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School Boards and Team Learning: A Phenomenological Study of the Beliefs of School Board Presidents in Central New York

Mary K. Coughlin
St. John Fisher College, mcoughlin123@gmail.com

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Abstract

The Boards of Education in New York State schools face formidable challenges in an educational environment characterized by accelerated and complex change. This contemporary context requires boards to function as high-performing teams to generate outcomes. Board members typically are well-intentioned yet unprepared for such challenges. This research study used a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how boards develop the capacity to work together to create results. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school board presidents in Central New York. Interview questions were guided by the theoretical framework of team learning. The analysis revealed four major categories and conclusions: (a) school boards develop the capacity of their teams through acquisition and sharing of knowledge, balanced board composition, and board president leadership; (b) boards interact as a team through communication, adhering to governance structures, understanding of roles, and mutual respect; (c) boards are confronted with challenges to address including personal agendas, micromanagement, and time; and lastly, (d) school boards create results by establishing students as the highest priority and continually reflecting on performance. A group of individuals does not constitute a team; rather, successful teams (boards) perform as a unit and are accountable to a collective performance. The study recommends that boards be mindful of the beliefs of the board presidents captured in the research as they work together to create results that will benefit future generations of school children. Information gleaned from this study adds to the literature and understanding of school boards and informs school board learning and preparation.

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Mary K. Coughlin

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Dr. Theresa Pulos

Committee Member

Dr. Ryan Pacatte

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Rick, and our three wonderful children, Liz, James, and Katherine. Their love and steadfast confidence and encouragement have been instrumental in the successful completion of my dissertation. I am truly blessed and eternally grateful for my family.

Thank you to my parents for selflessly providing me with opportunities for education throughout my life. To my dad, who would be beaming with pride for this accomplishment; and to my mother for her love and kindness.

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Biographical Sketch

Mary K. Coughlin is currently Assistant Superintendent for Instruction at the Fayetteville-Manlius School District in Manlius, New York. Mrs. Coughlin attended Skidmore College and Syracuse University and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1981. She attended Syracuse University and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 1982 and a Certificate of Advanced Studies degree in 1988. She came to St. John Fisher College in the spring of 2015 and began her doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mrs. Coughlin pursued her study on school boards and team learning under the direction of Dr. Theresa Pulos and Dr. Ryan Pacatte and received the Ed.D. degree in 2017.

Abstract

The Boards of Education in New York State schools face formidable challenges in an educational environment characterized by accelerated and complex change. This contemporary context requires boards to function as high-performing teams to generate outcomes. Board members typically are well-intentioned yet unprepared for such challenges. This research study used a qualitative phenomenological design to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how boards develop the capacity to work together to create results. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school board presidents in Central New York. Interview questions were guided by the theoretical framework of team learning. The analysis revealed four major categories and conclusions: (a) school boards develop the capacity of their teams through acquisition and sharing of knowledge, balanced board composition, and board president leadership; (b) boards interact as a team through communication, adhering to governance structures, understanding of roles, and mutual respect; (c) boards are confronted with challenges to address including personal agendas, micromanagement, and time; and lastly, (d) school boards create results by establishing students as the highest priority and continually reflecting on performance. A group of individuals does not constitute a team; rather, successful teams (boards) perform as a unit and are accountable to a collective performance. The study recommends that boards be mindful of the beliefs of the board presidents captured in the research as they work together to create results that will benefit future generations of school children. Information gleaned from this study adds to the

literature and understanding of school boards and informs school board learning and

preparation.

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The school board is a local board or authority responsible for the provision and

maintenance of schools and the establishment of regulations and policies by which

schools are governed (National School Boards Association [NSBA], n.d.). The American

Board of Education originated in 1647 when the Massachusetts Bay Colony mandated

that towns establish and maintain public schools (Kirst, 2007). Early schools were

administered by the citizens through town meetings. As school issues became more

complex, control was given to elected representatives (selectmen) and eventually to town

committees. In 1826, Massachusetts formally established the system of school

committees by requiring each town to elect a separate school committee to have charge

over all public schools in the town. This model spread to the rest of the nation and

established the school board model that exists throughout the United States today

(NSBA, n.d.).

School boards of education determine policies that govern the operation of the

local public school systems (NSBA, n.d.). The school board members are elected local

officials, and they are typically volunteers. In New York State, school boards lead a

statewide school system with budgets of $58 billion, 520,000+ employees, and

approximately 2.7 million children (New York State School Boards Association

[NYSSBA], n.d.). Except for Yonkers and New York City, board members in New York

State are elected.

The size of a school board depends on the district, and it consists of five, seven or nine members. According to law, voters have the power to change the size of their board. School board members typically serve 3-, 4-, or 5-year terms. Terms are staggered so all board positions are never open at the same time. School board members annually elect a president and vice-president as board officer positions (NSBA, n.d.; NYSSBA, n.d.).

The overarching role of a public school board of education is to govern and represent the community in matters of education while overseeing district resources (NSBA, n.d.). In recent years, school boards have experienced increasing pressure to understand their role and execute their authority (Mizell, 2010). In New York and throughout the United States, there are mounting student achievement expectations and demanding curricular reforms. The ability to transcend these obstacles is a challenging, yet necessary, function of boards of education (Alsbury, 2008).

State and federal education mandates are complex, and they require savvy and experienced board leadership (Hess & Meeks, 2010). The role specific to the school board president is unique in that there are formally identified responsibilities coupled with less formal, nuanced tasks. School board president responsibilities vary depending on the district; yet, most often, they conduct board meetings and maintain order, set meeting agendas with the superintendent, act as a bridge between the board and the superintendent, serve as the voice of the board, and act as a team builder and mediator (NYSSBA, n.d.). In addition to the stated responsibilities, the informal duties and nature of the school board president role can be stressful and unpredictable (Hurley, 2006). The resources and descriptions of course offerings from state organizations allude to the nature of the position as challenging and complex beyond the stated responsibilities. In an

era of high accountability, leadership from the school board president is essential (Daugbjerg, 2014).

School board members may lack experience and professional background in the field of education, which results in a lack of expertise in governance areas (Hess, 2010). School board members are not educational experts, but they require knowledge and understanding of districts to make informed decisions as a board (Delagardelle, 2008). Governance of major district operational areas, while staying abreast of education reform, often overwhelms new and inexperienced board members (Maeroff, 2010). Additionally, the evolving role of school boards now requires knowledge of complicated reforms and mandates. Gaining this knowledge is onerous as board governance and oversight extends the range of complex district operations, including budgets, personnel, curriculum, facilities, and instruction. School board members' need for knowledge in an era of unprecedented educational change remains a challenge for public school systems (Kirst, 2007).

Alsbury (2008) stated the consequences for districts with under-qualified boards of education are potentially devastating and could affect the education of millions of school children. Ineffective governance results in poor decisions, loss of focus, and decisions that may not support the mission and objectives of the district (Devarics & O'Brien, 2011). School boards' operations may be in direct conflict with district operations and philosophies, wasting resources of time and money (Alsbury, 2008). Inconsistency and confusion impacts morale and erodes confidence with staff, parents, and the community, and these outcomes could ultimately impact students (Hess, 2002).

In a report written for the Center for Public Education, Devarics and O'Brien (2011), identified indicators of school board effectiveness and characteristics of effective school boards. Participation in learning activities and working collaboratively as a team were identified as central characteristics of effective boards. Research conducted by Hess (2010) identified leadership, teamwork, and training as essential for successful board performance. School board professional preparation and learning is, however, evolving as districts are held to be more accountable for school improvement and academic performance and expectations for boards are heightened.

Requirements for school board training vary from state to state. A 2012 survey conducted by the National School Boards Association indicates that 23 states mandated board training. States require training for all board members and others require training exclusively for new board members. Research indicates that while participation in board training statewide is varied, there is no consensus as to content, time required, and format (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Typically, required training is offered by the state, or board members partake in training offered by alternate approved providers. The time requirement for training varies and the topics include governance roles and responsibilities, school finance, and evaluation of the superintendent.

In New York State, new school board members participate in 12 hours of mandated individual training. Additional opportunities are available through the national and state associations and other professional organizations. Local districts may choose to develop their own "in-house" learning opportunities based on board need or request. Training mandated in New York State focuses on individual skills and growth and does not address team learning and functioning (NYSSBA, n.d.). This disparity creates a

potential void between board member needs, preparation, and literature surrounding successful teams and organizations.

Communities rely on their school boards to make decisions and operate as a single entity and, therefore boards, must have the ability to do so (Alsbury, 2008, New York Education Law § 1804.). Senge (1990) asserted that organizations capable of long-term success practice five fundamental disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. As first defined by Senge (1990), "Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (p. 236). As they align and develop, boards acquire collective knowledge and results that would not be reached individually.

Problem Statement

Boards of education in New York State schools face daunting challenges in an environment characterized by accelerated and complex change (Alsbury, 2008). School board members from varied backgrounds typically are well-intentioned yet unprepared for such challenges (Hess & Meeks, 2010). This new context requires school boards to function successfully and develop team intelligence far greater than that of all its individual members (Fillion, Koffi, & Ekionea, 2014). The mandated training for New York State school board members is individual and skill based, yet it is problematically lacking content that aligns the ability of board members to work collaboratively as a team to produce results (NYSSBA, n.d.). Understanding how school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results provides meaningful contributions to school boards and informs school board learning and preparation.

Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical foundation for the study is systems thinking theory and more specifically, the framework of team learning. Systems thinking theory originated as general systems theory with biologist Von Bertalanffy (1968) stating the fundamental character of a living thing is its relationship to the whole and investigation of single parts cannot provide a complete explanation of phenomena. Von Bertalanffy stressed the interconnectedness of parts and believed it is flawed to study parts in isolation of a larger system.

Relationships among various parts and their functions are central to the systems-thinking concept. The balance of individual components contributes value to the whole organization or system. The discipline of team learning emerged as one part of five defined by Senge (1990) as "the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (p. 236). Focusing on the big picture rather than numerous isolated parts, systems thinking allows a holistic system perspective and provides insights on the system's connections (Senge et al., 2014).

Researchers have contributed to the body of knowledge of team learning since Senge's work in the 1990s, as teams have taken on importance, and as organizations rely on teams to develop knowledge, solve difficult problems, and improve performance. Learning in teams is a key mechanism through which organizations become strategically and operationally adaptive and successful (Edmondson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2007). The importance of teams is grounded in the understanding that an organization's ability to improve results relies on the ability of its teams to learn and grow (Edmondson et al., 2007; Senge, 1990).

Edmondson, Bohmer, and Pisano (2001) defined team learning as a process in which a team takes action, acquires and reflects on feedback, and makes changes to improve. Argote (2001) viewed team learning as the cognitive and social processes of acquiring, sharing, and combining knowledge through experience. Van den Bossche, Gijselaers, Segers, and Kirschner (2006) contributed a team learning beliefs and behaviors checklist to the field and defined team learning as "building and maintaining of mutually shared cognition, leading to increased perceived team performance" (p. 209).

The growing and diverse literature on team learning underscores the importance of deeply understanding how teams learn and work together. Team learning has thought-provoking applications when considering public school boards of education. School boards must work collaboratively, together as a whole entity, to make decisions that are in the best interests of children. Applying the concept of team learning could be that the intelligence and effectiveness of a board of education exceeds the intelligence and effectiveness of the individual board members. Teams have extraordinary capacities when their actions are coordinated and members are learning together (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2007).

Individuals on a school board need to be able to learn and work together for growth and success (Devarics & O'Brien, 2011). Team learning is significant for boards because teams, not individuals, are fundamental in contemporary organizations (Senge, Schneider, & Wallace, 2014). The research and analysis was guided by the theoretical framework of team learning.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results, to add to the literature regarding school boards, and to inform school board learning and preparation.

Research Questions

This study answers the following research questions:

1. How do school board presidents believe school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results?

2. What skills and knowledge do school board presidents identify as necessary for school boards to work together to create results?

3. What learning and preparation do school board presidents identify that help school boards acquire skills and knowledge to work together to create results?

4. To what degree do school board presidents believe existing school board learning and preparation supports or impedes the ability of school boards to work together to create results?

Significance of the Study

School boards in New York State oversee and influence millions of school children, and it is important to understand the skills and knowledge needed to govern in a challenging and high-stakes educational environment (Alsbury, 2008). The significance of this qualitative study is its potential contribution to understanding how school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results. The findings provide meaningful contributions to school boards and inform school board learning and preparation.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this paper:

Capacity – breadth and depth of knowledge and resources.

Governance – behaviors exhibited by school board members regarding their defined roles, which are guided by law and by established policies and regulations.

School Board of Education – elected body whose primary function is to govern a public educational institution that is consistent with the roles outlined by state and federal law.

School Board of Education Member – constituent of an elected body whose primary function is to govern a public educational institution that is consistent with the roles outlined by state and federal law.

School Board President – member who is elected by his or her board peers to lead and manage (in conjunction with the school superintendent) the operations of an elected body whose primary function is to govern a public educational institution that is consistent with the roles outlined by state and federal law.

Superintendent of Schools – professional educator in charge of a public educational district and who is hired by a board of education.

Systems Thinking Theory – understanding of an organized scheme or method as a whole by examining the interrelated components of that organized scheme or method (Senge, 1990).

Team Learning – "the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236).

Chapter Summary

Governing a school district in a time of complex and fast-paced educational reform is a challenge for school boards in New York State and the country. This chapter provides a framework for exploring the preparation of boards of education as they work together to address governance challenges and create results. The chapter additionally establishes a purpose and significance for the study. The theoretical concept of team learning and its relationship to boards of education working as teams is summarized, and the terms relevant to the understanding of the study are defined.

The remainder of the document includes four chapters. Chapter 2 summarizes the relevant research and literature regarding the phenomena of interest and topics including school boards and team learning, and Chapter 3 outlines the research design methodology, research context, research participants, and the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 describes the data analysis, findings, and summary of results; and Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and includes recommendations and a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results, to add to the literature, and to inform school board learning and preparation.

The review of the literature contained in this chapter begins with a description of the roles and governance practices of school boards to establish context. Next, literature about the effectiveness of school boards is discussed and the extent to which research indicates that school boards influence student achievement. The chapter then contains a review of school board member preparation and high-performing teams and relevance to the research study. The chapter concludes with a review of team learning and the major contributors to this body of knowledge.

School Board Governance and Roles

The role of a public school board of education is to govern and represent the community in matters of education while overseeing district resources (NSBA, n.d.). The *Key Work of School Boards* guidebook (NSBA, 2015) identifies the core skills that effective school boards need to improve student achievement, including vision, accountability, policy, community leadership, and board/superintendent relationships.

In recent years, school boards have experienced increasing pressure in understanding their role and executing authority (Mizell, 2010). Roles and responsibilities of school boards are being challenged in a high-stakes, standards-driven

environment that creates pressure for board members and the school board president who is responsible for management of the school board (Alsbury, 2008). Reforms in K-12 education governance have shifted accountability, and lines of responsibility have become blurred, which contributes to school board uncertainty about roles.

School board members are elected for 2- to 5-year terms, and change in the composition of the school board and leadership contributes to the challenge of school board operations and understanding of everyone's roles (Kirst, 2007). Turnover and role confusion additionally impacts the leadership functioning of the superintendent and elected school board president (Kirst, 2007).

Hess (2002) published the first national survey of school board member demographics and roles. The report examines the nature of school boards and the responsibilities of governance. Hess, along with the National School Boards Association, surveyed a national sample of school board members. The identified respondents were mailed an eight-page survey; 827 respondents returned surveys for a 41% response rate (Hess, 2002).

