are already relying upon data from these groups, even anecdotal information and hearsay when they evaluate a superintendent, this deserves further investigation. A proposed theory here that deserves review is: A formal process for including input from staff, community, parents, and students could assist a board when evaluating a superintendent.

5.3.9 *Board-superintendent relationships*

Board members request what they describe as a “professional” relationship with the superintendent. One board member described the relationship he and his board members share with their superintendent. He said the superintendent “personably, personally, and properly” made sure not to become close friends with any of them, but he has great communication with each and all of them. While Chapter 4 describes the importance of communication as a factor boards strongly consider when evaluating a superintendent’s performance, developing a shared understanding among a board and superintendent regarding communication and what constitutes appropriate relationships could reduce conflict and help build trust and respect. Board members and superintendents alike seem to desire an appropriate and effective relationship. This needs to be explored and defined in terms of what it looks like and how to develop it.

5.3.10 *Policy Governance*

A few school districts in Washington practice a prescribed approach to governance called Policy Governance© (Carver & Carver, 2009). Policy Governance outlines a strict framework for governance, and this study was not investigating merits of or concerns with Policy Governance©. However, I inadvertently selected one board member and one superintendent from Policy Governance© school districts for the interviews. There seemed to be some dissonance in the perspectives they both shared. Policy Governance© is a commendable model that deserves further testing. Germane to this study, it would be helpful to know whether and the extent to which its prescribed approach for superintendent evaluation serves the interests of board members, superintendents, and the district.

5.3.11 *Leadership and Influence*

Former Springfield, Massachusetts superintendent Peter Negroni (2013) described his learning journey as a superintendent. He discussed explicitly his shift in working with his school board (called school committees in Massachusetts). He began to seek and listen to board member opinions—demonstrating respect and value for their role. Negroni (2013) described the evolution of his leadership to that of a “convener of dialog.” His explanations of personal learning and growth resonate with how superintendents described their learning and evolution in the interviews in this study. Negroni’s (2013) sensemaking also complements what board members interviewed discussed that they wanted from a superintendent in terms of communication, involvement, and respect. Superintendents interviewed in this study shared their own conceptions of leadership.

One important skill related to superintendent leadership might be anticipating—and to whatever extent possible eliminating or at least warning others about—problems before they occur. One superintendent expressed that this was an important factor to his board and would be for any superintendent—“anticipating problems or issues that have become problems or conflict, and heading it off and dealing with it effectively before it rises to the level of a crisis.” He explained, “You can’t always do that, but I think the board expects that for the most part. That’s a big part of what I do, and so if I’m successful at that, that’s important to them.”

A board member described what members might need to know when considering evidence of performance. He said, they need “to learn what good leadership looks like, because they’re evaluating leadership.” Next, he described what board members should look for when they evaluate a superintendent. He stated unequivocally, “How well is the superintendent leading an organization that’s providing learning, that’s conducive to learning, and improving learning, K-12?” He added, “We hire the superintendent to lead our efforts there.”

Specifically how board members evaluate leadership by a superintendent deserves further attention. Particularly if the role of a superintendent is all about leadership, how might boards better identify and evaluate leadership characteristics and performance? It may be that within this study’s discussion of communication, visibility, relationships, and respect, we have been considering specific leadership attributes. If the role of a superintendent is about effective leadership, what evidence might board members consider, and how might that lend itself to improved superintendent evaluation? A leadership framework such as the one used for evaluation by Board B in the observation (see Appendix C) may assist in improving superintendent evaluation. This needs to be examined.

5.3.12 *Suggestions for Superintendents*

Working successfully with a school board is a critical requirement for the success of a superintendent. Not only is it essential for success in a particular district, but it is also essential for a career in that field. Veteran superintendents attest to the large amount of work required to work effectively with a board. They describe this in terms of something they learned after they became a superintendent. The amount of work and detail involved in working with a school board may not be well represented in some superintendent preparation programs.

One superintendent shared, “A veteran superintendent, measures their work cycle based on board meetings.” He further explained, “Most of us think . . . when’s the next board meeting and what do I have to do to get ready for that? You’re constantly in the process of getting ready for the next board meeting.” He stated specifically, “I think this is another thing that the preparation programs aren’t very good at preparing administrators for. Even if you sit in lots of board meetings as an observer, you’re sitting there wondering, why are they doing this? Why are they talking so long?” This superintendent described his learned skill of thinking ahead about what the board needed to be successful and how he could get that for them in time.

Related to the time and preparation he takes to ensure the board has what it needs to make fully informed decisions, this superintendent talked about his role in reducing chaos among the board. He distinguished this type of chaos from that of board members having relationship difficulty with each other. The superintendent described that as “a different kind of chaos” that the superintendent may not be able to prevent. However, he spoke about the superintendent’s role in not causing chaos among the board by throwing things at them that they do not fully understand and pressuring them to make decisions on a short timeline because the superintendent had not prepared enough in advance. He explained, “If you’re a board member, you’re kind of

going, oh my God. This is an important decision, I would like some time to think about it, and I'm being told I don't have it." This veteran superintendent shared, "Those are the things that you try to avoid."

He discussed this as part of the workload of working with a board that new superintendents may not realize in advance. He said, "It falls on the superintendent to think about that stuff." He added, you have to be working two to three weeks ahead and thinking about, what you need by the time you get there and who will provide it for you. He said, "And then, orchestrate all this stuff happening so it comes together smoothly for a school board meeting."

What percentage of a superintendent's time and attention needs to attend to the needs of board members and the board as a whole? This deserves specific research, as well as what is the nature of that time and attention and how does a superintendent manage his or her work to meet the needs of working with the board. The loose theory is that superintendents learn on the job to increase the amount of time and energy they spend supporting the board and its work. What is the nature of that learning, and how can superintendents best support a school board, making fully informed decisions in the best interest of the school district?

5.3.13 *Focusing on What the Whole Board Wants*

One superintendent shared a model that he uses to frame his analytic process, understand better, and act upon the desires of the board as a whole, rather than a minority of the board. This approach may be helpful for other superintendents and could help organize the focus of superintendent evaluations. He expressed that a critical skill for a superintendent is discerning and confirming areas and items of agreement among board members. The superintendent described listening to hear when board members were talking about something that they might

like to consider in the future. He described an essential skill of listening for consensus among the board members and the possibility of emerging consensus. The superintendent explained, “I’m . . . listening to my school board and assessing whether or not there’s consensus or support for some of the little items in their conversation. If I sense there is and it also aligns with where I think would make a difference, than I’m all over implementing those things.”

