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SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER BELIEFS AND ACTIONS INFLUENCING STUDENT LEARNING

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ABSTRACT This article investigates school board members' perceptions about their roles and responsibilities for improving student learning, and examines contextual factors and characteristics that influence those beliefs. Data collected through the limited research conducted in this area reveal significant regional differences in board members' level of personal expectations, importance ascribed to responsibilities tied to improving student achievement, understanding systemic change for student learning, and training quantity and quality. The studies shed light on the need for and importance of leadership development of board-superintendent teams, implications for redefining board roles, and the overlooked importance of district-level governance on student achievement.

Résumé Le présent article étudie les perceptions des membres du conseil scolaire (ou commission scolaire) à propos de leurs rôles et responsabilités pour améliorer l'apprentissage des élèves, et examine les facteurs contextuels et les caractéristiques qui les influencent. Les données recueillies par la recherche effectuée dans ce domaine révèlent des différences régionales importantes sur les plans des attentes personnelles des membres du conseil scolaire (ou commission scolaire), de l'importance attribuée à des responsabilités liées à l'amélioration du rendement des élèves, de la compréhension du changement systémique pour l'apprentissage des élèves et de la quantité de la formation et de la qualité. Les études mettent en lumière la nécessité et l'importance de développer le leadership des équipes de direction, les conséquences liées à la redéfinition des rôles du conseil d'administration, et l'importance sous-estimée de la gouvernance locale sur la réussite des élèves.

School boards have not typically sought or been encouraged to play an active role in most facets of instructional reform efforts leading to student achievement. Generally, boards and superintendents feel more comfortable leaving instructionally related matters solely in the hands of the professional staff. However, the increasing public demand for accountability for student learning now places emphasis on the responsibility of the board, as a governing body, to create the vision and direction for student learning, to set policy, to provide resources for improvement efforts, and then to monitor the results of student achievement initiatives (Henderson & al., 2001a, 2001b). School boards are charged with decisions that impact what students learn, how students are taught, how learning is measured, how teachers are supported with professional development, how funds are focused on district priorities, and how effectively the community is engaged around student learning. While, by their nature school boards are removed from the day-to-day work of teaching and learning, they control the conditions that can allow successful teaching and learning to occur throughout the system.

The public cry for improved achievement and accountability in public schools and the traditional lack of board involvement in issues related to student achievement create an urgent need to clearly understand the leadership role of the board as it relates to improving student learning. A better understanding of how board members establish effective district priorities, how district priorities are influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of the board members, and what board actions will most likely result in shared commitment to district priorities for student learning is a critical need in the educational literature (Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Delagardelle, 2006).

In order to elucidate school board role perception and examine the possible influence of school boards on school system performance, several studies examined board members perceptions about their roles and responsibilities for improving student learning, the influence of certain contextual factors and characteristics of board members upon those beliefs, and finally related particular board beliefs or contextual factors to the achievement of students in their schools. The findings shed light on which governance roles and responsibilities board members believe are most important to positively impact student learning in their school districts, and what contextual factors and characteristics have more influence on the board members' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for improving student learning.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND LOCAL SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

From the beginning, the essential value of the public school in the United States concept of democracy was to ensure an educated citizenry (Glickman, 1993). Public education is education for citizenship. Honoring the treaty between the public and their schools and delivering on this promise of public education requires consistent evidence of high and equitable achievement among the students in public schools.