Hess (2002) reported results in the following areas: (a) school boards and policy, (b) school board preparation, (c) profile of school boards, and (d) school board elections. With school boards and policy issues, respondents universally reported that issues of student achievement and budget were most urgent. In the area of board service and preparation, the majority indicated a desire to receive more training and preparation, primarily to better understand their role and distinguish their responsibilities from the superintendent's.

Land (2002) contended that school boards in the United States rarely have been the focus of empirical research, and reports are largely anecdotal and narrative in nature. Land reviewed and synthesized the research on the history of school boards, the existing state of school boards, current and future reforms of school boards, and the key characteristics of an effective school board. The comprehensive review detailing the relationship between school boards and academic achievement identified shortcomings in the scholarly research to understanding school boards. Land found that in the prior two decades, many school board and educational governance reforms had been proposed and implemented, yet the school board literature was limited in scope and generalizability, and too often it consisted of anecdotes and lists of unsupported best practices for school board members (Land, 2002). Land called for additional research on board member relationships and connections of the school board to academic outcomes (Land, 2002).

Federal and state accountability pressures have expanded the role of school boards, creating a challenge for school boards to examine issues in depth (Kirst, 1994). Board performance is judged by a multitude of constituents and, in this context, school board roles need to shift and focus on policy (Kirst, 2007). Several states have revised or are rethinking statutes concerning the roles of school boards (NSBA, n.d.).

Alsbury (2003) conducted a survey of 176 school superintendents in Washington State to collect information as to why school board members resign or retire from their positions and to understand the relationship of turnover and board roles. He utilized descriptive quantitative methods to analyze the survey results. The study ranked reasons for school board turnover, delineated political and apolitical turnover, and compared turnover results by size of district and superintendent turnover rates (Alsbury, 2004). The

study concluded numerous factors, primarily political, and related to role confusion, impacted school board turnover. Alsbury recommended further study to understand consequences on school board and superintendent roles and governance.

In New York and throughout the United States, mounting student achievement expectations and demanding curricular reforms, driven by economic and global considerations, challenge districts (Carnevale, 1992). Compliance with state and federal education mandates are complex and require savvy, experienced school board leadership and clarity of roles (Hess & Meeks, 2010).

The responsibilities specifically for New York State School Board members are articulated on the New York State School Boards Association (n.d.) website and include the following: (a) create a shared vision, (b) set direction of the school district to achieve the highest student performance, (c) provide rigorous accountability for student achievement results, (d) develop a budget and align district resources, (e) establish a healthy district culture for learning, (f) create partnerships with community stakeholders, (g) build the district's progress through continuous improvement, (h) adopt and maintain policies, (i) hire and evaluate the superintendent, (j) ratify collective bargaining agreements, and (k) maintain strong ethical standards.

In New York and other states, the school board president is responsible for overseeing the organization and functioning of the school board, providing leadership and working in close collaboration with the superintendent. It is important to note that in addition to the stated responsibilities, the informal responsibilities and nature of the role of the school board president can be demanding and unpredictable (Hurley, 2006). Role

ambiguity of school board presidents in an era of high accountability creates problems that can distract from the focus of educating students (Daugbjerg, 2014).

State educational workshop descriptions and resources available to school board presidents allude to the challenging and complex nature of the position. For example, the state of Texas offers six state-produced publications and three online learning courses specifically for school board presidents. One specialized course entitled *How to Work with the Errant Board Member* outlines ways the school board president might successfully meet the challenges of working with an errant board member. Another course entitled *Focused and Productive Board Discussions* is designed to help school board presidents understand how to facilitate a discussion that is focused and productive—one in which the school board is addressing issues that will truly advance the organization (Texas Association of School Boards, n.d.). New York State offers a course, *GOV 201: Board Officers Academy*, whose description claims school board leadership has never been more challenging (NYSSBA, n.d.). A NYSSBA (2015) presentation entitled, *The Role of the Board President: What They Never Tell You*, describes the school board president role as volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. The same presentation has a section entitled "Keeping Your Head, While Others May Be Losing Theirs." The examples from Texas and New York underscore the challenges faced by school board presidents.

The evolving role of school boards and member inexperience in an era of unprecedented educational change remains a challenge for public school systems (Kirst, 2007). School boards in the United States face a continuous changing educational landscape. School boards are required to adjust roles and adapt in response to 21st century

education reforms, mandates, and globalization (Boyd, 2007). The ability for school boards and board leadership to transcend these obstacles is a challenging yet necessary function for boards of education (Alsbury, 2008).

Effective School Boards

High student achievement is the ultimate measure of success for schools, and school boards are an important part of this success (Lorentzen, 2013). Research exists and concludes that school boards do make a difference in student achievement (Alsbury, 2008).

For the Center for Public Education, Devarics and O'Brien (2011) examined indicators of school board effectiveness from a compilation of several research studies. The research focused on school district and board practices from surveys, interviews, and observations. The research included studies comparing practices of boards in high-achieving districts and contrasting them with practices of boards in lower-achieving districts. Devarics and O'Brien (2011) identified the following eight characteristics of an effective school board: (a) commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals; (b) have strong shared beliefs and values about students and their ability to learn, and of teaching all children at high levels; (c) be accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time on student achievement; (d) have a collaborative relationship with community and the staff, and inform and engage stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals; (e) use data to drive improvement; (f) align and sustain resources to meet district goals; (g) lead as a team with the superintendent with collaboration and mutual trust; and (h) take

part in team development and training to build shared knowledge and commitment for improvement.

The Iowa Association of School Boards Lighthouse Inquiry is considered one of the first and most-influential studies of school boards and student achievement (Rice et al., 2000). The overarching purpose of the study was to identify connections between what school boards do for the achievement of students. The study researched school districts with histories of exceptionally high and exceptionally low student achievement to determine if there were differences in the beliefs of their school board members. The stated goal of the study was for the results to serve as a "lighthouse" to guide other school boards in their efforts to govern and improve student achievement (Rice et al., 2000).

Rice et al., (2000) identified six school districts based on student achievement, enrollment, and demographic information. Once the districts were identified, a six-member research team conducted site visits and 159 individual interviews. The research team visited districts and interviewed board members, superintendents, faculty, and staff. Case descriptions of each of the districts were developed based on the analysis of the accumulated interviews.

The Iowa Lighthouse Study is considered groundbreaking research on achievement and school boards because it demonstrates that school boards and superintendents in higher-achieving school districts differed in knowledge and beliefs compared to their counterparts in lower-achieving districts. School board members and superintendents in high-achieving districts believed all students could learn, maintained high expectations for their students, and maintained a focus on school improvement and achievement (Rice et al., 2000).

The Lighthouse Study established seven conditions for school improvement and student achievement: (a) the need to build a "human organization," (b) knowing how to make education better, (c) creating a supportive workplace for staff, (d) recognizing the importance of comprehensive staff development and how to support school sites, (e) developing strong community connections, and (f) the importance of leadership focused on a clear vision (Rice et al., 2000). "School boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than school boards in low-achieving districts. And, this difference appears to carry through among administrators and teachers throughout the districts" (Rice et al., p. 4).

The Phase II Lighthouse study (Delagardelle, 2008) utilized a mixed-method approach with qualitative and quantitative data and analysis techniques in a two-part study. The study consisted of a statewide survey and interviews of 718 Midwestern school board members and superintendents, measuring their beliefs about the importance of board behaviors for improving achievement. Five conclusions about school board roles related to student achievement emerged from the Lighthouse II Study, which resulted in recommendations for further study (Delagardelle, 2008). According to the study, school boards should: (a) set clear and realistic expectations about roles, functioning, and responsibilities, (b) work to establish conditions for success, (c) hold the system accountable to expectations, (d) build goodwill with the community, and (e) learn and develop as a team.

Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) conducted school board and superintendent survey research focused primarily on the school district leadership, including school boards and superintendents. The research focused on board-superintendent relationship

and student achievement, and it concluded that school districts cannot raise student achievement without strong leadership and teamwork from the school board and superintendent (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). The report offers board-superintendent recommendations in six categories: (a) build a foundation for teamwork, (b) acquire the most skilled team players, (c) ensure board members and superintendents know roles and responsibilities, (d) team training, (e) develop team strategies, and (f) convince others to support the team.

Ford and Ihrke (2016) conducted research addressing the *Key Work of School Boards* (NSBA, 2015) with multiple survey items answered by Wisconsin school board members. Ford and Ihrke concluded that adherence to best board practices by school board members who had served 5 or more years resulted in improved achievement in school districts. The findings of this study support that school board governance behaviors matter and are further connected to district-level academic achievement.

A working paper published by Waters, Marzano, and Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (2006) reported their findings at the Mid-Continent Research for Education organization. The meta-analysis examined the findings of 27 studies used to study the effect of school leaders on student achievement. The studies involved 2,817 school districts and the achievement scores of 3.4 million students.

The researchers identified district-level leadership responsibilities correlated with average student academic achievement, including: (a) collaboration and goal-setting, (b) goals for achievement and instruction, (c) board alignment and support of district goals, and (d) regular monitoring of goals for achievement and instructional design and programming.

Johnson (2013) studied school board leadership and factors associated with student achievement. The purpose of the study was to create and validate an author-created survey entitled "Effective Board Leadership Practices Survey." A literature review by Johnson (2013) identified 12 school board leadership behaviors that support student progress and achievement and served as the basis of the questions on the survey. The 33-item Likert survey administered in Ohio was designed to measure the identified leadership practices of boards of education that enhance student achievement. Results indicated a difference between board perception of achievement and leadership practices. Johnson (2013) reported that school board members from high-poverty and higher achieving districts perceived their boards as involved in effective board leadership practices to a greater extent than school board members from high-poverty, lower achieving school districts (Johnson, 2013).

Lee and Eadens (2014) conducted research to illuminate school board meeting effectiveness. A predominant premise of their study, based on the works of Alsbury (2008) and Delagardelle (2008), was that superintendent and school board collegiality at board meetings and other school board gatherings fosters connections and success among members and enhances school board effectiveness. Lee and Eadens created a School Board Video Project Survey, based on an extensive literature review of superintendent and school board governance.

School board meetings were observed using the School Board Video Project Survey. School board meetings were randomly chosen from across the country, which were observed in person, and others were observed through video recordings of the meetings. The researchers randomly selected and assigned themselves to view multiple

school board meetings, using coding methods that they all were trained in ahead of the time, and that were they tested for inter-rater reliability. Lee and Eadens's (2014) data indicated school board meetings at low-performing districts were: (a) less orderly, (b) lacked cohesion, (c) members spent less time on student achievement, (d) meetings lacked respectful discourse, (e) members appeared to have single agenda, (f) ineffective working relationships among the governance team, and (g) lack of focus on student achievement. The research concluded that school board members from low-performing districts needed training to improve effectiveness. Lee and Eadens (2014) additionally concluded that focused and intentional school board development programs promoting effective governance could positively impact district functioning and student achievement.

School board research provides evidence that school boards influence student achievement. It follows that school boards should understand the research, and the district and board leadership should pay attention to what they can do to make a difference.

School Board Preparation

School board members are elected and may lack experience and professional background in the field of education, which results in a lack of expertise in governance areas (Hess, 2010). School board members are not educational experts, but they do require knowledge and system understanding to make informed decisions as a board (Delagardelle, 2008). The research conducted by Hess (2010) identified leadership, teamwork, and governance training as essential for successful school board operation and district performance. Devarics and O'Brien's (2011) research of characteristics of effective school boards included participation in learning activities and working

collaboratively as a team, as central characteristics of effective school boards. The need and subsequent requirement for school board member professional development are increasing as schools are being held more accountable for school improvement. School board professional preparation and learning is, however, evolving as districts are held more accountable for school improvement and academic performance and as expectations for school boards are heightened.

School board development and preparation was a theme in the Devarics & O'Brien (2011) meta-analysis that named the eight characteristics of effective schools and stated, "Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts" (p. 7). The meta-analysis examined several pertinent studies. The first study they examined, the Lighthouse I study by Rice et al. (2000) concluded high-achieving school districts had formal and intentional training for new board members. Board members regularly participated in activities in which they learned together as a group, and Rice et al. named frequent study sessions with opportunities for inquiry and discussion prior to making final decisions. The Waters et al. (2006) meta-analysis suggested that supporting school board members' professional development is one of several ways that superintendents can produce an environment in which the school board is aligned with district goals. The Goodman et al. (1997) study emphasized the importance of formal training for school board members and recommended orientation workshops for new members. Goodman et al. also stated that the responsibility for orientation should be with the superintendent and school board president, and they should include meetings with top administration regarding programs

and policies. The study also stated that superintendents participate in orientation and development with school board members. Togneri, Anderson, and Learning First Alliance (2003) studied formal training and professional development for school board members. Lastly, the study by LaRocque and Coleman (1993) demonstrated the value of learning for board members, concluding effective school districts in Canada offered extensive learning for school boards, including retreats, work sessions, visitations, and social events.

Korelich and Maxwell (2015) conducted a qualitative study to develop an understanding of school board professional development, leadership, and the impact on student achievement. The study categorized interviews to understand how professional development for school boards can increase achievement. Three themes emerged from the study including board members' roles, specific agendas of school board members, and the positive effect of professional development. The respondents all considered school board professional learning crucial, showed a strong correlation in school board understanding of roles and adherence to them, and perceived board professional learning around roles as most important for the success of the district (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015).

Roberts and Sampson at the University in Texas (2011) found that (at that time) most states did not have mandatory professional development for school board members. In the states that did require professional development, the state board directors believed school board professional development was beneficial and had a positive effect on student achievement (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

Marino (2011) conducted research in conjunction with a doctoral program to measure the perception of school board presidents in Illinois concerning the implementation of continuous-improvement practices in their role. Questions on the survey were based on three established school board documents. Marino (2011) identified two areas of focus for school board member training and development, including (a) a need to monitor satisfaction levels of school board members, and (b) the need for a process to regularly self-evaluate school board meetings so all board members receive feedback on their performance.

Newton and Sackney (2005) asked each school board to describe a time when the board faced a critical decision. The study concluded that group decision making and group knowledge building was effected through interpersonal dynamics. School board and group development recommendations included group practices and the role and function of interpersonal relationships in group dynamics and decision making (Newton & Sackney, 2005).

Requirements for school board training vary from state to state. A survey conducted by the National School Boards Association (2012) indicate most states mandate board training. Some states require training for all school board members and others require exclusively for new board members. The training is offered by the state or, alternatively, school board members partake in training offered by other approved providers. The time requirement for training varies greatly, and the topics include governance roles and responsibilities, school finance, and evaluation of the superintendent. Of the states studied, 20 required school board members to receive some type of formal training. As school board work becomes more complex, due largely to

increased state and federal regulations that affect K-12 public schools, the move toward mandatory training is essential. Among those states, nearly all specify the number of training hours and/or topics that must be included. Most state-mandated training focuses on matters such as school finance and management.

Missouri requires training only for newly elected board members on school law, governance roles, and education finance and policy. At the time of the survey, Texas and 13 other states required ongoing training for all school board members in multiple areas.

Kentucky required board members to earn annual training credits based on their number of years of service. Members with fewer than 3 years of service must have at least 12 hours of training each year, while veteran members need only 4 hours annually to comply with the state law. Kentucky mandated training focuses on school law, education finance, and the school board members' roles and responsibilities. Beyond that, individual board members are left to their own discretion in finding additional training. In 2009, Kentucky was one of 11 states with an enforcement provision built into the law. However, no school board member has been removed from office for noncompliance.