Of interest here, how often do and how much time is consumed when superintendents pursue the interests or agendas of individual board members or less than a majority of the board. Could boards and superintendents develop a technique and skill for increased understanding of the will of the board or the possibility of emerging consensus among the board? If boards and superintendents could do this, could they distinguish those items and move those toward the focus of a superintendent evaluation? This seems like a long way of saying, “clarify expectations.” However, if a board and superintendent do not do this, there may be greater likelihood of distractions, confusion, and conflicts among them. Specific strategies for clarifying expectations, developing shared understanding, and operating more as a unit could increase desirable conditions and outcomes for school boards and superintendents. This is a theory that needs to be tested.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While the biases and preconceptions of this researcher could inhibit objectivity in this study, I have been careful throughout to build in scholarly review by my co-chairs and full committee, as well as by member checks with study participants and colleagues in the field. As a researcher, I have potential areas of bias. I am a former school board member and proponent of democratically representative local governance of public schools. I approach this work with the belief that the U.S. public education system is flawed, but not failed. I believe local schools and

their governance operate best through a balance of centralized and localized regulations and oversight. I believe dynamic tension in governance that respects mutual, and sometimes competing, interests of all parties—especially families and students—best serves compelling national, state, and local interests.

I currently work for the Texas Association of School Boards and oversee the development and delivery of school board member training for the state's 7,200 board members. I have worked for the National School Boards Association and prior to that, I worked for WSSDA, where I designed and directed board development for school boards and their members. I have a compelling interest in wanting to believe school boards are relevant and capable of fulfilling a vital role within public education; however, I am aware of shortcomings and concerns about our current configuration of public school governance. Deep awareness of my positionality and thorough review by my doctoral committee has helped ensure objectivity in this study.

5.5 SUMMARY

While it was thoroughly enjoyable to explore the factors and sources of information school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent, this is only one of many possible lenses and approaches for considering board-superintendent relationships and understanding this prevailing governance structure for public school governance in the U.S. Exploring the factors and sources of information school boards consider when evaluating a superintendent provided a portal to examine board-superintendent relationships. Concerns with trust and respect are at the crux of these relationships, not only from board members toward the superintendent but also from the superintendent toward the board and its members. If either party in the relationship struggles to trust and respect the other, challenges are likely to escalate.

On the other hand, if one party in the relationship chooses to extend trust and respect, even if there is a perception that it is undeserved, it may be possible to reduce breaches of understanding and improve the relationship—at least to a level of functionality. Fundamentally, this premise is not about personalities or merit. It may be more about leadership and a respect for the role the other fulfills. When board members respect the role and function of a superintendent to lead the district and trust that she or he is capable and committed to the good of the district, they are more likely to provide space and support for that to happen. Likewise, when superintendents respect the role of a school board to govern and provide oversight and trust that board members intentions are for the greater good of the district, they are more likely to support and encourage board members fulfilling their responsibility effectively.

From a memo, I wrote about the interview with one board member:

This is what I love about school governance. You're that voice, both back to the system from what the people have to say, but also you're the representative back from the people to the district also—helping them understand. No, these are not a bunch of villains here. In the future, I anticipate continuing to delve into this topic further.

When the board gets together and has the opportunity to tell their stories, good and bad—this is my experience, this is my observation, this is what I'm thinking—that's such a rich opportunity for the board to form and take things to a deeper level. The evaluation is a culmination of the board member's stories, their experiences, there intuition, as well as hard data. That's where the board has a big opportunity—a lever to bring improvement to the school system. That's why I've poured myself into this niche of superintendent evaluation. That conversation that's going on about how we improve, how we work well together, what you think, what you see, how you feel. To me, that's

the richness and beauty of publicly elected school board members and a hired administrator. Improving the richness of the conversation is what it's all about.

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Appendix A: Human Subjects Approval for Research

Date: 11/12/2014

PI: Mr. Phil Gore
Graduate Student
College of Education

CC: Brad Portin

RE: HSD study #48382
“Superintendent Evaluation: The factors and sources of information school boards consider”

Dear Mr. Gore:

The University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) has determined that your research qualifies for exempt status in accordance with the federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101/ 21 CFR 56.104. Details of this determination are as follows:

Exempt category determination: **2**

Determination period: **11/12/2014 – 11/11/2019.**

After clarification during the review and screening of this application, it has been confirmed that the only research procedure involving human subjects is prospective interviews with adults. The PI has confirmed that disclosure of subjects interview responses outside the research will not reasonably place them at risk. This exempt determination covers these interview procedures only.

Although research that qualifies for exempt status is not governed by federal requirements for research involving human subjects, investigators still have a responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of their subjects, and are expected to conduct their research in accordance with the ethical principles of *Justice*, *Beneficence* and *Respect for Persons*, as described in the Belmont Report, as well as with state and local institutional policy.

Determination Period: An exempt determination is valid for five years from the date of the determination, as long as the nature of the research activity remains the same. If there is any substantive change to the activity that has determined to be exempt, one that alters the overall design, procedures, or risk/benefit ratio to subjects, the exempt determination will no longer be valid. Exempt determinations expire automatically at the end of the five-year period. If you complete your project before the end of the determination period, it is not necessary to make a formal request that your study be closed. Should you need to continue your research activity

beyond the five-year determination period, you will need to submit a new *Exempt Status Request* form for review and determination *prior to implementation*.

Revisions: Only modifications that are deemed “minor” are allowable, in other words, modifications that do not change the nature of the research and therefore do not affect the validity of the exempt determination. **Please refer to the [SOP on Exempt Determinations](#) for more information about what are considered minor changes.** If changes that are considered to be “substantive” occur to the research, that is, changes that alter the nature of the research and therefore affect the validity of the exempt determination, a new *Exempt Status Request* must be submitted to HSD for review and determination *prior to implementation*.