In what has become an American tradition, school boards comprised of elected officials are the guardians of, and policy makers for, our nation's schools. Local school boards have been an integral part of the history of American public education. Across the nation, there are approximately 15,000 local school boards and 95,000 local school board members with approximately 96% elected by their communities (Hess & Meeks; 2010). These local school boards provide the means for segments in each community to have a representative voice in how schools will educate their children. School board members, as elected officials, view

their accountability and responsiveness to the community in a manner local staff cannot. The perspective of the citizen school board member adds a dimension of stewardship to the system. In principle, school boards provide public stewardship and direction to local education, However, whether school boards in practice are effective bodies for leading local education improvement for improved student learning is the most transcending issue (Alsbury, 2008b; Hess & Meeks, 2010; Resnick, 1999; Wong & Shen, 2008). While there are different views regarding the primary purpose of school boards (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Eadie, 2003; Kowalski, 2006; Sarason, 1997; Schlechty, 1992; Simon, 1986), most agree the primary purpose is related to the teaching and learning of America's youth and expect school governors to establish coherent, attainable outcomes that reflect the community vision for education in a democracy (Campbell & Greene, 1994; Kowalski, 2006).

In recent decades, however, school boards have been the target of criticism by those who perceive them as outdated and incapable of effectively leading educational reforms to improve students' academic achievement, particularly in urban areas (Carol & al., 1986; Danzberger & al., 1987; Danzberger & al., 1992; The Twentieth Century Fund/Danforth Foundation, 1992; Wong & Shen, 2008). Recently, private firms are formally vying to take over the state's most troubled and "chronically failing" public schools and mayoral and state takeovers have occurred in no less than 40 cities (Wong & Shen, 2003, 2008) fueled by the perception of failing student achievement, political conflict, inexperienced teaching staff, low expectations for students, lack of a demanding curriculum, lack of instructional coherence, and poor management (Edelstein, 2006).

Despite the long-standing presence of local school boards in public education and the more recent concerns about the effectiveness of locally elected governing boards, there are very few data-driven studies on the effectiveness of school boards that can contribute to the discussion of their role in school improvement or student learning. Rather, opinion-based writings on the overall role of the school board in relation to student achievement dominate the literature and, at best, prescribe general categories of board behavior for effective boardsmanship rather than agreed upon specific criteria for judging the effects of school board governance on school systems.

School Boards and their Role

Traditionally, local school boards believed their role to be supportive in nature: approving the budget, dealing with constituents, generating revenue, and keeping the public "at bay" around politically sensitive issues. While these are still typical functions, the challenge of improving student achievement suggests the need for a more dynamic leadership from all facets of the district; including local school boards. Although many writers have attempted to describe school board functions for more effective board leadership (Danzberger & al., 1992; R. H. Goodman & al., 1997b; Henderson & al., 2001a; Horn, 1996; Iowa Association of School Boards and The Iowa State Board of Education, 1994; Land, 2002; Resnick, 1999; Smoley, 1999) school board operations have remained stable and the outcomes of schooling, namely student achievement results, have not improved (Grissmer & al., 2000).

School Boards through the Eyes of the Superintendent

Several research efforts surfacing in the 1960s and 1970s and continuing to the present have focused on the relationship between the superintendent and the school board and

asked questions related to who controls whom. Several early studies (Kerr, 1964; Smith, 1974) confirmed that boards deferred to the judgments and values of school professionals and, therefore, were controlled by them. Other studies during this time (Cistone, 1976, 1977) challenged these results and provided evidence that board members, over the course of their tenure, reported a decreasing expectation in predominant administrative roles and a more balanced division of labor and responsibility between the board the superintendent. Zeigler and Jennings (1974) studied the interaction between the school board and the superintendent as a measure of the democratic principles playing out in school governance. They concluded that board opposition to the superintendent, and dependence on the superintendent for educational information, varied significantly on the size of the school district.

The results of numerous other studies (Danzberger, 1992b; Glass, 2000, 2001; Grady & Bryant, 1991; Kowalski, 2006) tended to provide more information about what boards should *not* do than information about what would make boards more effective. Common criticisms of boards in these studies included: pursuing single issues, pursuing personal gain, rejecting the professional status of the superintendent, satisfying a need for power, failing to maintain confidentiality, intruding into administration, and not being adequately prepared to serve on the board. A recent study of board member and superintendent beliefs about the role of the local school board (Delagardelle & Maxson, 2004) found that board members had higher expectations of themselves in relation to their roles and responsibilities than their superintendent.