Traditional modes of training are changing to be more accommodating and meet the needs of school boards. Six hundred Michigan voters were surveyed about their attitudes on school boards and school board training; 76% of the respondents believed board development was necessary, and they have more confidence in the decision-making ability of those who had received training. Michigan has changed and added new courses annually to a catalog of offerings and had seven levels of board certification. To make training more accessible, Michigan offers evening and weekend sessions as well as more seminars in more statewide locations.

The work of the Iowa School Boards Association and the Lighthouse studies generated a 5-year action-research Lighthouse Project for school board development. The Lighthouse Project developed an intensive, customized board-professional-development program to assist board members with their leadership role around student achievement. At the time of this writing, the program was utilized by several states including Oregon, Wisconsin, and Connecticut.

Every 3 years, the New York State Council of School Superintendents conducts a survey of superintendents to understand the profession and the relationship with school boards of education. In the category of leadership teams, the superintendents and their boards of education, and data comparing effective and ineffective boards (as perceived by the superintendents) are reported in percentages. The majority of superintendents (94%) reported that professional development for school boards and superintendents is necessary for effective functioning (New York State Council of School Superintendents & Teranova, 2016). New York State, new school board members participate in 12 hours of mandated individual training. Additional opportunities are available through the national and state associations and other professional organizations. Training that is mandated in New York focuses on individual skills and growth, and it does not address team learning and functioning (NYSSBA, n.d.). This disparity creates a potential void between school board member needs, preparation, and the literature concerning teams and organizations.

Participation in learning activities and preparation are central characteristics of effective boards (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011). Board members seek adequate preparation to be competent. Hess and Meeks (2010) reported that board members expressed a desire

for additional information and training opportunities to assist them with decision making and their ability to be responsive to constituents. School board preparation and learning is evolving as districts are held more accountable for school improvement, and expectations for boards are heightened.

High-Performing Teams

It is essential that school boards of education work successfully together as a well-functioning team (Alsbury, 2008). There is a wealth of research and literature in the areas of business management, government, and education on high-performing teams that could be transferable and informative for all school boards of education.

Ricci and Weise (2011) conducted interviews and developed case studies from leading organizations including Duke University, Best Buy, and General Electric. They identified characteristics of high-performing teams and determined that team members: trust in each other and the team purpose; work toward the same goals; are clear on how to work together and accomplish tasks; understand team and individual performance; engage in extensive discussion and criticism constructively; make decisions when there is mutual agreement; assume responsibility for their actions; respect team processes; and allow leadership to shift as appropriate.

The essence of a high-performing team is shared commitment, purpose, and learning. In their work on teams considered groundbreaking, Katzenbach and Smith (2005) defined effective teams: "A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 1). A group of individuals does not constitute a team; rather, successful teams perform as a unit and are accountable to a

collective performance. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) contended that teams are the key to improving performance in organizations, and they are vital to meet future challenges. To develop case studies, the researchers interviewed individuals in 50 varied teams within 30 companies to determine what distinguishes team performance. Their findings indicate that teams have four elements including common commitment and purpose, performance goals, complementary skills, and mutual accountability.

Goodall (2013) investigated factors that impact the recruitment and support of high-performing leadership teams. The research involved a comprehensive literature review and case studies of nine English schools. Four themes emerged in relation to high-performing teams: the need to create and sustain a team ethos, the need for clarity, the need for flexibility, and value placed on the experience of team members (Goodall, 2013). Goodall concluded there is a disagreement in the literature on the value of team training and recommended future research to investigate the impact of such training (Goodall, 2013).

The concept of "tight coupling" in high-performing teams is described as "synchronized performance achieved over time as a team works together" (London & London, 1996, p. 1). Their work compares leadership teams to musical ensembles where group members work successfully in an interconnected way. Each member is individually skilled and the ensemble (team) learns and develops together. Tightly coupled teams require team learning for success. High performance occurs when tight coupling and continuous improvement exist and learning matches the task (London & London, 1996).

Campany, Dubinsky, Vanessa, Mangino, & Flynn (2007) conducted a study to identify behaviors that distinguish high-performing development teams in a Fortune 100

pharmaceutical company. The results of the study describe specific behaviors and strategies (drivers) used by the high-performing teams. The study suggests that high performance requires a strong partnership among team members, leaders, and senior management. The high-performing teams studied could describe how each member contributed to team success. Additionally, high-performance teams create a balance between attention to task and attention to team members and working relationships. The research concluded with recommendations for teams in the pharmaceutical industry, but it additionally suggested these recommendations could be applied to other industries.

An understanding of the research and literature on establishing and developing high-performing teams is relevant to the work of school boards. High-performing teams attend to specific behaviors and strategies that contribute to success. In addition to individual team member expertise, high-performing teams regularly participate in learning that develops the expertise and functioning of the team to create results.

Team Learning

Given the challenges of school board governance it is essential that school boards learn to acquire knowledge to work collaboratively to create results. Team learning is a concept that has its origins in general systems theory and, more recently, in systems thinking theory (Senge, 1990). Biologist Von Bertalanffy (1968) stressed the interconnectedness of parts in a system and general systems theory (GST) emerged from his work in the 1940s. Systems-thinking concepts and terminology were developed in the 1970s and 1980s by researchers such as Checkland (1981). The relationships among the parts and their functions are central to the systems-thinking concept. Individual

components and details must be balanced according to their importance to the system, because it is only as part of the whole that they have value or utility (Checkland, 1981).

Additional research emerged in the 1990s, and the term systems thinking was solidified in organizational development by Senge (1990) and the Society for Organizational Learning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Senge, 1990). Senge distinguished systems thinking as the encompassing discipline that integrates four foundational disciplines, including personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning.

Senge (1990) underscored the importance of team learning and stated team learning is the key to innovation necessary in our rapidly changing society. He defined team learning as "the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236). The characteristics of teams that apply to successful organizations include: a tenacious commitment to genuine learning, individuals in the organization who are prepared to challenge thinking and be open to new ideas, and the need for people with varying viewpoints from different parts of the organization to determine a result as a group.

It is important to distinguish that team learning is not the same as team building; rather, the essence of team learning is alignment. It is about aligning and enhancing a team's capacity to act in a coordinated and unified manner. Senge (1990) asserted that team learning requires improved conversation in two forms, skillful discussion and dialogue. Discussion is a process of exploration taken by the team members whereby each member presents and defends his or her view. Dialogue, considered to enhance

alignment, requires team members to explore issues from varying points of view to make the best decision.

The literature explicitly focused on team learning that emanated in the early 2000s in varying fields of study, including communication, psychology, business management, and education. The emergence of teams as the foundation of organizations has given rise to increased interest in theory and research on team learning and development. Teams are central to managing complex and demanding problems. Organizations rely on teams to deal with fast-changing and highly competitive environments and learning in teams is seen as the key mechanism through which organizations become strategically responsive (Edmondson et al., 2007).

Decuyper, Dochy, & Van den Bossche (2010) conducted a review of team-learning literature and identified that fundamental team-learning behaviors divided into two areas: basic team-learning behaviors, which is what actually happens when teams learn, and facilitating team-learning behaviors, which direct the learning of a team in the direction of growth through planning and experimenting.

Basic team-learning behaviors are directly observable in the interaction between team members, and they include (a) working in a team toward a common goal (Van den Bossche et al., 2006); (b) sharing—the use of new information while others listen to interpret and understand (Decuyper et al., 2010); (c) co-construction, which is the process of the mutual development of knowledge by building on previous knowledge and competencies shared by one of the team members; and (d) constructive conflict, when team members encounter a conflict and constructively integrate different viewpoints toward a new solution.

Facilitating team learning behaviors include: (a) team reflexivity, which refers to the team reflection on a current situation and adapting to achieve the team goals (Senge, 1990); (b) when different team members take action and work with each other to explore new perspectives and ways of working; and (c) boundary crossing, which is a team taking the initiative to share and ask for information and feedback from others outside of the team. The review study of Decuyper et al. (2010) identified 30 different definitions of team learning that existed at the time.

Team learning leads to improved performance within the team, which is further translated into organizational performance (Kayes, Kayes, & Kolb., 2005). Learning contributes to organizational effectiveness by enabling teams to create knowledge between team members, create knowledge with others external to the team, and to interact with the environment to enable adaptation to changing situations. It is not clear how team learning develops and what variables go into developing the environment that fosters team learning (Kayes et al., 2005). By working and solving new areas of study together, a team generates trust and confidence in each other while working toward organizational success (Costa et al., 2011).

Team learning is distinguished from individual learning because team learning occurs when one person is engaged with another person or persons. Unlike individual learning, team learning requires individuals to share experiences with other team members (Kayes et al., 2005. Team learning occurs when individuals acquire and manage knowledge to reach a team goal. Exposure to individuals with different expertise and experience is a vital source of team learning. Interaction with dissimilar ideas promotes

learning by exposing individuals to new paradigms and by encouraging a variety and sharing of ideas (Edmondson, 1999).

Edmondson (1999) defined team learning as "an ongoing process of reflection and action, characterized by asking questions, seeking feedback, experimenting, reflecting on results, and discussing errors or unexpected outcomes of actions" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 353). Edmondson (1999) looked at learning with a team lens to identify an understanding of learning beyond existing individual and organizational learning theories. She agreed with Senge (1990) that the team is the fundamental learning unit of an organization. Edmondson (1999) suggested that when teams at different levels of an organization fail to work together and reflect, the organization misses crucial learning opportunities.

Edmondson (1999) presented a concept within team learning as psychological safety, "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 1). Psychological safety stems from mutual respect and trust, whereby team members are confident they can speak without being embarrassed, rejected, or punished (Edmondson, 1999). Social systems, like that in a team, are tied together by trust (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Psychological safety was found to be important when implementing new technology practices (Edmondson et al., 2001) and identified as an essential condition for group effectiveness (Druskat & Wolff, 2001).

The results of a study of work teams in a manufacturing company show that team psychological safety is positively associated with team performance (Edmondson et al., 2001). There has also been evidence for psychological safety being associated with constructive team learning behaviors (Edmondson 1999; Van den Bossche et al., 2006).

Van den Bossche et al. (2006) defined team learning as "building and maintaining of mutually shared cognition, leading to increased perceived team performance" (p. 490). Van den Bossche et al. developed the Team Learning Beliefs and Behaviours (TLB&B) Model Checklist to distinguish four different categories of team learning variables. The model develops the idea that the social context of the team (referred to as beliefs about the interpersonal context) has a direct influence on the team learning behaviors. The team learning behaviors and beliefs contribute to the development of mutually shared understanding, and this directly relates to team effectiveness (Van den Bossche et al., 2006).

Chan, Pearson, and Entrekin (2003) believed little empirical research had been dedicated to the relationship between team learning and team performance due to the lack of an instrument to assess team learning. In his study, Chan et al. (2003) used Edmondson's (1996) team learning survey to examine effects of internal and external team learning on team performance. The study was conducted at an Australian hospital with 189 respondents from various hospital departments. The analysis concluded a positive relationship between team learning and team performance, and team performance was enhanced by the presence of internal and external team learning. Edmondson (1996) defined internal team learning as the extent to which team members engage in behaviors to monitor performance against goals, and external learning was defined as the extent to which a team engages in behaviors such as seeking new information or asking for feedback. The researchers recommended future research in additional hospitals and companies in Australia and overseas to increase the empirical evidence of the relationship between productivity and team learning.

Raes, Boon, Kyndt, & Dochy (2015) examined team learning behaviors by studying authentic team interactions instead of team members' perceptions of team learning behaviors. To answer the research questions, three team meetings of three student project teams were taped and coded. An important conclusion of this study is the lack of understanding between individual contributions and learning behaviors and team learning behaviors.

Ortega, Sánchez-Manzanares, Gil, & Rico (2010) examined the relationship between team learning and effectiveness in virtual teams. The study involved a total of 144 participants, grouped into 48, three-person teams. The participants were psychology students at a large Spanish university. The mean age was 22.5 years and 82% of the participants were women. All members of the project teams reported via questionnaire on the previously researched variables of team learning including psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), task interdependence, collective efficacy, and team performance. The results indicated a positive relationship between team learning behaviors and effectiveness in virtual teams; specifically, that team learning behavior increased performance by the members of the virtual teams.

Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant (1997) defined team learning as "a process through which a group creates knowledge for its members, for itself as a system, and for others" (p. 229). They identified five learning processes for teams to develop: framing, reframing, experimenting, crossing boundaries, and integrating perspectives. Barker and Neailey (1999) recommended a team learning methodology with four ongoing stages: individual learning, functional learning, whole team learning, and communication of learning. The Barker and Neailey methodology and the Kasl et al. (1997) stages of

learning are similar as each starts with the individual and moves to sharing knowledge as a team.

The work of Senge (1990) and other contemporary researchers regarding team learning have intriguing applications for school boards of education. Senge's (1990) team learning definition and concepts have endured and are used in professional learning and remain praised in organizational circles. School boards develop capacity that consequently creates results. School boards must work as a single entity to make decisions that are in the best interest of children. Each board member has an influence on the whole, and members are bound by their interrelated actions. It would therefore bear true that the effectiveness of a school board of education exceeds the effectiveness of the individual members. Teams have extraordinary capacities when their actions are coordinated and members are learning and creating results together (Senge, 1990).

Chapter Summary

The evolving role of school boards and member inexperience in an era of unprecedented educational change remains a challenge for public school systems (Kirst, 2007). Public school boards of education have demanding roles and responsibilities in the complex and ever-evolving arena of public education (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). School board presidents are in a position with the added responsibilities of managing and leading their boards. Their experience gives them a unique perspective about the boards they serve.

Clarity of roles and ongoing learning to address the vast and diverse responsibilities and school functioning is vital to school board effectiveness (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). The Center for Public Education initiative of the National

School Boards Association researched indicators of school board effectiveness (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011). Their work further substantiated participation in learning activities in team functioning as a central characteristic of effective boards. Learning in teams is seen as a means by which learning organizations become strategically and operationally adaptive and responsive (Edmondson et al., 2007).

  The following chapter will outline the study design and methodology to help more deeply understand team learning and school boards. An investigation of the beliefs of school board presidents will seek to understand how school boards align and develop the ability to work together and create results for long-term and sustained school board functioning.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The role of a public school board of education is to govern school districts and represent the community in matters of education while overseeing district resources (NSBA, n.d.). In recent years, school boards have experienced increasing pressure to understand their role and executing authority (Mizell, 2010). In New York State and throughout the United States, new standards and tests of student performance reflect dissatisfaction with the level of student achievement (Hanushek, 2012). Increasing student achievement expectations driven by economic and global considerations are challenges for districts. Compliance with state and federal education mandates are complex and require savvy and experienced board leadership (Hess & Meeks, 2010). The boards of education in New York State schools face daunting challenges in an environment characterized by accelerated and complex change (Alsbury, 2008). The ability to transcend these obstacles is a challenging, yet necessary, function of school boards of education (Alsbury, 2008).

Board members from varied backgrounds typically are well-intentioned yet unprepared for such challenges (Hess & Meeks, 2010). This new context requires school boards to function successfully and develop team intelligence far greater than those of all its individual members (Fillion et al., 2014). The mandated training for New York board members is individual and skill-based, yet problematically absent of content that aligns the ability of boards to work together to produce results (NYSSBA, n.d.). The study of

how school boards develop the capacity to work together and create results provides meaningful contributions to school boards and informs school board learning experiences.

The overall design of this research was a qualitative phenomenological study to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people construct and how they make sense of, and then share and relate, experiences they have in the world (Merriam, 2009). Phenomenology is the study of structures based on lived experiences and describes the meaning for individuals of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative method and phenomenological framework was chosen for this study to understand the lived experiences of school board presidents and explore their meaning of team learning and how school boards work together to create results.