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events or any problem that may increase the risk to the human subjects and change the category of review, notify HSD promptly. Any complaints from subjects pertaining to the risk and benefits of the research must be reported to HSD.

Please use the HSD study number listed above on any forms submitted which relate to this research, or on any correspondence with the HSD office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at (206) 543-0098 or via email at hsdinfo@uw.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Bailey Bell
Human Subjects Administrator
(206) 221-7918
bbell3@uw.edu

Appendix B: Evaluation Instrument from District A

SCHOOL DISTRICT A
Superintendent Evaluation

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Rate each item according to the following performance scale.

Performance Scale

4 = Distinguished

3 = Proficient

2 = Basic

1 = Unsatisfactory

3 Relationship with the Board

- *Keeps the Board informed on issues, needs and operations of the school system.*
- *Offers professional advice to the Board on items requiring Board action, with appropriate recommendations based on thorough study and analysis.*
- *Interprets and executes the intent of the Board policy.*
- *Seeks and accepts constructive criticism of his work.*
- *Supports Board policy and actions to the public and staff.*

3 Community Relationships

- *Gains respect and support of the community on conduct of the school operations.*
- *Solicits and gives attention to problems and opinions of all groups and individuals.*
- *Develops friendly and cooperative relationships with news media.*
- *Participates actively in public affairs.*
- *Achieves status as a community leader in public education.*
- *Works effectively with public and private groups.*

4 Staff and Personnel Relationships

- *Develops and executes sound personnel procedures and practices.*
- *Develops good staff morale and loyalty to the organization.*
- *Treats all personnel fairly, without favoritism or discrimination, while insisting on performance of duties.*
- *Delegates authority and responsibility to staff members appropriate to the position each holds.*
- *Recruits and assigns the best available personnel.*
- *Encourages participation of appropriate staff members and groups in planning, procedures and policy interpretation.*
- *Evaluates performance of staff members, giving commendation for good work as well as constructive suggestions for improvement.*

3 Educational Leadership

- *Understands and keeps informed regarding all aspects of the instructional program.*
- *Maintains a sound philosophy of educational needs of all pupils.*
- *Participates with staff, board and community in studying and developing curriculum improvement.*
- *Organizes and implements a planned program of curriculum evaluation and improvement.*
- *Effectively lead efforts toward achievement of district goals.*

3 Business and Finance

- *Keeps informed of needs of the school program (plant, facilities, equipment, and supplies).*
- *Supervises operations, insisting on competent and efficient performance.*
- *Determines that funds are spent wisely, with adequate control and accounting.*
- *Evaluates financial needs and makes recommendations for adequate financing.*

4 Personal Qualities

- *Defends principle and conviction in the face of pressure and partisan influence.*
- *Maintains high standards of ethics, honesty and integrity in all personnel and professional matters.*
- *Earns respect and standing among his professional colleagues.*
- *Devotes his time and energy to the job.*
- *Exercises good judgment in arriving at decisions.*

Comments

We are in full agreement with the self-assessment that you provided to us. We commend you for outstanding performance in all areas, for your integrity, for your work ethic and for the positive relationships you've forged within the community and our school district. You are very responsive to board and community concerns. You excel in all areas of staff and personnel relationships. We commend you and thank you for your continued long hours of service and appreciate the good judgement that you use in arriving at all decisions.

We would like you to give additional attention in the coming year to more effective use of student achievement data and working with the board to understand it more fully. We noticed a decline in your visibility within the schools and would like you to continue to maintain a regular presence in the buildings.

We appreciate your devotion to our schools and our positive working relationship with you.

In recognition for your outstanding work and devotion to the job, we would like to consider an increase your current base salary.

3 Overall Rating

This report is to be completed by the District Board of Directors and discussed with the superintendent. Any material used in the evaluation will be attached. After discussion, the superintendent will, within three (3) working days, sign the report as having read and discussed it, not necessarily indicating agreement with the contents. Any rebuttal, documents or other statements may be attached by the superintendent prior to his signing the report.

Superintendent's Signature _____ Date _____

Board President's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Superintendent Leadership Framework Sample Used by District B

Standard 2— Instructional Leadership: The superintendent is an educational leader who improves learning and achievement for each student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a district culture conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Strand 1—Putting student learning at the center. *The superintendent...*

Themes	Unsatisfactory	Basic	Proficient	Distinguished
<i>A. Advocates for student learning as the district's highest priority.</i>	does not communicate that student learning is central to the district's mission	communicates to all stakeholders that student learning is central to the district's mission	consistently emphasizes student learning is central to the district mission by actively engaging stakeholders in collaborative discussion of ways to improve learning	motivates stakeholders to seek continuous improvement and innovation in student learning to achieve the district's mission
<i>B. Promotes the systematic improvement of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.</i>	takes few steps to analyze district curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student learning	engages staff in regular analysis of district curriculum, instruction, and assessment	assures that decisions on curriculum, instruction, and assessment are guided by regular analysis based on objective data	develops or sustains a comprehensive system for the review, analysis and modification of curriculum, instruction, and assessment based on key learning indicators
<i>C. Assures that district policies, practices, and resources support student learning.</i>	does not align district policies, practices, and resources to support student learning	assures that existing district policies, practices, and resources are aligned to support student learning	uses data to seek improvements in district policies, practices, and resources to better support student learning	motivates principals and other administrators, teachers, and other members of the school community to seek improvement in district policies, practices, and resources to support student learning

<p><i>D. Promotes values, beliefs and behaviors that create an organizational culture devoted to student learning.</i></p>	<p>does not address the values, beliefs, behaviors, and organizational practices that support a school culture focused on student learning</p>	<p>recognizes and celebrates individual and collective efforts that reinforce the culture to improve student learning</p>	<p>creates or sustains a culture that leads members of the school community to openly acknowledge and collaboratively address problems in student learning</p>	<p>creates or sustains a sense of collective mission and efficacy in the improvement of student learning</p>
<p><i>E. Gives a high priority to reducing achievement gaps.</i></p>	<p>disregards or downplays the significance of achievement gaps</p>	<p>focuses attention on the need to maintain high expectations for each student and close achievement gaps</p>	<p>assures that improvement efforts include data-based strategies to analyze and address barriers to student learning and setting specific targets for closing achievement gaps</p>	<p>creates district-wide commitment to understanding and addressing achievement gaps, and demonstrates sustained progress in improving learning</p>