Previous studies exploring the relationship between the school board and superintendent and attempting to clarify the roles and responsibilities between the two, have had limited success in setting a clear direction. As a result of the absence of studies clearly defining effective roles for school boards and superintendents, and public confidence in local governance deteriorating during the second half of the 20th century, many commissioned reports and task forces began offering suggestions regarding how school boards should function.

National Reports on School Boards

Following the 1983 publication of the report *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), several national reports (Boyer, 1983; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Carol & al., 1986; Peterson, 1983) expressed concern about the ability of school board leadership to effectively govern American schools. In 1992, two national reports (Danzberger, 1992a; Danzberger & al., 1992) followed by others (Committee for Economic Development, 1994; Education Commission of the States, 1999; R. H. Goodman & William G. Zimmerman, 2003; Hess, 2002; Resnick & Seamon, 1999; The Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Ziebarth, 1999) recommended sweeping changes in the ways school boards are organized and operate. While most of these reports recommended modifications in the current system, some (Danzberger, 1992a; Danzberger & al., 1992) expressed little confidence that boards could reform themselves and recommended alternative models to local governance.

In response to the growing controversy over the role of school boards, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) issued a task force report (Campbell & Greene, 1994) describing four responsibilities of the school board: (a) establishing a vision, (b) establishing an organizational structure, (c) establishing systems of accountability to the community, and (d) advocating on behalf of children and public education. A recent and rare compilation of perspectives on school boards (Howell, 2005) focused on site-based management

reforms, mayoral takeover, parental choice, the influence of centralized initiatives on accountability, and the influence of teacher unions. The studies collectively argued that while school boards performed some administrative functions well, their effort to institute school reform was undermined by various political pressures. Overall, the majority of reports represented opinion rather than empirical evidence regarding the roles, responsibilities or effectiveness of school boards.

VALUES AND BELIEFS OF BOARD MEMBERS

Sergiovanni (1999), added a new dimension to previous theories about the role and responsibilities of school leadership. He suggested the most important responsibility of leadership is to give a sense of direction and establish an overarching purpose. To be successful in providing purpose the public must have trust and confidence in the leaders' competence and values, and they must have confidence that their leaders make judgments on the basis of competence and values, rather than self-interest. The "purposes" defined by the leaders are, as a rule, value based. Whether the focus is on "student learning" or something else, what gets attention and support in schools reflects the core values and beliefs of the school leaders.

The core values and beliefs shared among educators (the norms) influence the ways important tasks are attended to in a school district (the practices). These norms and practices together constitute a district ethos shaped largely by the beliefs and actions of the leaders (Coleman & LaRocque, 1990). This focus on the importance of district ethos and the significant role of the school leaders in influencing the norms and practices of the organization is discussed by other scholars (Delagardelle, 2006; Elmore, 1996; Joyce & al., 2001; LaMonte & al., 2007; LaRocque & Coleman, 1993; Rutter & al., 1979; Webber, 1995) who provide evidence that the values, attitudes and behaviors characteristic of the school as a whole are associated with pupil behavior, attendance, retention in school, achievement, and delinquency rates.

Iowa Lighthouse Studies

The multi-phase Lighthouse research of the Iowa Association of School Boards and the Iowa School Boards Foundation, has found behaviors and beliefs of school boards that positively impact district efforts to improve achievement. An ethnographic study of school districts with a history of exceptionally high and exceptionally low student achievement (Joyce & al., 2001) revealed profound differences in the beliefs and attitudes of the school board and staff, the knowledge of the board members about systemic change, and the presence of seven conditions for productive change. A subsequent five year action research project extended the original Lighthouse study (LaMonte & al., 2007) and resulted in a description of five main board roles related to improving student achievement, seven key areas of performance boards demonstrate as they play these roles, the knowledge, skills and beliefs necessary to perform in these ways, and effective strategies for board development related to these board roles. Areas such as creating a sense of urgency, developing a district wide focus for improvement, creating conditions within the system for success, monitoring progress, deliberative policy development, and developing a leadership continuum appeared to positively influence board behaviors and beliefs, the practices and beliefs of district staff, and the improvement of student achievement in the pilot districts.