Individual interviews were the primary method of data collection to explore the experiences and beliefs of individual school board presidents. The theoretical frame of systems thinking and, specifically, the discipline of team learning guided the study results (Senge, 1990). Team learning is viewed as "the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236).

The research questions that guided this qualitative study are:

1. How do school board presidents believe school boards develop the capacity to work together to create results?

2. What skills and knowledge do school board presidents identify as necessary for school boards to work together to create results?

3. What learning and preparation do school board presidents identify that help school boards acquire skills and knowledge to work together to create results?

4. To what degree do school board presidents believe existing school board learning and preparation supports or impedes the ability of boards to work together to create results?

Research Context

The study took place in the Central New York region and focused on school boards located within the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison Board of Cooperative Educational Services (OCM BOCES). The OCM BOCES services 23 school districts in the Onondaga, Cortland, and Madison counties in New York State (OCM BOCES, 2016). The 23 districts include rural, urban, and suburban districts comprising a diverse student population ranging in size from approximately 500 to 9,000 students.

Onondaga County is located in the Central New York region and had a 2015 census population of 468,301, which includes a population for the City of Syracuse (New York Demographics Data, n.d.). In May 2017, the New York State (NYS) Department of Labor (n.d.) reported an unemployment rate in Onondaga County of 4.3% (NYS rate: 4.3%, U.S. rate: 4.3%). Major employers in the county include hospitals, colleges and universities, insurance companies, power and phone companies, and public school districts. The economy is slowly rebounding after decades of the loss of manufacturing jobs and two major corporations.

Cortland County is a small rural county situated south of Syracuse in Central New York. The loss of many of the several local businesses has led to the economic decline of the region. The 2015 census reports a population of 49,043 (New York Demographics

Data, n.d.). The May 2017 unemployment rate as reported by the NYS Department of Labor was 4.8% (Department of Labor, n.d.).

Madison County is also a rural county with a 2015 population reported at 72,427 (New York Demographics Data, n.d.). In May 2017, the NYS Department of Labor (n.d.) unemployment rate was 4.7%, and the county economy relied heavily on agriculture and small businesses.

The majority of students in all three counties—Onondaga, Cortland, and Madison—attend public schools in their respective communities. Fewer than 15 private and charter schools serve the region in addition to 12 Roman Catholic Diocese Schools (Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse, n.d.). The academic achievement and graduation rates of the districts in the OCM BOCES region range from groupings of high-performing schools to low-performing schools listed as schools in need of improvement (NYSED Office of Accountability, n.d.).

The depressed economy and unemployment are prominent issues faced by the region and school districts. School districts in New York State are categorized by a need/resource capacity index, which is a measure of a district's ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources. The index is the ratio of the estimated poverty percentage to the Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR). A district with a both estimated poverty and combined wealth ratio equal to the NYS average would have a need/resource capacity index of 1.0 (NYSED Office of Accountability, n.d.).

Sixteen districts in the OCM BOCES are categorized as average needs/resource capacity districts, districts between the 20th and 70th percentile on the index. Four districts are categorized as high needs/resource capacity rural districts, defined as districts

at or above the 70th percentile with fewer than 50 students per square mile or fewer than 100 students per square mile and an enrollment of less than 2,500. Two OCM BOCES districts are categorized as high/resource capacity: Urban-Suburban Districts, defined as districts at or above the 70th percentile that have at least 100 students per square mile or an enrollment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile. One district is categorized as a Low Needs/Resource Capacity District, defined as a district below the 20th percentile on the index. The range of categories of districts in the OCM BOCES, graduation rates, and student academic performance underscore the demographic and economic diversity in the region. The regional diversity will be valuable to the study because a wider range of lived experiences will be represented. This range of experiences will expose rich and significant beliefs of school board presidents. The study represented 12 OCM BOCES school districts based on eligibility and availability of school board presidents in the participating districts.

Research Participants

The research participants included existing school board members who, at the time of this study, were school board presidents for no less than 1 year, between July 1, 2006 and January 31, 2017. A 10-year period of time was selected to increase the likelihood that participants had strong recollection of their experiences as school board presidents. Explicit (long-term) memory fades over time and the likelihood of strong recollection of facts and details decreases (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974). Additionally, learning and the influences of technology on learning in the past 10 years has driven change in learning format and design (Galumhussein, 2013). The intent was to interview school board presidents who had exposure to learning in a contemporary context.

OCM BOCES district superintendents were contacted in advance to explain the research study and respond to questions. This communication took place at a regularly scheduled monthly meeting of superintendents at OCM BOCES, and a follow-up email (Appendix A) was sent to all superintendents.

The research participants were identified with the assistance of district superintendents who also provided contact information. The participants were contacted by email, with a letter of introduction (Appendix B) that included a detailed explanation of the study. There was a response deadline yet there was flexibility to extend the deadline to ensure broad representation, sufficient sample of participants, and to be sensitive to busy schedules.

The number of participants was guided by the principle of saturation, which states that additional participants and collection of new data does not provide additional insights on the issue under investigation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) proposed that saturation occurs at approximately 12 participants. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) indicated that less than 20 participants in a qualitative study is practical, helps build interview relationships, and improves the open exchange of information. The sample needed to be sufficiently large enough to ensure that most or all perceptions that may be important are revealed and disclosed. Therefore, the goal was to interview 10-15 school board presidents, which was realistic based on the principle of saturation and practicalities of time and labor, necessarily, required for qualitative research. The goal was met, and 12 board presidents were interviewed for the study.

The advantages of the OCM BOCES site and population sample was that the participants were accessible and the range of districts provided varying experiences and

perspectives. The sample was considered a criteria sample as the selection of participants (school board presidents) met a predetermined set of characteristics (Patton, 2002).

Research participants were not reimbursed financially or otherwise. Results of the research will be shared with the participants at the conclusion of the study thus providing mutual beneficial feedback to the participants.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

A prominent method of data collection in qualitative research is interviewing. Interviews have evolved as the main data collection procedure associated with qualitative and human scientific research (Englander, 2016). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with participating school board presidents. Semi-structured interviews are prevalent in qualitative research due to the belief that participants' viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation (Flick, 2014). Additionally, interviews are valuable because they capture viewpoints without guiding participants and predetermining response categories (Creswell, 2013). Effective interviews produce rich data that reveal the participants' perspectives and transcripts filled with examples and meaningful details (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Interviews were used to expose specific beliefs of school board presidents regarding skills and learning opportunities for school boards to work together and create results. The flexibility of the semi-structured approach allowed for necessary structure as well as elaboration of information based on the responses of the school board presidents. Qualitative semi-structured interviews provided the interviewer with latitude to pursue tangential ideas or responses in detail thus allowing the subject to tell his or her story and freely invoke true meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

An interview guide was developed based on literature about school boards, research questions, and team learning theory. Predetermined open-ended questions were drafted and piloted, and final interview questions were reviewed by the researcher's dissertation chair, dissertation committee member, and executive mentor to establish and affirm credibility. These individuals were asked to scrutinize and edit the interview document thereby increasing the probability that the questions would generate data related to the research questions and team learning theory. Qualitative researchers view reliability (dependability) as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than literal consistency across different observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). It therefore was important that the interview guide was thoroughly vetted, routines established, and that the training/practice took place ahead of the actual interviews. This increased the likelihood of repeatability and procedural dependability in the study (Flick, 2014). Questions were finalized, yet there was opportunity to modify them throughout the process based on what was gleaned at each interview.

Once the participants agree to participate in the study, they were contacted to arrange a mutually convenient time and place for the interview. Participants were asked to allocate 1 hour, total, for the interview session, and informed that the actual interview would be approximately 30 minutes. Each participant was provided with a consent form (Appendix C) to be signed and confidentiality of participants was assured. A digital voice-recorder was used to record the interviews and each interview was professionally transcribed and checked for accuracy by listening to the recording while reading the transcript (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the interview process a journal of reflexive and

analytic memos was maintained by the researcher to record reflections immediately following each interview.

Procedures for Data Analysis

A well-planned methodological approach and research framework provide a clear structure for organizing and interpreting qualitative data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The collection and analysis of interview data was iterative in design, such that each interview informed subsequent interviews and questions. This design informed emerging discussions and identified questions that needed to be refined and experiences that needed to be probed in subsequent interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Throughout the process there was openness and flexibility in response to objective review of the data. Dey (1993) stated:

> The researcher should become thoroughly familiar with the data, be sensitive to the context of the data, be prepared to extend, change and discard categories, consider connections and avoid needless overlaps, record the criteria on which category decisions are to be taken, and consider alternative ways of categorizing and interpreting data. (p. 100).

The transcripts were read thoroughly, multiple times, to gain a firm grasp of the information and to reflect on possible meanings (Creswell, 2009). Coding was the first step in the analytical process to organize and sort the data. Interview data was coded, and emerging codes emanated from listening, reading, and re-reading the interview transcripts. Codes were created when an idea was relevant, repeated in several places in the transcripts, the participant explicitly stated that it was important, or it was connected to the research questions, literature, and team learning theory.

Codes were then analyzed and sorted and used to generate categories to guide further analysis and findings of the study (Creswell, 2009). Software was utilized to efficiently represent the data. Categories were created by grouping the data, and they became the basis for the organization and conceptualization of the data (Dey, 1993). Reflexive memos were considered data and referenced to generate additional ideas about emerging categories.

The distinguishing characteristic of phenomenology is the essence of the lived experience. In the analysis, themes were created from categories. Those themes were closely examined to determine the essence of each category: asking the questions, what is consistent among all participants, and what was the essence of the lived experience of each school board president? Peer and dissertation committee review was utilized to gain additional feedback and establish credibility regarding the codes, categories, and themes.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about the skills and knowledge needed for boards to work together to create results. The intent of this chapter was to outline the research methodology used to complete the study.

The overall research design was a qualitative phenomenological study to gain understanding of school board president beliefs based on their lived experiences. Individual semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection, and the theoretical frame team learning by Senge (1990) and other contemporary researchers guided and predicted study results. The research questions served to focus the study and connect to team learning theory.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College approved the study in February 2017 (Appendix D).

The research was conducted in the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES location. The schools in the region include rural, urban, and suburban districts, featuring a diverse student population and ranging in size from approximately 500-9,000 students. The area remains economically distressed and school budgets and the tax burden are prominent issues.

The research participants included school board presidents who had served as board president for no less than 1 year, between July 1, 2006 and January 31, 2017. The school district superintendents were informed of the research and graciously assisted with the identification of eligible participants and provided contact information. An interview protocol was the primary data collection instrument and developed according to the literature about school boards, the research questions, and systems thinking theory. The final interview questions were reviewed by the researcher's advisor, dissertation chair, and dissertation committee member to establish and affirm content.

Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed for accuracy. Transcripts were read thoroughly and information placed into emerging codes and categories and themes developed. Analysis and research findings were correlated with the research questions and team learning theory, and they identified new knowledge derived from the essence of the shared experiences in the data. The analysis subsequently led to the research findings and main results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how school board members develop the capacity to work together to create results. Understanding this research has the potential to provide meaningful information to school boards and inform for school board preparation and learning experiences. The qualitative data were collected through 12 individual interviews with existing school board presidents. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were the sole instrument for the data collection in this study. A criteria sampling method was employed, and the 12 participants met the predetermined set of characteristics (Patton, 2002). The participants represented 12 (57%) of the 21 school districts contacted in the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES region.

Moustakas (1994) described that the analysis of phenomenological data follows a systematic procedure that identifies significant participant statements in the data; clusters statements into meaning units, categories and themes; and constructs a composite description of the meanings and the essences of the experience. The data analysis was guided by phenomenological qualitative research procedures, and it generated four core categories and 10 key themes. The essences of each category are embedded in each section.

Data Analysis and Findings

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to report the findings of the research. The categories and key themes that emerged from the data answer the following research questions:

1. How do school board presidents believe school board members develop the capacity to work together to create results?

2. What skills and knowledge do school board presidents identify as necessary for school boards to work together to create results?

3. What learning and preparation do school board presidents identify that help school board members acquire skills and knowledge to work together to create results?

4. To what degree do school board presidents believe existing school board learning and preparation support or impede the ability of school board members to work together to create results?

Theme titles are direct quotes from the participants, and they aptly and powerfully convey the meaning and the quintessence of the themes. The first category, *developing capacity* incorporates three themes: (a) "It's through sharing of knowledge" (Participant 5, p. 6), and (b) "Because everybody has different contributions" (Participant 2, p. 12), and (c) "That's where my job as president should be" (Participant 4, p. 35). The second category, *interacting as a team*, incorporates four themes: (a) "Everybody needs to have their voice heard" (Participant 5, p. 31), (b) "I believe in chain of command" (Participant 4, p. 41), (c) "You have to be on board with the board" (Participant 8, p. 2), and (d) "So, that builds bridges and builds relationships" (Participant 10, p. 15). The third category, *addressing challenges*, incorporates one theme: "A good guy, barking up the wrong tree"

(Participant 12, p. 6). The fourth and final category, *creating results*, incorporates two themes: (a) "It's about the kids" (Participant 11, p. 14), and (b) "We do a pretty good job of self-assessment" (Participant 10, p. 14). Table 4.1 illustrates a summary of the categories and themes as well as providing the essence of the themes.

Table 4.1

Summary of Categories, Themes, and Essences

Categories	Themes	Essences
Developing Capacity	It's Through Sharing of Knowledge	Knowledge
	Because Everyone Has Different Contributions	Backgrounds
	That's Where My Job as President Should Be	Leading
Interacting as a Team	Everyone Needs to Have Their Voice Heard	Communication
	I Believe in Chain of Command	Governing
	You Have to be On Board With The Board	Collective Ownership
	So, That Builds Bridges & Builds Relationships	Mutual Respect
Addressing Challenges	A Good Guy, Barking Up the Wrong Tree	Constraints
Creating Results	It's About the Kids	Priorities
	We Do a Pretty Good Job of Self-Assessment	Reflection

Category 1: developing capacity. The first category, developing capacity, emerged as a multifaceted category as the participants described the acquisition and sharing of knowledge, their backgrounds and experiences and that of their board members, and the leadership of the school board president. The three themes identified under this category include: (a) "It's through sharing of knowledge" (Participant 5, p. 6);

(b) "Because everybody has different contributions" (Participant 2, p. 12); and (c) "I feel the school board president needs to be a leader" (Participant 5, p. 5).

"It's through sharing of knowledge" (Participant 5, p. 6). The school board presidents described numerous ways their boards acquired and shared knowledge to develop skills and understanding of board work. Taking advantage of professional development is encouraged, as stated by Participant 9: "We also encourage every board member to do as much education as they possibly can" (p. 5).

The presidents discussed the importance of sharing and mentoring with neighboring districts: "I think it's really, really important for districts to share. To share information. Why wouldn't you want to?" (Participant 3, p. 34). Participant 3 further described inviting another school district to attend a summer retreat session: "A few years ago . . . we had invited a neighboring district and a lot of them came. I think it would be really cool . . . if boards could help mentor each other" (p. 33). Participant 1 regularly contacted other school board presidents for advice and ideas:

> Some of the board members do a lot of research, find out things on other districts and what they're doing. You could always pick up the phone and call a school board president at a neighboring district and ask them what their focuses are, how they do something. (p. 14)

When asked what learning and preparation school board presidents identify that help school board members acquire skills and knowledge, the majority of the participants discussed the value of learning opportunities offered through the Central New York School Boards Association (CNYSBA) and the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA): "We love the NYSSBA conferences and stuff, and when we

have people come in, they do a bang-up job" (Participant 11, p. 17). Participant 3 reiterated appreciation of the local and state offerings: "Central New York School Boards does a lot of that, so they're good about that" (p. 37). Participant 4 shared that the district had a discussion about the value of NYSSBA and stated it was an easy decision to participate: "We are members of NYSSBA. We've talked about it, and pretty quickly we see a value being connected with them. That value includes the news clips from around the state, so to speak" (p. 16).