Standard 6— Socio-Political Context: The superintendent is an educational leader who improves learning and achievement for each student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Strand 2—Works effectively with the school district’s Board of Directors. *The superintendent...*

<p>Themes</p>	<p>Unsatisfactory</p>	<p>Basic</p>	<p>Proficient</p>	<p>Distinguished</p>
<p><i>A. Respects and advocates mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities of superintendents and board.</i></p>	<p>does not articulate or adhere to the roles and responsibilities of the board and superintendent</p>	<p>articulates and adheres to the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and board</p>	<p>collaborates with board to review and refine guidelines for effective board and superintendent roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>models candid but respectful discussion of board and superintendent roles and responsibilities, including areas of friction or misunderstanding in the board-superintendent relationship</p>

<i>B. Honors board policy.</i>	does not follow board policy	follows board policy	consults with the board when questions of interpretation arise on board policy	facilitates systematic board review and revision of policy-making process
<i>C. Provides the board with timely information.</i>	does not provide the board with timely information needed for effective board decision-making	assures that the board receives necessary information in a timely way, including relevant laws, policies and procedures from local, state and federal mandate	assists board in understanding the multiple perspectives surrounding issues, as well as possible implications of decisions	collaborates with the board to review and improve the effectiveness of information and guidance provided to the board
<i>D. Treats all board members fairly, respectfully, and responsibly</i>	favors certain board members or is unresponsive to board members' perspectives on educational issues	treats all board members fairly, respectfully, and responsibly	facilitates resolution of concerns or conflicts through board dialogue that creates greater mutual understanding	increases board capacity through trust, encouragement, and personal example
<i>E. Provides necessary support for effective board decision-making</i>	does not establish and implement effective procedures for board meetings	assures that the board has the necessary materials, information, and logistical support to make effective decisions	works with the board to assure that meeting agendas are focused and consistent with board priorities	collaborates frequently with the board to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of board decision-making
<i>F. Builds strong team relationships with the board</i>	does not attempt to establish a working team relationship with board	collaborates with board to develop structures, procedures, and norms for working as a team	works with board to monitor team effectiveness and adjust procedures accordingly	facilitates development of a board-superintendent team characterized by candor, deep listening, a collaborative spirit and openness to change

Appendix D: Statewide Survey

1. How long have you served on your school board?
 - Less than 1 year
 - 1 to 3 years
 - 3 to 5 years
 - 6 to 10 years
 - 11 to 20 years
 - More than 20 years
2. Have you participated in a formal evaluation of your superintendent?
 - Yes, I participated in the most recent one
 - Yes, in the past, but not in the most recent one
 - No, I have not participated in a superintendent evaluation
 - Other (please explain)
3. Were you the board chair/president during the most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?
 - Yes
 - No
4. When did your school board perform its most recent formal evaluation of your superintendent?
 - Our board has not performed a formal evaluation of our superintendent within the past year
 - About 1 year ago
 - About 6 months to 1 year ago
 - About 3 months to 6 months ago
 - Within the past 2-3 months
 - Last month
 - Don't know
 - Other, please explain
5. At the time of your most recent formal superintendent evaluation, how long had the superintendent served in that position in your district?
 - It was his or her first year
 - 1-3 years
 - 4-5 years
 - 6-9 years
 - 10 years or more Other (please specify)
6. To what extent were you satisfied with the overall outcome of the most recent formal superintendent evaluation?
 - Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Very unsatisfied

7. To what extent were you satisfied with the process your board used for the most recent formal superintendent evaluation?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Very unsatisfied
8. To what extent were you satisfied with the sufficiency of information and evidence on which the most recent formal superintendent evaluation was based?
- Very satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Unsatisfied
 - Very unsatisfied
9. How important did you personally consider the following factors to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?

(Extremely Very Moderately Somewhat Not at all)

- Community satisfaction
- Parent satisfaction
- Financial management
- District safety
- Bond or levy passage
- Effective working relationships with others
- Met goals
- Communication
- Community engagement
- Student achievement data
- Your perceptions of the superintendent's leadership
- Condition of district facilities
- Staff satisfaction
- Student satisfaction
- Graduation rates
- Other (please specify)

10. When the board is evaluating the superintendent's performance, please indicate the importance of each of the following factors:

(Extremely, Very, Moderately, Somewhat, Not at all)

- Community satisfaction
- Parent satisfaction
- Financial management
- District safety
- Bond or levy passage
- Effective working relationships with others
- Met goals
- Communication
- Community engagement
- Student achievement data
- Your perceptions of the superintendent's leadership
- Condition of district facilities
- Staff satisfaction
- Student satisfaction
- Graduation rates
- Other (please specify)

11. How important did you personally consider the following sources of information to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?

(Extremely, Very, Moderately, Somewhat, Not at all)

- Personal observation
- Perspectives of fellow board members
- The superintendent
- Parents and community members
- Students
- State assessment scores
- District teachers
- District administrators
- Other district staff
- Other (please specify)

12. When the board is evaluating the superintendent's performance, please indicate the importance of each of the following sources of information:

(Extremely, Very, Moderately, Somewhat, Not at all)

- Personal observation
- Fellow board members
- The superintendent
- Parents and community members
- Students
- State assessment scores
- District teachers
- District administrators
- Other district staff
- Other (please specify)

13. Have you participated in any workshops or training on superintendent evaluation during the past 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, who provided the training?