These studies provide evidence that the values and beliefs of board members may significantly influence how they function as local officials and a few (Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Joyce & al., 2001; LaMonte & al., 2007) add knowledge about what functions are most important for school boards to perform. With the emphasis on accountability for improved student learning and the increasing public concern that locally elected school board officials are incapable of governing toward this end, clarity related to the roles, responsibilities, and influence on student achievement of local school boards should be determined. However, other than simplistic references to "policy" versus "administration," no consensus exists concerning board member roles (Campbell & Greene, 1994).

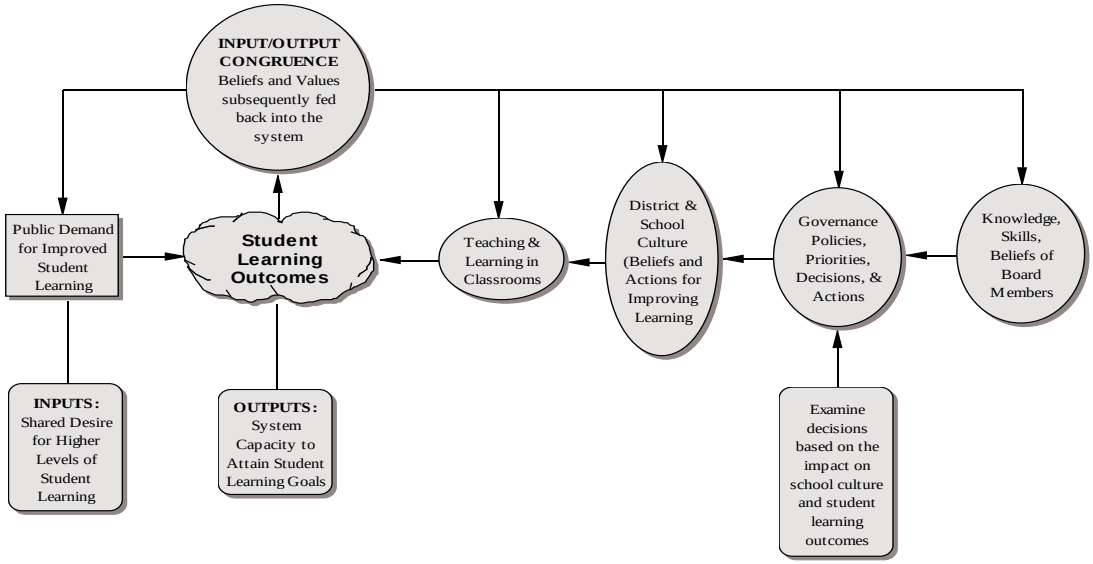
LIGHTHOUSE STUDY RESULTS

The Phase II Lighthouse study utilized a mixed method approach with qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques applied in sequential phases (Cistone, 1975; Zeigler & al., 1974). Phase I of the study consisted of an online statewide survey of 718 Midwestern board members and superintendents measuring beliefs about the importance of certain board behaviors for improving achievement. An analysis of the variability in those beliefs that can be predicted by the role of the participant was also conducted. This phase of the study addressed the first research question regarding the governance roles and responsibilities board members believe are most important.

Phase II had two distinct parts; first, a quantitative analysis used to determine which factors may be influencing board members' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for improving student learning. Next, a qualitative study of two boards, identified from the data with significant differences in beliefs about the importance of specific board behaviors, was conducted. The individual interviews with board members and superintendents from the selected districts also addressed questions related to the external factors that influence board members' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities and may, therefore, influence their actions at the board table during the decision making process.