Participant 4 elaborated on their board's involvement with the local school board association: "We are also members of the CNYSBA local association, school board association. That's an opportunity to connect with other schools, local schools and their school board members, as well. There's different workshops there" (p. 17). The mandated training for New York State school board members is considered to be high quality, but the participants believed it does not adequately prepare new board members. New board members attend required state training, but the board presidents described it to be foundational and insufficient: "You have as a new board member, you do have an orientation. They give you a little bit of information" (Participant 2, p. 8). Participant 5, reflecting on their own experience, agreed with this sentiment and believed knowledge comes with time:

> Well, they all go through the school board training. That, at least gives, them some sort of a basic take knowledge. I've found . . . and I remember my own experience, and I have seen it now with others because over these years people have come and gone from being on the school board. I've watched transitions

with others, and that's a good basic type knowledge. However, it's certainly not enough, and sometimes you don't learn all the intricacies for years. (p. 17)

Some participants mentioned that membership fees and costs to attend conferences and workshops are prohibitive for their district, and they rely exclusively on the local organizations and district sharing to gain information. "We couldn't afford to send two or three members to the convention" (Participant 6, p. 17). Participant 6 further stated:

We're not a member of New York State School Boards Association because of cost . . . we rely on the bigger school districts to bring the information back to Central New York or to us and then share that information because we can always reach out to our neighboring school districts, the board members, and get an update. (p. 15)

Participant 12 stated that funds exist in budgets for fees and conference costs but the district is cautious about spending because those funds possibly could be used for students: "Money is in the budget to do it, but we feel that, if we're cutting places in the school budget for things that affect kids, we don't want to be spending money for ourselves" (p. 14).

Networking is an arrangement where several individuals and/or organizations share a common interest. Board presidents, particularly those from the smaller districts, discussed the value of networking through the CNYSBA President's Roundtable. Participant 4 stated, "Being on the CNY board, I will bring back any current information from that board, as to what they're dealing with or what they're looking at" (p. 18). Participant 6 further emphasized the importance of district networking:

The Central New York School Boards Association also has a president's

roundtable that they meet three or four times a year and school districts are able . .

. . The presidents and vice presidents and sometimes superintendents can share

what's going on. If you feel you're going through a tough time or there's a

situation at the school, if you go to one of these meetings and share it, there's

probably somebody there that's going through it and you're not the first to go

through it. (pp. 10-11)

Later in the interview, Participant 6 returned to the practice of networking and the

realization that the smaller district is not isolated:

I went to the first meeting and I thought, "What a great venue for getting

knowledge" because you got 48 school districts there that have got all this

knowledge, and I don't have to go look for it. All I have to do is ask a question,

and I can get 48 views. I came back, brought that message back to the school

board saying, "We're no longer on an island. We've been joined by this huge

bridge to all these districts to get this knowledge." (pp. 28-29)

Participant 7 is a member of the OCM BOCES board as well and strongly believed in the

value of networking, above all other learning opportunities for school boards:

Myself, as an individual, I catch all of the president round tables with the Central

New York School Board Association. I sit on the Onondaga-Madison School

Board Association, also, but I still find that the value of the networking tends to

outweigh the educational components of most of the events that we attend. (p. 18)

While board presidents value learning opportunities and affiliations with

organizations and neighboring districts, several expressed that experience is what helps

board members truly develop the skills and knowledge necessary for the role. Participant 5 stated:

> So, when it's a new board person, they have no concept what that's really like, and that's the learning curve. You can have as much training as you want, but some of the experiences are what makes you grow as a board member. Not until you learn by doing. (p. 19)

Further, Participant 4 suggested that it takes an entire 3-year term to gain the knowledge and skills necessary for boards: "I think, for the most part, it takes one term to really grasp what the position is. Hopefully, the person will stay for that second or third term and start to become a good board member" (p. 5).

As an additional means to develop knowledge and skills, school boards depend heavily on expertise from teachers, administrators, and outside consultants, particularly in the areas of budgetary and legal issues. These two areas were mentioned by the participants as least familiar and most difficult for boards. Participant 3 works closely with the district budget person and mentioned the value of the expertise: "They don't understand how, yes, Lisa does the budget process. We've had Lisa come to one of our retreats before, and she's, 'This is how I do it. This is why I do it.' That's been very helpful" (p. 16). Participant 11 added that the district budget individual is a regular part of the board orientation, as well as other district administrators:

> When we orientate our members, they sit down with the financial person; they sit down with the assistant superintendent; they sit down with the superintendent and the director of curriculum, special ed director; and we give them access to them and ask them whatever they want. (p. 2)

Additionally, Participant 10 mentioned administrators regularly attending and sharing at board meetings: "Other administrators, usually one elementary administrator or a secondary administrator, will come. So that's usually full, and they're great, they're a great resource; they have so much knowledge and information that they share. But that too takes some time" (p. 10).

Participant 2 was extremely appreciative of teachers who serve as instructional coaches and attend the board meetings and being able to learn from them: "The four learning coaches are going to come in and talk [for] an hour about what they've been doing" (p. 18). Referring to the use of outside consultants, Participant 2 added: "We spent, like, three hours with a professional consultant on leadership. It was quite interesting" (p. 16).

Participant 12 shared the value of board members learning first hand from students and teacher department leaders. The district added more presentations with teacher and students, and the district was seeking to make the presentations a comfortable and non-threatening experience:

> One of the things I really like, that we started this year regularly, is every meeting we have, it may be an educational highlight, that sort of stuff, but we also are having department chairs come in and report. They felt it's threatening, and we've tried to tell them we're not asking you because we're looking to cut, we just want to know what's going on. This board, particularly, that's made up from the last 2 years, [is] very interested in knowing more about what's academically, what's going on. They're doing such cool things; I love when the kids come in. (p. 11)

Teams acquire collective knowledge and results that would not be reached individually. The board president participants believed sharing and learning among the board members is important to developing skills and knowledge. In most cases, all board members do not attend the same conferences or participate in the same learning opportunities. Participants schedule time when the full board is together for sharing and exchanging after members attend professional development sessions. Participant 4 stated: "We'll share our thoughts on what we saw there. That's been pretty helpful for us as a board" (p. 19). Similarly, Participant 12 said that: "We felt that three or four of us could come back with information to share with the rest." (p. 12). Expanding on this thought, Participant 12 went on to say: "Well, we come back for the board meeting, yeah, because we try to split up and go to different workshops, and I often write up a little report of what I did and just send it out to everybody" (p. 15).

Two school board presidents expressed discouragement and frustration with board members who do not participate or stay abreast of information provided to board members. With a discouraged tone, Participant 2 remarked: "There's two or three that don't participate in that, and you can't . . . to each his own" (p. 11). Participant 2 revisited this later in the interview when referring to board meeting information: "People need to read their board information. We've got tons of information" (p. 25). And, Participant 1 said, "I know we, we get emails all the time . . . with updates, but I don't know whether people read them or not. You know, that's up to them" (p. 13).

"Because everybody has different contributions" (Participant 2, p. 12). School boards comprise five, seven, or nine members, and the participants discussed the varied backgrounds and range of experiences each member contributes. The study participants

emphasized the importance of a diverse composition of boards. They stated that diversity of membership contributes a range of perspectives and strengthens the capacity of understanding. "You do need a mix of different skills. 'Got some engineers, got some retired teachers, got some parents. All that works pretty well" (Participant 2, p. 3), and Participant 3 said, "I think people that have different backgrounds from the business community or they're nonprofit volunteer work . . . they can bring a lot of value to the table" (p. 9). Further, Participant 10 voiced, "I think it works best if you have a very mixed background on your board so that different people bring different things to the table" (p. 4).

Participant 6 described each member of the board and what he or she contributed based on background:

Like, we have a board member that's a firefighter in Franklin, so he has access to people that live in Franklin and their education environment. Another guy is a supervisor of a construction company that works in schools, so he sees things in schools. Then another person owns her own business. We have a very well-rounded board that has different skill sets that they bring to the team. (p. 31)

Participant 12 emphasized the same importance in describing board composition:

So, it's kind of a neat mix, we come from a lot of different backgrounds, so if we're talking about building stuff, we've got a construction guy who's really strong. If we're in a legal, we're trying to deal with something legal, he actually works for a company that does school law, so he really knows the school law stuff. If we're talking insurance, we've got an insurance person. If we're talking

money, our financial person. If we're talking education and curriculum, there's me. You know, so it's just kind of, we've been very lucky that way. (p. 4)

Several of the board members were very proud regarding their long-standing involvement in the community and understanding the history of the school district. Participant 5 shared that all members of the board lived and went to school in the community and believed that facet added to the richness of the board:

Rollins is a little bit unique. It's a five-person board, and the difference that we find in Rollins is that all five people on the board have gone through the Rollins school system and lived their entire life in Rollins, so to speak. We come at it as this is our community. (p. 1)

Further expressing pride, Participant 7 remarked, "This is my district, I graduated here in '95" (p. 24), and Participant 8 said, "I've been here, so I'm a lifer here, as far as that goes" (p. 1).

Several of the board presidents had been board members and served as president for many years. Participants were proud of this longevity and believed continuous service and experience contributed to the board. The average years of service as a board member of the 12 participants was 11.1 years. Of the 12 participants that served as board members, 10 (83%) served as president for at least 3 years and 6 of the 12 (50%) board member participants served as board president for more than 5 years. Participant 6 said that "I think the big thing that you're looking for is stability, and you want school board members that contribute to that stability not pull it apart" (p. 34). Table 4.2 shows the participant years of service as a board member and as board president.

Table 4.2

Board President Years of Service

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Years as Board Member	3	6+4*	11	17	18	2+15*	5	19	12	8	7	6
Years as Board President	2	2+2*	7	14	8	0+10*	4	17	4	7	3	2

Note. *not consecutive

"That's where my job as a president should be" (Participant 4, p. 35). The
participants expressed that they take their jobs seriously, care for their boards, and they
expressed a desire to listen and lead. They believed a high level of commitment and
caring from the board president develops the board and eases pressure on the board.
Board members rely on the president in many ways. Participant 5 stated, "Because they
know, they know how much I care. They know. I don't let the sleeping dog lie. I try to
stay on top of things. I try to talk to people. I try to educate people. I wear it" (pp. 39-40),
and Participant 6 viewed this as a responsibility: "My job is to bring them all to move the
education process forward for Lakewood (p. 31).

The participants expressed the importance of listening and ensuring each board
member had equitable opportunities to contribute. Participant 1: "I think it's really
important, when you're a board president, to make sure that [you] hear the concerns of
the board members as far as if they need something explained to them" (p. 7).
Participant 2 stated that, "I'm very . . . try to be very open to calls from board members. If
we've been into discussion, and I feel like some board members left in an unhappy mood,
after a couple days, I'll try to reach out and understand" (p. 5). Participant 4 further
emphasized the belief that board president leadership develops board capacity:

I have to have it be open enough that you feel comfortable speaking, sharing your

thoughts, sharing your opinion, asking questions, and if I haven't done that for

you, then I haven't done my job as a leader of the board. (p. 28)

When referring to leading and developing the strength and knowledge of the

board, the participants discussed keeping abreast of information and sharing.

Participant 4 voiced: "So keeping them involved, I think that's my job. As the board

president, I have to make sure everybody's in the know, so to speak" (p. 26).

Participant 5 stated:

I'm always checking sources, and stuff like that. If there's something that I feel is

earth shattering, or in breaking news that they should know and they should pay

attention to, I would send it to everybody. I send that all the time. (p. 38)

Additionally, Participant 1 reflected: "It's my in . . . my job to make sure that everybody

knows what the changes are, how it's impacting people" (p. 9).

Category 2: interacting as a team. The second category that emerged from the

data analysis was interacting as a team, which includes: (a) "Everybody needs to have

their voice heard" (Participant 5, p. 31); (b) "I believe in chain of command"

(Participant 4, p. 41); (c) "You have to be on board with the board" (Participant 8, p. 2);

and (d) "So, that builds bridges and builds relationships" (Participant 10, p. 15). The

school board president participants believed teams rely on communication, leadership,

and mutual respect to be successful. They expressed that school boards need to operate as

teams to best serve their districts and constituents.

"Everybody needs to have their voice heard" (Participant 5, p. 31). When asked

about the skills and knowledge board members need to work as a team, all of the

participants discussed communication skills. Participant 1 stated, "It's just, it's all about being a good communicator" (p. 14), and Participant 8 remarked, "I think, as far as the biggest thing [is] with and communications among the board members" (p. 5). Participant 2 stated, "You've got to be a listener" (p. 4).

The participants' statements highlight the belief that board members need to have the opportunity to contribute and to have their voice heard: "It's extremely important that everybody feels they've got a seat at the table" (Participant 2, p. 14). Participant 2 went on to state: "I believe when you get a number of ideas on the table, you can then filter and come to the better idea. You hope that happens" (p. 13). Further emphasizing the need for equal voice, Participant 3 shared that equal voice leads to understanding, "I think it's important to have an opportunity to speak your mind, so people can understand you, and [it] gives them an opportunity to understand everybody else. I think that's why it works; I really believe that" (p. 26). And, ultimately, Participant 4 said that: "One way or another, it's got to be put on the table" (p. 41).

Participant 10 discussed that there was a time when all board members did not have an opportunity to contribute and expressed the potential consequences of lack of voice:

> That's really important that every board member feels they're being heard and then they . . . are as important as each other. It's just like any other group of people. And those are important things to have, and if somebody starts to feel like that's not the case, often that's when you start to have things unravel a bit. (p. 21)

The participants described the importance of the tone and the manner in which messaging occurs. Participant 1 shared a past experience with board members who were

communicating poorly, resulting in dissention and divisiveness. Participant 1 believed

that improved board communication led to better results: "Everything's discussed and the

biggest thing is, as a board, is listening to each other, without talking over each other,

without belittling, you know, each other's opinion, and we vote 7-0 almost all the time"

(p. 15).

Participant 2 stated the importance of working together and tone. "Just common

sense of working together and allowing interactions and not trying to talk over people or

be condescending in any way. A lot of it is just rules of conduct" (p. 24). Participant 12

discussed that appropriate communication should be a given and that individuals elected

to a board should possess these skills. "I think it's just the typical things I learned in

kindergarten. Let other people speak, don't talk over . . . . Just common courtesy things;

respecting each other's opinion" (Participant 12, p. 24).

Participant 3 viewed communication as respect, and in the context of team and

team interactions, stated: "I think we come together as a team, and I think just the way we

talk to each other . . . just be respectful" (p. 44). The participants shared their sense of

responsibility and strategies to encourage open communication: "I believe in being very

transparent, but I want to be sure everybody feels like they've had their say, but that

nobody tries to dominate it" (Participant 2, p. 6). Participant 3 acknowledged the value of

dialogue: "We thought the best way to be honest and open, and really get some dialogue .