14. Is your district currently participating in a superintendent evaluation pilot?

- Yes
- No

15. Please share recommendations for improving superintendent evaluation.

General questions about your perspectives on school boards

16. How important is it for a school board to do each of the following?

(Extremely, Very, Moderately, Somewhat, Not at all)

- Speak with a unified voice
- Act according to public opinion
- Support recommendations of the superintendent
- Consider multiple and diverse opinions
- Discuss and debate all aspects of an issue

17. In your work as a school board member, how important do you consider your responsibility to each of the following:

(Extremely, Very, Moderately, Somewhat, Not at all)

- Fellow board members
- Your superintendent
- Voters in your district
- Parents in your district
- Students in your district
- Minority students and minority communities in your district
- Teachers and staff in your district
- Business and employers in Washington
- Washington state (i. e. the state board, legislature, & OSPI)
- The United States (i. e. Congress & the Department of Education)
- Who else do you feel responsible to? (please specify)

18. Please rank the importance of each of these objectives in public education

- Preparing citizens for participation in democratic society
- Developing economically productive individuals for a healthy economy
- Helping students rise above the social status into which they were born

19. Please share anything else you would like to on this topic.

20. How many students are attending your school district this year?

- 0 - 500
- 501 - 1,000
- 1,001 - 2,500
- 2,501 - 7,500
- 7,501 - 15,000
- 15,000 - 25,000
- 25,001 or more

21. How would you describe the location of your school district?

- Urban – there is dense population and several skyscrapers within your district boundaries
- Suburban – your district borders a densely populated city with skyscrapers nearby
- Rural – your district has no city with a population over 35,000, and most land is unincorporated by any city

- 22.** Which Educational Services District (ESD) does your district belong to?
- Northeast – ESD 101 (includes cities such as Republic, Chewelah, and Cheney)
 - Yakima – ESD 105 (includes cities such as Sunnyside, Highland, and Ellensburg)
 - Vancouver – ESD 112 (includes cities such as Washougal, Battle Ground, and Longview)
 - Olympia – ESD 113 (includes cities such as Aberdeen, Oakville, and Tumwater)
 - Olympic – ESD 114 (includes cities such as Bremerton, Port Angeles, and Forks)
 - Puget Sound – ESD 121 (includes cities such as Federal Way, Issaquah, and Kirkland)
 - Pasco – ESD 123 (includes cities such as Richland, Clarkston, and Colfax)
 - North Central – ESD 171 (includes cities such as Leavenworth, Lake Chelan, and Oroville)
 - Northwest – ESD 189 (includes cities such as Everett, Mt. Vernon, and Ferndale)
 - Don't know
- 23.** Prior to becoming a school board member, how many times had you formally evaluated an employee?
- More than ten times
 - Five to ten times
 - One to four times
 - Never
- 24.** Prior to becoming a school board member, had you ever shared the responsibility with others for the formal evaluation of an employee?
- Yes
 - No
 - If Yes, please describe
- 25.** Have you ever been employed in education? (check all that apply)
- No
 - Yes, in a preschool, as a teacher or other staff
 - Yes, as a private K-12 teacher
 - Yes, as a private K-12 administrator
 - Yes, as a public K-12 teacher
 - Yes, as a public K-12 administrator
 - Yes, in higher education
 - Yes, other (please specify)
- 26.** Are you, your spouse, or another relative (such as a parent, child, or grandchild) currently employed by the district in which you are a board member?
- Yes
 - No

Responses to these questions are optional but can help us understand: 1) Why board members have certain perspectives, and 2) How Washington board members' responses may differ from those in other states.

27. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female
- Decline to respond

28. Which category below includes your age today?

- 18 - 29
- 30 - 39
- 40 - 49
- 50 - 59
- 60 - 69
- 70 - 79
- 80 or older
- Decline to respond

29. Do you currently have any children attending preschool through 12th grade? (Check all that apply)

- Yes, in the public school district where I serve on the board
- Yes, in another public school district
- Yes, in a private school
- Yes, in a homeschool
- No
- Decline to respond

30. What is the highest level of education you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than high school completion
- High school graduation or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree
- Decline to respond

31. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

- Employed, working up to 39 hours per week
- Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
- Student
- Not employed, looking for work
- Not employed, NOT looking for work
- Retired
- Disabled, not able to work
- Decline to respond

32. What is your expected total household income this year?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 – \$34,999
- \$35,000 – \$49,999
- \$50,000 – \$74,999
- \$75,000 – \$99,999
- \$100,000 – \$149,999
- \$150,000 or More
- Decline to respond

33. What is your race?

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White, non Hispanic
- From more than one race
- Decline to respond
- Some other race (please specify)

34. What is your general political philosophy?

- Liberal
- Moderate
- Conservative

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix E: Survey Introduction

Dear School Director,

Thank you for your service as a school board member in Washington State.

We need your help to understand better what school board members consider when evaluating a superintendent. By completing this survey, you will help us find new ways to improve the governance of public schools. We have kept this survey as short as possible to make it convenient for you to complete. Individual responses will not be reported. We intend to report information only by group.

Appendix F: Interview Protocol for Board Members

Superintendent Evaluation: The factors and sources of information school boards consider

Date _____

Time _____

Interviewee pseudonym _____

Date on signed consent form _____

Introduction

- Thank you for your participation in this study. I believe your input will be valuable to this research.
- Your participation and comments are confidential.
- Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you would like to decline to respond to a question or discontinue this interview, just let me know. Upon conclusion of the interview and after you review your responses, you have the right to change or delete your responses or withdraw from the study.
- This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. I have allowed for up to an hour if you would like to share additional information or continue the discussion.

Purpose of research:

I am exploring the factors and sources of information that school board members consider when they evaluate a superintendent. Information from this study may help to improve the process and quality of superintendent evaluations. It may also help to inform school board members, superintendents, researchers, and others seeking to understand board-superintendent relationships and school governance.

You have had an opportunity to review the questions in advance, and I would like to go through each of them one at a time to record your responses and perspectives. Again, feel free to skip a question or discontinue the interview if anything makes you uncomfortable.

Are you ready to begin?

- 1. How do you perceive your role, as an individual, and the board's collective role in your relationship with your superintendent?**

Response:

2. What factors did you consider in your most recent evaluation of your superintendent?

Response

3. What factors did your board as a whole consider when evaluating the superintendent?

Response:

4. What other factors might a school board consider when evaluating the superintendent?

Response:

5. What are your thoughts about the evidence you had as a basis for your most recent superintendent evaluation?

Response:

6. What may board members need to know when considering evidence of performance?

Response:

7. What individuals and sources of information did you rely upon during your most recent evaluation?

Response:

8. In what ways do you feel these individuals were helpful to your understanding the superintendent's performance?

Response:

9. How do you feel about the quality/accuracy of the information/evidence you had to consider during your most recent evaluation of your superintendent?