. . instead of people hiding behind an email, or hiding behind a document . . . would be

much more effective" (Participant 3, p. 15). Participant 6 described the process the board

used to address an issue to discuss: "Because of the closeness of our board, if there's

something that we need to work on, we'll have a special meeting. We just say, 'Okay,

we're going to have a special meeting,' and then we work on it" (p. 18). Participant 8

stated the importance of immediacy in communication, "As far as what's going on, so we

really don't have anything set in stone with that. I think it's because if there's a problem,

we just, we don't let it fester or anything, we just bring it out" (p. 12).

"I believe in chain of command" (Participant 4, p. 41). Boards of education have

a formal democratic structure and established procedures to govern operations. In

addition, boards may establish additional informal procedures to guide their team

functioning. When speaking about governance of the board and team interactions, the

board presidents emphasized the importance of following an established chain of

command and agreed upon procedures. Chain of command is a phrase from the military

that describes lines of authority and responsibility. In a civilian context, chain of

command refers to hierarchical structures of authority. Within a school, chain of

command would refer to authority and responsibility among the board, administration,

teachers, staff, and parents. Participant 4 believed, "As a board member, you should be

respectful of the chain of command" (p. 41), and Participant 4 added, "So I'm a believer

in the chain of command . . . . I feel like, if you believe in that and follow that, it will

keep you out of some hot water" (pp. 42-43). Participant 11 reinforced the need for board

members to adhere to the chain of command to avoid miscommunication and promote an

environment of fairness:

> In our orientation packet, we have the chain of command. And, honestly, the way
>
> the chain of command came about was because we had board members that
>
> would bring issues to the board meeting that they . . . you know. And nobody had

an opportunity to deal with them. It's not fair to put something out there that we

know nothing about. It's not appropriate. (p. 4)

Participant 9 believed and stated that adherence to a chain of command had supported

team interaction and functioning and helped avoid problems:

Our district has been very strong about that whole chain of command function and

process. That's kind of been our mantra, and it's worked very well for us. I think

it's key, because if you have one board member that either members of the faculty

or members of the community think they can influence, and if that person can

then influence the board, then you've got a problem that you have to deal with.

(p. 17)

Participant 11 expressed:

And they go around the procedures and the chain of command and the policies

and stuff. So, we actually, what I suggested we did last year was, in the conduct,

we actually have a chain of command put in the Code of Conduct for our teachers,

for our students, for our parents, and for our members. (p. 4)

Participant 10 shared the chain of command as it related to the superintendent of schools:

There is a chain of command. What we have found, works really well for us, is if

any board member has a topic of interest or a concern or complaint or whatever,

they share it with the board president, and I've requested that they CC it to the

superintendent, or they send it to both of us. (p. 6)

In addition to following an articulated chain of command, the participants

emphasized that collectively establishing operating guidelines that are customized to their

district is helpful for board interactions. The participants discussed procedures that are

developed in house and personalized to address specific needs. "We had one time we put together ground rules for all of our meetings that we all agreed on" (Participant 3, p. 24).

Participant 4 shared that because the board developed procedures because the established guidelines were not understood, which resulted in board members not following the chain of command. "I think, like anything, once you understand the process and the decisions that were made, things start to make more sense to you" (p. 9).

Participant 6 described board the importance of New York State board regulations when developing internal guidelines and procedures:

> I think board members, the first thing, they have to understand the board process
> as defined by the state, the laws. We got this very big thick New York State Laws
> for Education. We have to understand that, and we have to also understand the
> policies that are placed, that support those laws. (p. 6)

"You have to be on board with the board" (Participant 8, p. 2). The landscape of education is changing, and it has created confusion about the roles and responsibilities of school boards. The participants believed that confusion impacts working together as a team and understanding boards have collective ownership of decisions. The evolving role of school boards requires the knowledge of complicated reforms and mandates. Reforms in K-12 education governance have shifted accountability, and the lines of responsibility have become blurred, which the participants believed contributed to school board uncertainty about roles. As stated by Participant 3,

> Explain consistently in what is the role of a board member? Yes, that's very, very
> important that people understand what the role of a board member is . . . a school
> board member. Because that can get very blurry. Those lines. (p. 7)

New board members often begin their term with limited, none, or an incorrect understanding of the role. Participate 8 candidly remarked about starting as a new board member: "Yeah, I mean, that first year, that's where you get hit with it, that's when you realize, 'What am I doing?'" (p. 15). Participant 4 discussed the impact,

I think that's probably the challenge of becoming a board member. Understanding your role is based on what your position is, not based on what you saw as a parent or what you experienced with your kid. I think that's a little bit of a challenge. (p. 7)

Participant 7 spoke about abruptly coming to understand the role:

And I found this very quickly as I took a role on the board was, your perception of what school board members know, can say, can do, how they react, it is so skewed from what the reality of a board member is. (p. 1)

The participants emphasized that boards make decisions as a single entity to work together to create results and make decisions. Participant 4 stated:

I think probably the first challenge is realizing you don't make any decisions, the board does. As an individual, you can't represent the board. You can only represent yourself. You have to be part of the team that's making the decisions" (p. 6)

Participant 8 stated: "I think the big thing that came away from it was that you, as a board member, have to act; the whole board has to act as a unit. You have to be on board with the board" (p. 2). Later in the interview, Participant 8 emphasized working as a unified team is learned over time:

A lot of it is you realize, once you get on the board, you can't do that. You have to have support from the board, and you can't just go in there and say that you want to do these things. That's [what] . . . you learn that. (p. 5)

Participant 7 recommended defining roles as the starting point of a retreat: "I think roles and responsibilities is always the starting point of any retreat, because as an outsider coming onto the board thinking that you have all of this vested power… that doesn't exist" (p. 17). And, as an important part of the board role, to support the board decisions, even if there was disagreement, Participant 9 stated:

I think the biggest thing is just realizing that you're only one person. Whether you're five, you're seven, or you're nine, you're one voice. While you don't always all agree on something, you have to learn to work as that board, and respectfully accept whatever the ultimate [decision] of the board is as a whole. (p. 18)

Participant 7 stated, "The board acted. We're not two people that lost this vote, but the board acted. That's the maturity level and understanding of how boards work that make board members good is understanding their role as a board member" (p. 10). Participant 7 further stated, "It's a board decision and you need to recognize that the board has spoken; the majority has spoken" (p. 10).

The participants described it is not the role of a board to become mired in small operational details. "You have to understand that you can't pick at every small thing" (Participant 2, p. 4), and "Of course, what you would find out pretty quickly is the small things are not what you're responsible for" (Participant 4, p. 7).

"So, that builds bridges and builds relationships" (Participant 10, p. 15). Many
of the participants shared that they believe strong relationships and mutual respect are at
the core of team interactions and functioning. Participant 5 was passionate about this,
"We try really and truly to work together. We have mutual respect for each other. Even if
we don't always agree, [we] like each other as people" (p. 49).

Participant 12 was equally as passionate:

And I think it's just really important to be able to separate your decisions and

responsibilities on the board from who we are as people. We can disagree and still

be best friends. Not best friends necessarily, but friends. We can still respect each

other. (p. 25)

The participants shared their belief in the importance of compromise to build

relationships and create results: "There's a lot of compromise; I think if you want to be

successful, there's a lot of compromise involved" (Participant 10, p. 4). Participant 7

stated: "If you cannot work with other people, first and foremost, and recognize there's

always going to be compromise on the board, you're never going to make it" (p. 11).

A surprising result was the participants' emphasis on the importance of social

gatherings for the boards. The participants highlighted the value of socialization as a time

for the board members to get to know one another and, in doing so, better understand one

another as individuals. Those relationships became important when faced with difficult

decisions. Participant 2 stated: "But then we have an hour, and we'll have dinner

together. We'll have a little time to socialize. Sometimes I think it's really important that

you get to appreciate each other on an individual basis" (p. 15).

Participant 5 had been a board president for many years and, believing in the importance of knowing board members, often hosted gatherings in the home: "We had everybody here for a dinner. We can sit around at a table with food, and just converse, and we like each other as people. We share stories, we know about each other" (pp. 49-50). Participant 11 expressed a similar sentiment:

I think that is important, because I think if you come into a board meeting and have no relationship with these people, you don't know them, you don't know their values, you don't know why they are there. I think it's highly important to have that social interaction where you have another relationship besides sitting on a board together. (p. 8)

Additionally, Participant 11 suggested attaching the social time to a board retreat:

Even to dine together before, it really does add that social [element]. Where you have time to say, "Oh, your kid plays . . . you know, to get to know each other. And then to sit down and then, you know, to bang out whatever topic you are looking at and discuss it. It's vital to have open communications. (pp. 17)

Participant 9 added: "We try to do it at school, but once in a while, it's nice as a group to interact with each other outside of the school setting and be able to just chat in a more comfortable atmosphere" (p. 7). Several of the participants mentioned gathering socially after a long board meeting. Participant 12 reflected: "Well, quite honestly, we also socialize together; because we're a small community, a lot of us know each other from other places. And I think that's important, because you care about each other" (p. 17).

In highlighting the importance of strong relationships to complete a difficult task, Participant 7 shared a strategy that was helpful during a superintendent search:

> The conversations we had through the process, whether it was at dinner interviews or things like that, where people could be people, and you didn't see them as board members, I think that helped to solidify the way in which we work with each other now. (p. 16)

Opportunities for getting to know one another can occur while traveling outside the district. Participant 10 stated: "I think that that's helpful when we all travel together, we get to know each other as people. So, you get to see people on a little bit of a different level. So, that builds bridges and builds relationships" (p. 15). Participant 12 talked about socializing to relieve the stress after a difficult board meeting: "And especially if they're stressful. It's more just the socializing and the . . . what we're dealing with at school isn't everything, so we can just relax and enjoy each other as people" (p. 24).

Category 3: addressing challenges. Boards of education face abundant challenges in a complex and fast-moving educational environment. The third category, addressing challenges, emerged when the participants described challenges and how boards seek to address challenges as a team. One theme was identified under the category of "A good guy, barking up the wrong tree" (Participant 12, p. 6).

"A good guy, barking up the wrong tree" (Participant 12, p. 6). A predominant challenge and constraint that the participants believed interferes with team functioning is personal agenda. The majority of the participants believed that board members who are motivated to be on the school board to address a single issue is a problem. When asked

what skills and knowledge boards need, Participant 2's immediate first response was: "I think a lot of it is . . . . First of all, not having an agenda" (p. 24).

Participant 5 expressed frustration about a person's agenda: "I've been frustrated over the years because sometimes there has been a person who will come on board with their own agenda" (p. 5). Similarly, Participant 11 stated: "We have a board of seven, and I found that when people come in with agendas, it is very hard to get them to focus on anything else but their agenda issue" (p. 2). Participant 7 added:

> I think my biggest fear—why I continue to hold on—is, as I described, the type of board members you get today are going to either be somebody that is like me that has a real invested interest, whether they came up through scouts, or some other reason that they feel that they need to give back to the community, and this is the service role that they pick, or the person that got wronged or their kid got wronged, and they're going to take it out on the district. (p. 29)

Participant 8 attributed positive board functioning to members not having personal agendas:

> For the most part, we work out fairly well. Especially this board. I mean, there was times where we've had a couple people that have come in, that have a certain agenda and you could tell. You know, so there was that friction there, but with this board, you know this is probably the best it's been since I've been here. (p. 10)

Participant 11 attempted to rectify the challenge by speaking directly with the board members:

And the two instances that I can think of, in the past few years, that we've had

people running with agendas, they've been very vocal. One guy started an online

campaign, because . . . I felt bad. A good guy, barking up the wrong tree. He

wanted to change tenure. And I tried to have a very private conversation with him

and say, "you're at the wrong level; there's nothing you can do at the local level."

He's got a lot bigger trees to bark up because this is the wrong one—completely.

It's the little sapling that has no control. (pp. 6)

Further, Participant 12 believed that school community does not want board members

with a single agenda, and they have exercised this through voting: "They're there for a

specific thing, and they don't get elected. When they come with an agenda, they might

get a small group that support them because of that, but not enough to get them on the

board, usually" (p. 5).

A major challenge that several participants believed interfered and distracted from

board interactions was micromanagement. Participant 7 stated that, "What's really

become a problem with our district, and I've seen it in other districts, is the

micromanagement of the board members and the board itself towards the district

operations" (p. 30). This point was further emphasized by Participant 6: "There's a way

to manage as a board and not be micromanaging, because it's detrimental to the school

district and to the kids and the community if the board is micromanaging" (p. 36).

Participant 9 believed that the board was successful because micromanagement

did not exist: "I think that's kind of key to our success because we don't end up with

anyone who wants to advance their own agenda or micromanage what's happening"

(p. 8).

The final area that the participants believed challenge boards is lack of time; a common challenge for groups and organizations. School board members are not compensated. Work and personal commitments make it difficult to dedicate time to board work. Participant 1 discussed the difficulty of scheduling meetings and members having time to attend anything extra: "Everyone on the school board, except maybe one person, is full-time worker, so they don't have a lot of time to do the extra, and most of them are from the private sector." (p. 10)

Participant 7 was challenged when trying to schedule extra meetings to conduct a superintendent search:

> The real issue as a board member that I find time and time again is, there's so much knowledge out there that we don't have, and the people that serve on these boards all have houses to maintain and families to maintain, and they are professionals and have 40+-hour work weeks, for sure, no matter what. Through all of those items that take up their time, I notice that you really reach a saturation point that sometimes people begin to [become] fatigue[d] with just our two meetings a month. (p. 20)

Participant 7 believed visibility at school events is important and added that, in order to attend events, personal life is compromised: "I make personal decisions all of the time to prioritize certain things for this district above my family" (p. 21).

Speaking about the reason why a board member resigned from the board in the middle of the term, Participant 9 shared: "I think a lot of it was related to family issues and work issues and just not having the time to dedicate to the board" (p. 4). Participant 9

was sensitive and kept this in mind in future planning, "We try not to infringe on people's private lives any more than we have to" (p. 7).

Category 4: creating results. The fourth and final category is creating results and the themes uncovered by the data include (a) "It's about the kids" Participant 11, p. 14), and (b) "We do a pretty good job of self-assessment" (Participant 10, p. 14).

"It's about the kids" (Participant 11, p. 14). Working forward with common purpose and toward a common goal is important for teams. The primary purpose of schools is to provide a quality education for all students. School boards are an integral part of that goal. A belief from the participants in this study was the importance of focusing on the students as the priority in all decision making. The participants emphasized that decisions need to benefit the students, and boards need to keep this goal front and center. Participant 11 shared that their board works well because students are the common priority: "I think we work pretty well together. Our members are really there for the right reason. I think, at the end of the day, what's right for the kids is what gets done" (p. 12). Participant 3 had similar resolve with "The bottom line is that there's a reason. It's for kids. If you want kids to be successful, and whatever you can learn, and do, and bring back to the table to help kids be successful" (p. 54). Participant 9 attributed board success to an emphasis on students:

> I think that's why we're able to be as successful as we are with such a small district and such limited resources, because we all came to that conclusion when we got on the board and got our feet under us that this isn't about us. It's not about what we personally want. This is about what we do to make sure that every

student that graduates from the district is able to pursue the dreams that they have. (p. 18)

Participant 1 posed a rhetorical question: "If you always put the kids first, I mean, who's gonna be against that?" (p. 21). Additionally, Participant 1 recommended and strategically shifting the conversation to focus on students when there is disagreement:

But, like I said, if you always say, "Hey, listen guys. You know, we're talking about this particular issue. This is how it benefits the children, this is how it will maybe negatively impact teaching staff, but the kids will win here." If you can, if you can really break down the problem so that it favors the kids (p. 20).

Participant 5 emphasized looking at options that are best for students: "Talking about the various options that are available, or that what we have to look at, and, again, always going back to what really serves all the children or the majority of the children" (p. 6).

Several participants mentioned that boards need to be reminded to prioritize for the students when faced with decisions about limited resources and fiscal pressures. As stated by Participant 6: "That we also are spending the money in the right areas to help the kids" (p. 4). Participant 6 elaborated on this later in the interview: "Our customers are the kids and the community, and if you start listening to the kids, you know what's going on in the school; you know what's best" (p. 44).

Participant 12 believed that boards are tested to prioritize for the students when staff may potentially lose their jobs: "We have a lot of discussion, and this board is very committed to kids first. You don't want to hurt people with jobs, either; but kids are first. And we don't want to affect [the] program or the kids" (p. 22). Participant 9 summed up

the importance of creating results by having the collective priority on students: "It was all for the good of the school" (p. 2).

"We do a pretty good job of self-assessment" (Participant 10, p. 14). Boards, like any effective team, have positive outcomes when there are clear goals, direction, and reflection about performance. The participants believed in the value of self-assessment and their boards being engaged in varying activities and possessing the resources to assist them with planning and reflection. The participants discussed the value of board retreats as an opportunity to plan and reflect: "Part of August is talking about goals and stuff. Where we are and where we're . . . . What we're going for the year and what will be stressed" (Participant 2, p. 19). Participant 10 shared, "In every retreat, we look at the handbook, and we say, 'what hasn't worked?'" (p. 22). Likewise, Participant 1 stated:

> And we get together, and we do our strategic plan for the year. Talk about what
>
> our goals are. We actually map out a plan that's on paper that the entire
>
> community can see. So, they know what our emphasis is for the year. (p. 11)

Participant 3 believed the retreats are an important venue to collectively discuss board self-evaluations: "I think if you just hand out a piece of paper, there's no opportunity to have some dialogue, because I'd had that experience. So, I think retreats are very, very important, and they're very effective" (p. 27).

The participants used board self- evaluations to reflect on board performance and team results. Participant 4 said, "I think that's a tool that may uncover things that you hadn't thought about. I would certainly recommend that boards do that" (p. 12). Participant 4 went on to state: "I think that's important because it gives people an opportunity to say 'I thought this was good, but we could have done better here'" (p. 14).

In addition to reflecting, using self-assessments, the participants sought out and believed feedback from all constituents in the community is crucial. Participant 9 reflected:

> So, we've done another series of scans with the students, the staff, and the parents. So, we're going to go over the results of the scans and figure out how we're going to redirect our goals and objectives based on the feedback we're getting from staff and students and parents. (p. 7)

Participant 8 emphasized feedback from teachers: "We hear from the teachers and it's always good to have board members that have kids going here. Then they always give us feedback as far as what's going on with the kids" (p. 10).

When asked how they know if the board is working well together and has made a good decision, the participants stated they gauge performance on attendance at board meetings or board news in the media. Participant 9 said that, "You don't have a lot of people in the audience that are upset with you. And that's when they show up. If people are happy, for the most part, they don't bother you" (p. 12). This was further emphasized by Participant 7: "Feedback within the community. The press wasn't coming to every single [meeting]; they weren't reporting out the negatives" (p. 9), and additionally, Participant 8 followed with, "It's hard to get feedback, you know? I guess we figure, 'Well we must be doing okay, because we're not getting the feedback'" (p. 10).

The participants understood that feedback about performance and results may not be immediate and or apparent: "But if we've made a good decision, probably the results are down the road. Hopefully, we have enough knowledge and understanding and experience to know that we need to wait for those results" (Participant 4, p. 30).

Participant 2 conveyed that they use reflection to create results. Ultimately, boards make decisions the best they are able:

> That's a good question. That's a good question. You know, you do the best you can. I guess in the end, how you know that is depending on the feedback you get down the line. Right? I wouldn't say that we've always been 100% perfect, but we've tried. (p. 20)

Summary of Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how boards develop the capacity to work together to create results. The four categories and 10 themes that emerged from the data and discussed in Chapter 4 were: first, developing capacity incorporating the three themes of: (a) "It's through sharing of knowledge" (Participant 5, p. 6), and (b) "Because everybody has different contributions" (Participant 2, p. 12), and (c) That's where my job as president should be" (Participant 4, p. 35). The second category, interacting as a team, incorporated the four themes of: (a) "Everybody needs to have their voice heard" (Participant 5, p. 31); (b) "I believe in chain of command" (Participant 4, p. 41); (c) "You have to be on board with the board" (Participant 8, p. 2); and (d) "So, that builds bridges and builds relationships" (Participant 10, p. 15). The third category, addressing challenges, incorporated the theme of: (a) "A good guy, barking up the wrong tree" (Participant 12, p. 6), the fourth and final category, creating results, incorporated two themes: (a) "It's about the kids" (Participant 11, p. 14), and (b) "We do a pretty good job of self-assessment" (Participant 10, p. 14). All categories and themes were relevant to the

lived experiences of the 12 school board presidents in Central New York who participated in this qualitative study.

The final chapter of this study provides a summary of the findings while also describing the study's limitations and the implications for the recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the research that examined the beliefs of school board presidents. The research findings are discussed and implications for school boards are explored. The limitations of the study and recommendations are discussed and a conclusion is presented.

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how school boards learn to work together to create results. This study emphasized the skills, knowledge, and preparation that school board members need to function successfully as a team. Information gleaned from this study adds to the literature and understanding of school boards and informs school board learning and preparation.

Communities rely on their school boards to make decisions and, therefore, board members must have the skills and knowledge needed to govern in a high-stakes educational environment. School board members are not educational experts, but they require knowledge and understanding of districts to make informed decisions as a board (Delagardelle, 2008). Additionally, the evolving role of school boards requires knowledge of complicated reforms and mandates. School board members' inexperience in an era of unprecedented educational change remains a challenge for public school systems (Kirst, 2007).

This qualitative study answered the following research questions:

1. How do school board presidents believe school board members develop the capacity to work together to create results?

2. What skills and knowledge do school board presidents identify as necessary for schools to work together to create results?

3. What learning and preparation do school board presidents identify that help school board members acquire skills and knowledge to work together to create results?

4. To what degree do school board presidents believe existing school board learning and preparation support or impede the ability of school board members to work together to create results?

Data were collected from interviews with 12 school board president participants from the Central New York region. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from each of the participants. Measures were taken to protect the identity of the participants and school districts and to protect the confidentiality of the data.

Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interview questions were conducted with the school board presidents. The interview questions were based on the research questions, school board and team learning literature. The collection of interview data was iterative in design, so that each interview informed subsequent interviews and questions.

School board presidents have a unique role on school boards given that there are formally identified responsibilities coupled with less-formal, nuanced tasks. The distinguishing characteristic of phenomenology is the essence of the lived experience. Understanding school boards through the unique lens of the school board presidents led

to the development of major categories, themes, and essences of their lived experiences through a qualitative analysis of the interview data.

The trustworthiness of the study was examined using criteria for a qualitative study proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To establish credibility, there were frequent debriefing sessions between the researcher, dissertation committee, and executive mentor. Peer review was utilized to gain additional feedback about the codes, categories, and themes. The collaborative sessions helped to widen perspective and consider alternatives.

The rich and extensive narrative responses from the participants included in this study further establishes credibility that the results are, indeed, believable. The participants were volunteers and willing to take part in the study and had the opportunity to member check interview transcripts.

A highly detailed description of the research context is provided in Chapter 3. The specific details of the research situation and methods establish a reasonable degree of transferability of the research to another context.

Dependability ensures that the research findings are consistent and could be repeated. The processes in this study, including the research design, implementation, data gathering, and analysis are reported in detail. This level of detail allows future researchers to repeat the study. In doing so, in the same context and with the same participants and methods, dependability is addressed and similar results may result (Shenton, 2004).

The concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, confirmability refers to the degree the results can be corroborated by others. To enhance the confirmability of the study and

reduce the possibility of researcher bias, a detailed "audit trail" was completed. The data collection and analysis procedures were meticulously documented and maintained throughout the study.

Implications of Findings

The four main categories that emerged from the data align with literature about school boards team learning theory (Senge, 1990). "Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236). The categories include: (a) developing capacity, (b) interacting as a team, (c) addressing challenges, and (d) creating results. The categories are interconnected and fluid as boards evolve and learn.

The categories were further broken down into 10 themes that emerged from the participants' responses. The theme titles are direct quotes from the participants and aptly and powerfully convey meaning:

1. "It's through sharing of knowledge" (Participant 5, p. 6).

2. "Because everybody has different contributions" (Participant 2, p. 12).

3. "That's where my job as president should be" (Participant 4, p. 35).

4. "Everybody needs to have their voice heard" (Participant 5, p. 31).

5. "I believe in chain of command" (Participant 4, p. 41).

6. "You have to be on board with the board" (Participant 8, p. 2).

7. "So, that builds bridges and builds relationships" (Participant 10, p. 15).

8. "A good guy, barking up the wrong tree" (Participant 12, p. 6).

9. "It's about the kids" (Participant 11, p. 14).

10. "We do a pretty good job of self-assessment" (Participant 10, p. 14).

The essences were generated to capture the unique lived experiences of the participants. A model depicting the categories and essences derived from the themes is represented in Figure 5.1.
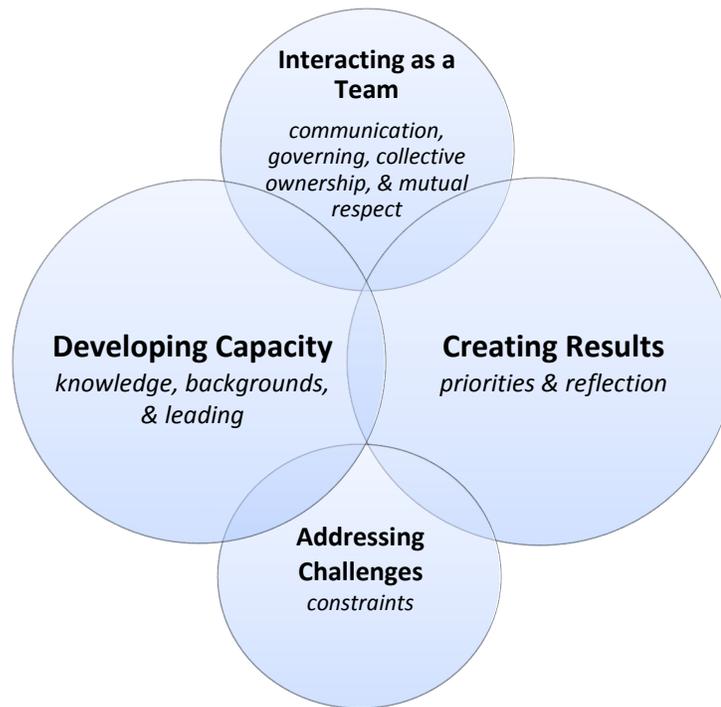

Figure 5.1. School Boards and Team Learning: Categories and Essences.

Developing capacity. Capacity derives from the Latin word *capacitatem* meaning breadth or capacity. Organizations seek to build capacity by developing the skills and knowledge of individuals and teams to strengthen the organization and achieve success (Senge, 1990). The first category, *building capacity*, captured the beliefs of the school board presidents about what is essential for boards to develop to have the ability to produce results and operate as a well-functioning team.

School board members are not educational experts, but they require knowledge and understanding of districts to make informed decisions as a board (Delagardelle,

2008). The school board presidents emphasized the importance of acquiring and sharing knowledge to build capacity. Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) identified participation in learning activities as a central characteristic of effective boards, and they found members should take part in team development and training to build shared knowledge, values, and commitment for their improvement efforts. Boards have an opportunity to participate in a variety learning opportunities, and they are encouraged to do so. Most have funds and access to local, state, and national offerings such as conferences and webinars. Those who do not have the funds and access to offerings rely on local organizations and networking with other districts.

Carver (2011) emphasized the importance of formal training for boards that make a difference in nonprofit and public organizations. In New York State, new school board members participate in 12 hours of mandated individual training. Participants believe this training is insufficient for board needs. Specifically, board presidents believe new board members need added knowledge in the areas of school district budgeting and understanding the role of school boards.

Hess and Meeks (2010) reported board members expressing a desire for additional information and training opportunities to assist them with decision making and their ability to be responsive to their constituents. The school board presidents relied heavily on gaining knowledge from experts within the district, from lawyers, and from outside consultants. They involve these individuals at meetings and believed this provides boards with crucial information needed to make decisions regarding operations, curricula and legal matters.

The ability to establish contacts and network for the purpose of sharing information and ideas has become an important skill for leaders in organizations (Kumar, Kumar, Adhish, & Reddy, 2015). Networking with neighboring districts and in-house mentoring was valued by the board presidents. Communication through networking and sharing builds knowledge over time and through experience. Several of the participants believed board members need at least 1 year or a full term to understand the role.

Learning contributes to organizational effectiveness by enabling teams to create knowledge between team members, create knowledge with others external to the team, and to interact with the environment to enable adaptation to changing situations (Kayes, Kayes, & Kolb, 2005). The perceptions of the school board presidents concerning the acquisition and sharing of knowledge is significant information for school boards to plan for professional development and make decisions to join local, state, and national school board associations.

The participants stated a diverse range of experience and backgrounds that contribute to a positive dynamic and builds capacity on the board. Specifically, the board presidents mentioned years of experience as a board member, different professions and work experience, and age. As to building a board for success in an organization, Senge and Crainer (2008) identified the need for people with varying viewpoints from different parts of the organization to determine a result. Persons from varied occupations and work experiences lend expertise to the board. The participants believed that their board members had experience and knowledge of the community and school district.

A surprising aspect of this study was learning about the leadership of the school board presidents as it relates to information gathering, sharing and facilitating. Decuyper

et al. (2010) conducted a review of team learning literature and identified facilitation of that information as a fundamental team learning behavior, which would drive the team in in the direction of growth. Most of the participants were very active learners, had a palpable investment in their communities, and sought information by attending educational opportunities in person, online seminars, conferences, and attending CNYSBA roundtable meetings. They also attained knowledge by meeting and planning with the school superintendent.

The board presidents actively shared knowledge with their boards at meetings, via phone calls, and through electronic communication. It is interesting that in some cases, the school board presidents made determinations about the information that they shared with their boards. They did not do this with the intent of withholding information; rather, they did it in consideration of time, and they saw their role as filtering and providing only the necessary information to their board members.

Interacting as a team. The second category, *interacting as a team*, was a collective understanding of the school board presidents about how the board members work together. This included communication, adhering to well-known board rules of governance, clarity about the role of the school board, and socializing to develop mutual respect.

The school board participants emphasized the importance of communication and making certain that all board members had the opportunity to have their voices heard. Bohm (1996) wrote that there are two primary types of discourse: dialogue and discussion. In discussion, points of view are presented with a single prevailing idea and it is through dialogue that individuals gain insight that simply could not be achieved

individually (Bohm, 1996). Through dialogue, a group explores complex, difficult issues from many points of view. The board presidents believed that through this dialogue, boards reap the benefits of multiple points of view and ideas. When asked about skills, they mentioned that board members need to be willing to listen actively and be willing to suspend assumptions.

School boards have a governance structure that is guided by New York State law and by established policies and regulations. Governance of major district operational areas, while staying abreast of education reform, often overwhelms new and inexperienced board members (Maeroff, 2010). Further, rresearch conducted by Hess (2010) identified governance training as essential for successful board performance. Most of the school board presidents felt it is critical for boards to adhere to governance structures and the established chain of command. When this does not occur, the interactions of the team are damaged. The participants recommended handbooks that clearly outline the procedures and guidelines. Publications that are available from the State School Boards Association are helpful start, but boards need to customize the information for their purposes.