Response:

10. In what ways and to what extent did you rely upon information from the superintendent when evaluating his or her performance?

Response:

11. What additional evidence and sources of information might a school board consider when evaluating a superintendent?

Response:

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Response:

Reflection by Interviewer

- Closure
 - Thank you to interviewee
 - Reassure confidentiality
 - I will provide you a copy of the notes from this call within the next ten days. Please let me know if there is anything you would like to delete or amend.
 - Do I have your permission to follow-up with you? _____

Appendix G: Interview Protocol for Superintendents

Superintendent Evaluation: The factors and sources of information school boards consider

Date _____

Time _____

Interviewee pseudonym _____

Date on signed consent form _____

Introduction

- Thank you for your participation in this study. I believe your input will be valuable to this research.
- Your participation and comments are confidential.
- Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you would like to decline to respond to a question or discontinue this interview, just let me know. Upon conclusion of the interview and after you review your responses, you have the right to change or delete your responses or withdraw from the study.
- This interview will take approximately 45 minutes. I have allowed for up to an hour if you would like to share additional information or continue the discussion.

Purpose of research:

I am exploring the factors and sources of information that school board members consider when they evaluate a superintendent. Information from this study may help to improve the process and quality of superintendent evaluations. It may also help to inform school board members, superintendents, researchers, and others seeking to understand board-superintendent relationships and school governance.

You have had an opportunity to review the questions in advance, and I would like to go through each of them one at a time to record your responses and perspectives. Again, feel free to skip a question or discontinue the interview if anything makes you uncomfortable.

Are you ready to begin?

- 1. How do you perceive your role as superintendent with your board as a whole and the individual members?**

Response:

2. What factors did you believe that your board members considered during your most recent formal evaluation?

Response

3. What factors do you feel a board should consider when evaluating you?

Response:

4. What other factors might a school board consider when evaluating a superintendent?

Response:

5. What are your thoughts about the evidence the board used as a basis for your most recent superintendent evaluation?

Response:

6. What may board members need to know when considering evidence of performance?

Response:

7. What individuals and sources of information did your board rely upon during your most recent evaluation?

Response:

8. In what ways do you feel these sources were helpful to these understanding the superintendent's performance?

Response:

9. How do you feel about the quality/accuracy of the information/evidence your board had to consider during your most recent evaluation?

Response:

10. In what ways and to what extent does your board rely upon information from you when evaluating your performance?

Response:

11. What additional evidence and sources of information might a school board consider when evaluating a superintendent?

Response:

12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Response:

Reflection by Interviewer

- Closure
 - Thank you to interviewee
 - Reassure confidentiality
 - I will provide you a copy of the notes from this call within the next ten days. Please let me know if there is anything you would like to delete or amend.
 - Do I have your permission to follow-up with you? _____

Appendix H: Survey Response Data

Question 1. How long have you served on your school board?

Table H.1. Tenure of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Less than 1 year	3.6%
1 to 3 years	22.8%
3 to 5 years	23.4%
6 to 10 years	26.0%
11 to 20 years	17.1%
More than 20 years	7.1%

Question 2. Have you participated in a formal evaluation of your superintendent?

Table H.2. Survey Respondents that had Participated in a Formal Superintendent Evaluation

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes, I participated in the most recent one	93.0%
Yes, in the past, but not in the most recent one	1.1%
No, I have not participated in a superintendent evaluation	5.9%

Question 3. Were you the board chair/president during the most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?

Table H.3. Percent of Survey Respondents that were the Board Chair during the Most Recent Superintendent Evaluation

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes	27.4%
No	72.6%

Question 4. When did your school board perform its most recent formal evaluation of your superintendent?

Table H.4. Timing of Survey Respondents' Most Recent Superintendent Evaluation

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Last Month	2.6%
Within the past 2-3 months	12.8%
About 3 to 6 months ago	33.7%
About 6 months to 1 year ago	32.6%
About 1 year ago	8.8%
Our board has not performed a formal evaluation of our superintendent within the past year	6.6%
Don't know	2.9%

Question 5. At the time of your most recent formal superintendent evaluation, how long had the superintendent served in that position in your district?

Table H.5. Tenure of Survey Respondents' Superintendent at the Time of the Most Recent Evaluation

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
First year	12.4%
1-3 years	31.0%
4-5 years	21.2%
6-9 years	24.1%
10 years or more	11.3%

Question 6. To what extent were you satisfied with the overall outcome of the most recent formal superintendent evaluation?

Table H.6. Percentage of Respondents Satisfied with the Overall Outcome used for the most recent Superintendent Evaluation in their District

Answer Choices	Very Satisfied and Satisfied	Unsatisfied and Very Unsatisfied
Response Percentage	83.9%	16.1%

Question 7. To what extent were you satisfied with the process your board used for the most recent formal superintendent evaluation?

Table H.7. Percentage of Respondents Satisfied with the Process used for the most recent Superintendent Evaluation in their District

Answer Choices	Very Satisfied and Satisfied	Unsatisfied and Very Unsatisfied
Response Percentage	76.1%	23.1%

Question 8. To what extent were you satisfied with the sufficiency of information and evidence on which the most recent formal superintendent evaluation was based?

Table H.8. Percentage of Respondents Satisfied with the Sufficiency of Information for the most recent Superintendent Evaluation in their District

Answer Choices	Very Satisfied and Satisfied	Unsatisfied and Very Unsatisfied
Response Percentage	76.9%	23.1%

Question 9. How important did you personally consider the following factors to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?