The school board presidents also believed that a customized handbook publication would provide clarity about the role of the school board and member responsibilities. Maeroff (2010) asserted that the role of school boards has become too expansive and the status quo is not adequate to address improved student outcomes and accountability pressures. Clarity of roles and ongoing learning to address the vast and diverse responsibilities and school functioning is vital to school board effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2008). The participants described that the interactions and functioning of the team

are disrupted because board members do not understand their roles and responsibilities. Reforms in K-12 education governance have shifted accountability, and lines of responsibility have become blurred, which contributes to school board uncertainty about roles. Role ambiguity of school board presidents in an era of high accountability creates problems that can distract from the focus of educating students (Daugbjerg, 2014). This underscores the participants' beliefs about the need for focused clarity about board roles.

A final theme in the category of *interacting as a team* was an unexpected emphasis by most of the participants on socialization. Through socialization, the board presidents believed that board members develop a mutual respect for one another and this positively enhances decision making and the board members working as a team. Edmondson (1999) presented a concept within team learning as psychological safety, "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson, 1999, p. 1). Psychological safety stems from mutual respect and trust, whereby if team members are confident, they can speak without being embarrassed, rejected, or punished (Edmondson, 1999). The participants referenced numerous ways in which their board members come together in informal social settings, for example, with– dinners and/or drinks after board meetings, and traveling to conferences, etc. These opportunities allow board members to get to know one another, and knowing and respect transfers to decision making at board meetings.

Addressing challenges. Açikgöz, Günsel, and Kuzey (2015) found that the problem-solving capability of teams is associated with higher levels of team learning. School boards face challenges and problems that disrupt board interactions and their ability to build capacity, interact, and create results. Although the participants described

similar challenges, they did not have consistent strategies or workable solutions. They did acknowledge the importance of addressing these challenges to establish a productive and cohesive board.

Board members have busy lives, and the presidents believed there was not enough time to complete the work at hand. Attendance by all board members is perceived as very important, and the presidents had a hard time scheduling meetings. That said, they remained steadfast to arrange agreeable times to ensure full attendance.

The board presidents believed there are individuals who want to be on the school board because they have a single agenda, and that interferes with the board working as a team. They further believed that when personal agenda do not exist, the board functions better. They also voiced that board members who try to micromanage, attempt to manage, or control with excessive attention to minor details is to the detriment of the board. As presidents, they sought to minimize and or eliminate micromanagement through clarity of procedures and addressing board members directly.

Creating results. The fourth category derived from the school board presidents' interviews was *creating results*. Edmondson et al. (1999) defined team learning as a "process in which a team takes action, obtains and reflects on feedback, and makes changes to improve" (p. 353). The participants positively believed that their boards could build capacity, interact as a team, address challenges, and ultimately work as a team to create results.

Ricci and Weise (2011) identified that team members need to trust in each other, understand the team purpose, and work toward the same goals. To create results, the

participants emphasized that decisions must be made with students as the number-one priority. The board presidents stated that this needs to be the unifying goal.

Effective teams get regular feedback about performance and productivity (Wheelen, 2015). To create results, the board presidents in the study emphasized reflection about performance and the use of a board self-assessment tool. Edmondson (1999) suggested that when teams at different levels of an organization fail to work together and reflect, the organization misses crucial learning opportunities. The participants deemed it important and meaningful to have time for individual and collective reflection. The reflection, they said, should encompass feedback from the community and include dialogue among all board members.

Implications for school boards. The study of school board presidents in Central New York suggests school boards develop the capacity of their teams through access and the acquisition and sharing of knowledge. The knowledge may be provided in a variety of formats and in a variety of locations for all to avail and to encourage participation. Further, it is suggested that boards develop mechanisms for the sharing of new knowledge among board members. Learning in teams is a key mechanism through which learning organizations become strategically and operationally adaptive and responsive (Edmondson et al., 2007). This study suggests that boards seek a balanced board of individuals who contribute multiple perspectives and expertise and identify a board president who has the time, will, and enthusiasm to lead.

This study further suggests that boards understand how to do so, and to commit to interacting as a team. Communication is essential, and all voices should be accessed through discussion and dialogue. Dialogue involves listening and collectively exploring

ideas; discussion refers to searching for the best view to support decisions (Senge, 1990). The participants believed that boards need to communicate through dialogue to address issues and make decisions.

The results suggest the need for understanding and adherence to governance procedures and district procedures and guidelines. Board roles and limitations need to be understood. This study suggests by working as a team, board members strategize to address the challenges of time, personal agendas, and micromanagement.

Finally, this study suggests two areas to create positive results: establish students as the highest priority, and continually reflect on performance based upon goals and priorities. In order for a school board to ensure that it is positively contributing to the effective governance of a school district, its members must demonstrate "a commitment that learning for all is the priority to which they will pledge their efforts and honor" (Mizell, 2010, p. 21).

Implications for policy development. The study has implications for board policy development at the local level and potentially at the state and national levels. The study suggests that governance frameworks ensure students as the priority for boards. The frameworks should be well-defined and communicated to clarify authority and responsibilities.

Additionally, the study suggests the need for increased requirements for board preparation. The preparation should include additional time and content to address the knowledge required for boards. Several board presidents identified financial constraints that limit participation in board preparation activities and membership in organizations.

The study suggests that policies underscore the importance of board preparation and ensure accessibility for all boards, regardless of financial means.

Lastly, the participants identified the importance of varied backgrounds and experience of boards of education. The study suggests that policy development explore existing models of balanced boards.

Implications for future research. The participants in this study were from Central New York, and the study results are based on the interviews of 12 individuals who served as school board presidents. In order to determine the extent to which the findings may be true of participants in other settings, similar research utilizing the same methods, but conducted in different environments, could be of great value. Including school board presidents from additional geographic regions would develop results and affirm the transferability of the study.

This study sought the perspective of team learning and school boards from the perspective of the school board president. Future study could examine those same beliefs from school board members, past and present, who did not serve as school board presidents.

The board president participants identified and discussed the challenges of personal agendas, micromanagement, and time. These challenges appear to be common, and future study could examine each challenge in depth.

The participants indicated that fiscal constraints may limit participation in board preparation. Future study could examine how to establish financial resources for equity and board preparation.

Of the board president group, 10 participants served continuously as board president for 3 or more years, and six served continuously for more than 5 years. The average length of school board service for all of the participants in this study was 11.1 years. Further study could examine the how board leaders are selected and the impact of longevity in leadership of school board presidents.

Limitations

A qualitative phenomenological research study provides the opportunity to study and understand people's beliefs and lived experiences about a particular situation or phenomenon. The school board presidents who participated in the interviews provided rich descriptions of their experiences as presidents and school board members. However, this study has the following limitations:

The sample in the study was considered a criteria sample, as the selection of participants (school board presidents) met a predetermined set of characteristics (Patton, 2002). Participation was voluntary, and 12 school board presidents agreed to be interviewed. This sample size and narrow geographic region potentially limits the transferability of the study. Ultimately, though, the results of a qualitative study are understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organization and, possibly, the geographical area in which the research was conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The school board presidents volunteered to participate in the study, it could be possible that they were more ambitious and dedicated than other nonparticipating board presidents, and it is possible that their perspectives may not be representative of a broader pool of board presidents.

The researcher is a school district administrator in the same Central New York region. The researcher's status had the potential to influence the participants' responses. Efforts were made to enhance credibility and to ensure honesty from the participants (Shenton, 2004). The participants were genuinely willing to take part in and offer responses freely. Rapport was established at the onset of each interview and the participants were reassured about confidentiality and encouraged to be frank and honest.

Recommendations

Katzenbach and Smith (2014) contended that teams are the key to improving performance in organizations, and they are vital to meet future challenges. The results of this research describe the beliefs of school board presidents about how school boards develop capacity, interact as a team, address challenges, and create positive results. A group of individuals does not constitute a team; rather, successful teams (boards) perform as a unit and are accountable to a collective performance. The study recommends that boards be mindful of the beliefs of the board presidents captured in the research as they work together to create results that will benefit future generations of school children.

Conclusion

The school board is a local board or authority that is responsible for the provision and maintenance of schools and the establishment of policies and regulations by which schools are governed (NSBA, n.d.). The overarching role of a public-school board of education is to govern and represent the community in matters of education while overseeing district resources (NSBA, n.d.).

In recent years, school boards have experienced increasing pressure to understand their role and execute their authority (Mizell, 2010). School board members may lack

experience and professional background in the field of education, which results in a lack of expertise in governance areas (Hess, 2010). School board members are not educational experts, but they require knowledge and understanding of districts to make informed decisions as a board (Delagardelle, 2008). Governance of major district operational areas, while staying abreast of education reform, often overwhelms new and inexperienced board members (Maeroff, 2010). The evolving role of school boards also now requires knowledge of complicated reforms and mandates. School board member inexperience in an era of unprecedented educational change remains a challenge for public school systems (Kirst, 2007).

Communities rely on their school boards to make decisions and operate as a single entity and, therefore, boards must have the ability to do so (Alsbury, 2008; New York Education Law § 1804.). Furthermore, team learning and growth is vital because teams, not individuals, are fundamental in contemporary organizations (Senge et al., 2014). "Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236).

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how school board members develop the capacity to work together to create results. The theoretical framework of team learning was used to guide and study the research questions. The significance of this study is its contribution to school boards and education practitioners. The findings add to the literature regarding school boards and inform school board learning and preparation.

The overall design was a qualitative, phenomenological study to examine the beliefs of school board presidents. This study answered the following research questions:

1. How do school board presidents believe school board members develop the capacity to work together to create results?

2. What skills and knowledge do school board presidents identify as necessary for school boards to work together to create results?

3. What learning and preparation do school board presidents identify that help school board members acquire skills and knowledge to work together to create results?

4. To what degree do school board presidents believe existing school board learning and preparation support or impede the ability of school board members to work together to create results?

Individual, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection, and the theoretical frame of team learning by Senge (1990) and other contemporary researchers guided and predicted study results. The research questions served to focus the study and connect to team learning theory.

The research was conducted in the Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES location. The schools in the region include rural, urban, and suburban districts, featuring a diverse student population and ranging in size from approximately 500-9,000 students. The research participants included 12 school board presidents. An interview protocol was the primary data collection instrument, and it was developed according to the literature about school boards, the research questions, and team learning theory.

Interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed for accuracy. Transcripts were read thoroughly and information was placed into emerging codes and categories,

and themes were developed. Analysis and research findings were correlated with the research questions and team learning literature.

To provide meaningful contributions to school boards and inform school board learning and preparation, this study identified the beliefs of school board presidents in Central New York about how board members develop the capacity to work together to create results. The school board presidents believed that boards can build capacity through knowledge, balanced teams, and leadership from the board president. To interact as a team, board members need to communicate, follow governance procedures, understand a chain of command and roles and responsibilities, and develop mutual respect and relationships through socialization. Challenges exist for school boards and boards seek to find solutions to address these challenges. Finally, the board presidents believed the board can create results by establishing students as the priority and regularly reflecting on board performance.

Alsbury (2008) stated that school boards make a difference and the consequences for districts with under-qualified boards of education are potentially devastating and could negatively affect the communities and students they serve. Team learning has thought-provoking applications when considering public school boards of education. Applying the theoretical tenets of team learning could be that the intelligence and effectiveness of a board of education exceeds the intelligence and effectiveness of the individual board members. Teams have extraordinary capacities when their actions are coordinated, aligned, and their members are learning together (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2007). School board members working as a united team have the potential to create results and positively influence millions of children.

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Appendix A

Notice to School Superintendents

Mary Coughlin, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction at Fayetteville-Manlius, is a

doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership program at St. John Fisher College. The

topic of her research is school boards and the perceptions of board presidents about how

boards develop capacity to work together to create results. The theoretical frame of

systems thinking and specifically the discipline of team learning will guide study results

(Senge, 1990). Mary will be interviewing willing participants in the OCM BOCES

region to understand the skills and knowledge board presidents identify as well as the

learning and preparation. ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ and ▬▬▬▬▬▬ districts will be

excluded from the study due to researcher affiliation.

Research questions:
1. How do school board presidents believe boards develop the capacity to work together to create results?

2. What skills and knowledge do school board presidents identify as necessary for boards to work together to create results?

3. What learning and preparation do school board presidents identify that help boards acquire skills and knowledge to work together to create results?

4. To what degree do school board presidents believe existing board learning and preparation supports or impedes the ability of boards to work together to create results?

Mary will be available to share the specifics of the research study and respond to

questions prior to the School Chiefs meeting on Wednesday, February 8 at 8:30am in

room xxx.

You may also contact Mary directly with questions at _____ or

mkc05288@sjfc.edu

Thank you.

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Executive Leadership (Ed.D.) program in the School of Education at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. I am in the process of writing my doctoral dissertation and conducting research for that purpose. I am very interested in exploring the perceptions of school board presidents about how boards develop the capacity to work together to create results. I will be seeking to understand what skills and knowledge current or former school board presidents identify as important. Additionally, I will be seeking to understand as well as the learning and preparation needs of school boards.

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your assistance as a school board president by agreeing to be a participant in this study. For this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio recorded interview with this researcher. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes. Your information will be kept strictly confidential and will never be linked to the results of the study. Names and institutions will be de-identified in the transcripts, text, and any publication of the research. The interview will be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview or study at any time.

Please contact me if you are interested in participating or have any questions. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed and approved this project. For any concerns regarding this study you can contact Jill Rathbun at 585.385.8012 or by email at: irb@sjfc.edu.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research. Your perceptions and unique experiences as school board president are valuable and could contribute to the body of knowledge about school boards.

Appreciatively,

Mary Coughlin
mkc05288@sjfc.edu
_____(cell)

<div align="center">**Appendix C**</div>

<div align="center">**Informed Consent Form**</div>

<div align="center">St. John Fisher College
Institutional Review Board</div>

Title of study: School Boards and Team Learning: A Study of the Beliefs of School Board Presidents in Central New York.

Name(s) of researcher: Mary K. Coughlin
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Theresa Pulos Phone for further information: 315.█████████

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study is to examine the beliefs of school board presidents about how boards work together to create results.

Place of study: OCM BOCES region in CNY. Public office or location of convenience.
Length of participation: 30-60 minute interview

Risks and benefits: There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Participants are willing and agree to be interviewed. If a participant wishes to decline an interview question, they may skip the question or end the interview altogether. Participant may stop participating in the study at any time and for any reason. Should participant decide to withdraw from the study, all data generated as a consequence of participation will be destroyed.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: Names will not be recorded in the interview and participants will be de-identified in the transcripts, text, and any publication of the research. Materials associated with the research will be maintained in a locked office.

Your rights:
As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, which might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print Name (Participant)	Signature	Date

Print Name (Investigator)	Signature	Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Health and Wellness Center at (585) 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

The institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study and/or if you experience any physical or emotional discomfort, you can contact Jill Rathbun by phone at 585.385.8012 or by email at: irb@sjfc.edu

St. John Fisher College
IRB
Approval Date: 2-2-17
Approved: 2-2-17 To Expired: 2-2-18

Appendix D

SJFC IRB Approval Letter

February 2, 2017

File No: 3659-121516-18

Mary K. Coughlin
St. John Fisher College

Dear Ms. Coughlin:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, "School Boards and Team Learning: A Study of the Beliefs of School Board Presidents in Central New York."

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at irb@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen Lynd-Balta

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board
ELB: jdr