Table H.9. Percent of Responses for How Important Board Members Personally Considered the Factors to be during their Most Recent Formal Superintendent Evaluation

Factor	Extremely and very important	Moderately important	Somewhat and not important
Financial management	97.8%	1.9%	0.4%
Communication	97.4%	1.9%	0.7%
Effective working relationships	96.3%	3.4%	0.4%
District safety	90.7%	7.5%	1.9%
Student achievement data	88.1%	10.5%	1.5%
Met goals	90.3%	7.8%	1.9%
Community engagement	89.2%	8.2%	2.6%
Perception of supt's leadership	86.7%	10.8%	2.6%
Graduation rates	80.6%	14.8%	5.6%
Community satisfaction	80.7%	14.4%	4.8%
Parent satisfaction	78.9%	17.8%	3.3%
Staff satisfaction	78.8%	18.0%	2.2%
Bond or levy passage	72.6%	17.7%	9.8%
Condition of district facilities	66.8%	26.1%	8.1%%
Student satisfaction	67.8%	25.5%	6.7%

Question 10. When the board is evaluating the superintendent's performance, please indicate the importance of each of the following factors:

Table H.10. Percentage of Responses for How Important Factors are when Evaluating a Superintendent

Factor	Extremely and very important	Moderately important	Somewhat and not important
Financial management	97.0%	2.6%	0.4%
Communication	92.8%	5.3%	1.9%
Effective working relationships	92.0%	5.3%	2.7%
District safety	90.5%	7.2%	2.3%
Student achievement data	84.6%	12.3%	3.1%
Met goals	86.6%	9.6%	3.8%
Community engagement	82.8%	13.7%	3.0%
Perception of supt's leadership	85.9%	9.5%	4.6%
Graduation rates	83.7%	10.9%	5.4%
Community satisfaction	80.2%	15.2%	4.6%
Parent satisfaction	77.9%	18.3%	3.8%
Staff satisfaction	75.6%	19.1%	5.3%
Bond or levy passage	72.8%	19.2%	8.0%
Condition of district facilities	65.8%	27.8%	6.4%
Student satisfaction	67.1%	21.8%	11.1%

Question 11. How important did you personally consider the following sources of information to be during your most recent formal evaluation of the superintendent?

Table H.11. Responses to How Important Board Members Considered Sources during their Most Recent Formal Superintendent Evaluation

Source of Information	Extremely and very important	Moderately important	Somewhat and not important
Personal observation	89.8%	8.7%	1.5%
The superintendent	85.7%	11.8%	2.6%
Fellow board members	81.9%	13.2%	4.9%
State assessment scores	72.6%	21.7%	5.7%
District administrators	74.1%	18.9%	7.0%
Parents and community	72.5%	22.6%	5.0%
District teachers	67.3%	26.2%	6.4%
Other district staff	63.1%	27.8%	9.1%
Students	51.3%	32.7%	16.0%

Question 12. When the board is evaluating the superintendent's performance, please indicate the importance of each of the following sources of information:

Table H.12. Percent of Responses for How Important Sources of Information are When Evaluating the Superintendent

Source of Information	Extremely and very important	Moderately important	Somewhat and not important
Personal observation	89.8%	8.7%	1.5%
The superintendent	85.5%	11.8%	2.7%
Fellow board members	81.9%	13.2%	4.9%
State assessment scores	72.6%	21.7%	5.7%
District administrators	74.1%	18.9%	7.0%
Parents and community	72.4%	22.6%	5.0%
District teachers	67.3%	26.2%	6.5%
Other district staff	63.1%	27.8%	9.1%
Students	51.3%	26.2%	6.5%

Question 13. Have you participated in any workshops or training on superintendent evaluation during the past 12 months?

Table H.13. Survey Respondents' Participation in Training on Superintendent Evaluation in the past year

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes	35.5%
No	64.5%

Question 14. Is your district currently participating in a superintendent evaluation pilot?

Table H.14. Respondents whose District was Participating in the Superintendent Evaluation Initiative

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes	28.1%
No	71.9%

Question 15. Please share recommendations for improving superintendent evaluation.

General questions about your perspectives on school boards

Question 16. How important is it for a school board to do each of the following?

Table H.16. Survey Respondents Conception of their Role

Aspects Considered	Extremely or Very Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important
Speak with a unified voice	92.5%	5.6%	1.9%	0%
Consider multiple and diverse opinions	93.2%	6.4%	0.4%	0%
Discuss and debate all aspects of an issue	88.7%	9.8%	0.8%	0.8%
Support recommendations of the superintendent	74.1%	22.6%	3.0%	0.4%
Act according to public opinion	30.2%	50.6%	16.2%	3.1%

Question 17. In your work as a school board member, how important do you consider your responsibility to each of the following?

Table H.17. Percent of Survey Respondents Identifying How Important They Consider Their Responsibility to the Following:

Object of Responsibility	Extremely or Very Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat or Not at all Important	Average Rating
Students in your district	95.9%	3.3%	0.7%	4.65
Voters in your district	92.9%	6.7%	0.4%	4.53
Parents in your district	95.6%	4.4%	0.0%	4.51
Minority students and minority communities in your district	92.4%	6.8%	0.7%	4.47
Your superintendent	92.6%	5.6%	1.8%	4.43
Teachers and staff in your district	92.2%	7.4%	0.4%	4.36
Fellow board members	87.8%	9.3%	3.0%	4.33
Business and employers in Washington	55.8%	34.2%	10.0%	3.58
Washington state (i.e. the state board, legislature, & OSPI)	49.3%	29.9%	20.9%	3.38
The United States (i.e. Congress & the Department of Education)	34.0%	37.7%	28.4%	3.04

Question 18. Please rank the importance of each of these objectives in public education

Table H.18. Respondent Ranking of Education Objectives

Objective of Public Education	First	Second	Third	Average Ranking
Developing economically productive individuals for a healthy economy	40.2%	38.4%	21.4%	2.19
Preparing citizens for participation in democratic society	41.2%	34.1%	24.7%	2.16
Helping students rise above the social status into which they were born	18.7%	27.7%	53.6%	1.65

Question 19. Please share anything else you would like to on this topic.

Question 20. How many students are attending your school district this year?

Table H.20. Survey Responses on Size of Districts in Schoolyear 2013-2014

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Percentage of Washington School Districts this size district
0-500	16.4%	35.9%
501-1,000	16.7%	16.2%
1,001-2,500	16.0%	15.6%
2,501-7,500	26.8%	18.6%
7,501-15,000	11.5%	7.1%
15,000-25,000	8.2%	4.7%
25,001 or more	4.5%	1.8%

Question 21. How would you describe the location of your school district?

Table H.21. Rurality/Urbanicity of School Districts Represented in Survey

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Rural – your district has no city with a population over 35,000, and most land is unincorporated by any city	74.8%
Suburban – your district borders a densely populated city with skyscrapers nearby	21.9%
Urban – there is dense population and several skyscrapers within your district boundaries	3.3%

Question 22. Which Educational Services District (ESD) does your district belong to?

Table H.22. Respondents' ESD

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Northwest – ESD 189 (includes cities such as Everett, Mt. Vernon, and Ferndale)	19.9%
Olympia – ESD 113 (includes cities such as Aberdeen, Oakville, and Tumwater)	16.2%
Northeast – ESD 101 (includes cities such as Republic, Chewelah, and Cheney)	15.0%
Puget Sound – ESD 121 (includes cities such as Federal Way, Issaquah, and Kirkland)	13.5%
North Central – ESD 171 (includes cities such as Leavenworth, Lake Chelan, and Oroville)	8.7%
Vancouver – ESD 112 (includes cities such as Washougal, Battle Ground, and Longview)	8.3%
Olympic – ESD 114 (includes cities such as Bremerton, Port Angeles, and Forks)	6.4%
Pasco – ESD 123 (includes cities such as Richland, Clarkston, and Colfax)	6.0%
Yakima – ESD 105 (includes cities such as Sunnyside, Highland, and Ellensburg)	5.26%
Don't know	0.8%

Question 23. Prior to becoming a school board member, how many times had you formally evaluated an employee?

Table H.23. Number of Times Prior to Board Service Respondents had Evaluated an Employee

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
More than ten times	55.6%
Five to ten times	9.8%
One to four times	15.4%
Never	19.2%

Question 24. Prior to becoming a school board member, had you ever shared the responsibility with others for the formal evaluation of an employee?

Table H.24. Percent of Respondents that Prior to Board Service had Shared Responsibility for Evaluating an Employee

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes	55.4%
No	44.6%

Question 25. Have you ever been employed in education? (check all that apply)

Table H.25. Respondents that had been Employed in Education

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes, as a private K-12 administrator	0.8%
Yes, as a private K-12 teacher	3.2%
Yes, in a preschool, as a teacher or other staff	4.7%
Yes, as a public K-12 administrator	5.5%
Yes, in higher education	11.8%
Yes, as a public K-12 teacher	17.8%
No	66.5%

Question 26. Are you, your spouse, or another relative (such as a parent, child, or grandchild) currently employed by the district in which you are a board member?

Table H.26. Percent of Respondents that They, their Spouse, or Another Relative were Currently Employed by the District in which they Serve.

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes	19.7%
No	80.3%

Question 27. Are you male or female?

Table H.27. Gender of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	WSSDA Records	Washington Adults (U.S. Census, 2010)	National Responses (Hess & Meeks, 2010)
Male	48.7%	59.2%	49.3%	56%
Female	48.3%	40.8%	50.7%	44%
Decline to respond	3.0%	11.2%		0.01%

Question 28. Which category below includes your age today?

Table H.28. Age of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Washington Adults (U.S. Census, 2010)	U.S. Adults (U.S. Census, 2010)	National Responses (Hess & Meeks, 2010)
18 – 29 years	0.4%	21.9%	22.0%	0.4%
30 – 39 years	4.9%	17.5%	17.1%	4.2%
40 – 49 years	21.7%	18.5%	18.6%	25.5%
50 – 59 years	33.3%	18.4%	17.9%	35.9%
60 – 69 years	27.7%	12.7%	12.5%	34.0%
70 – 79 years	7.9%	6.4%	7.1%	
80 or older	1.1%	4.4%	4.8%	
Decline to respond	3.0%			

Question 29. Do you currently have any children attending preschool through 12th grade? (Check all that apply)

Table H.29. Percent of Respondents with Children in School

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Yes, in a homeschool	0.8%
Yes, in another public school district	1.1%
Yes, in a private school	1.1%
Yes, in the public school district where I serve on the board	40.0%
No	58.5%
Decline to respond	2.3%

Question 30. What is the highest level of education you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

Table H.30. Education Level of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Washington over 25 (U.S. Census, 2010-2014)	National Responses (Hess & Meeks, 2010)	U.S. over 25 (U.S. Census, 2010-2014)
Less than high school completion	0%	13.7%	0.1%	9.8%
High school graduation or equivalent (e.g. GED)	2.6%		5.1%	
Some college but no degree	20.2%		20.6%	
Associate degree	10.5%			
Bachelor degree	33.3%	32.3%	27.7%	29.3%
Graduate degree	32.2%		46.5%	
Decline to respond	1.1%		0.02%	

Question 31. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Table H.31. Employment Status of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Employed, working 40 or more hours per week	49.1%
Retired	24.7%
Employed, working up to 39 hours per week	14.6%
Not employed, NOT looking for work	6.7%
Decline to respond	2.3%
Not employed, looking for work	1.5%
Disabled, not able to work	0.8%
Student	0.4%

Question 32. What is your expected total household income this year?

Table H.32. Annual Household Income of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage
Less than \$20,000	0.4%
\$20,000 – \$34,999	2.3%
\$35,000 – \$49,999	7.1%
\$50,000 – \$74,999	16.9%
\$75,000 – \$99,999	17.6%
\$100,000 – \$149,999	24.7%
\$150,000 or more	15.4%
Decline to respond	15.7%

Question 33. What is your race?

Table H.33. Race of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Response Percentage	Washington State (U.S. Census, 2010)	National Responses (Hess & Meeks, 2010)	US Adults (U.S. Census, 2010)
White, non-Hispanic	82.2%	77.3%	80.5%	63.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3.0%	1.5%	1.2%	0.9%
From more than one race	1.9%	4.7%	Not an option	2.9%
Asian	0.8%	7.2%	0.8%	4.8%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.8%	0.6%	0.1%	0.2%
Black or African-American	0.4%	3.6%	12.3%	12.6%
Hispanic	1.1%	11.2%	3.1%	16.3%
Decline to respond	9.9%		0.02%	

Question 34. What is your general political philosophy?

Table H.34. General Political Philosophy of Survey Respondents

Answer Choices	Survey Respondents	National (Hess & Meeks, 2010)
Liberal	19.6%	20.4%
Moderate	35.1%	47.3%
Conservative	26.8%	32.3%
Declined to respond	18.5%	0.1%