The results of each phase of this study were aggregated and applied to logically consider key linkages in the congruence between inputs and outputs by examining board members' beliefs about their role for improving student learning, the contextual factors and characteristics that may be influencing their beliefs about their roles for improving achievement, how those beliefs influence their actions/decisions at the board table, and, ultimately the achievement of students in their schools. These linkages provided a logical argument for extending the current definition of outputs supported by Wirt and Kirst (1982) in their Decision Output Theory (See Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: KEY LINKAGES IN A SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE DECISION-OUTPUT MODEL



Board Member Perceptions of Role

Phase I of the Lighthouse studies addressed governance roles and responsibilities board members believed were most important and identified variables associated with statistically significant differences in board member responses. The data used for this phase were collected from a statewide online survey to 542 board members and 176 superintendents in Iowa. The response rate for local school board members was 25%, 48% for superintendents, and both groups were representative of the total study population in terms of gender, age, and experience. The state is divided into twelve regional service agencies and an analysis revealed equal representation across geographic regions as well.

Measures of central tendency and a histogram were used to determine how well the distribution of participant responses approximated a normal distribution. A factor analysis was used to assess the validity of the instrument and Cronbach's alpha was calculated for all items in each set of questions as an index of the internal consistency of the items in the survey. To analyze differences between the responses of the board members and superintendents about the role of governing boards, one-way analysis of variance, with Levene's test for homoscedasticity, and the Brown-Forsythe robust test for comparing means were used to compare mean scores and determine when responses were different enough to be meaningful. In addition, various post hoc tests were used to identify the specific areas of board work where board members and superintendents differed significantly in their beliefs.

An open-ended question in the survey gave participants the opportunity to provide more information about the roles and responsibilities of local school board members in relation to improving student achievement. Each comment was read by two reviewers and coded according to what the participant seemed to be saying about the role of the local board. The comments were then categorized and the emerging themes identified.

Board Member Perception on Influence of Student Achievement

Survey data collected in Phase II – Part 1 of the study determined the variables with the greatest influence on board members' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for improving student learning. Respondents totaled 510 local board members for a return rate of approximately 25%. On the survey, board members were asked to report their board tenure, time spent on board work each month, size and location of their school district, whether or not they have children or grandchildren in school, and their role, gender, level of education, and age. These were used as independent variables to determine which, if any, may contribute to the differences in beliefs among the board members about their work related to improving student learning.

In the analysis for this part of the study, there were 14 dependent variables (board member ratings of perceived importance of 14 behaviors) and 8 independent/predictor variables. Because of the number and type of dependent variables being analyzed, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) procedures were used to determine the relationship between the participants' responses and the levels of the independent variables (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002). Eight of the independent variables were organized into separate, discrete categories for purposes of analysis. Other tests confirmed the validity and reliability of the findings.

Results indicated that the size of the district, the length of time the board member had been on the board, the amount of time the board member spends on board work each month, and the level of education of the board member did not predict their beliefs about their role for improving achievement. These tests also provided evidence that age, gender, and whether or not a board member has children in school may influence their beliefs about some aspects of their role. However, what seemed to matter most was the region where the board member lived. Specifically, the board members in one region of the state, region 10, responded significantly lower to the survey items than did board members in the other regions.

To rule out other factors that may be impacting board members in this region, statistical tests were used to examine other ways the regions of the state may be similar or different. No significant causal differences were seen between the regions in regards to the financial health of the school districts, the stability of the local school boards, or traditional demographic variation. The primary factor explaining the differences in beliefs was board members' participation in training, with board members in region 10 participating in significantly less training than those in other regions. In addition, Haddad and Alsbury (2008), in a related study, provided evidence that an unusually high concentration of low-achieving districts resided in this single region of the state, even after controlling for variations in class and school size, experience level of teachers, SES level of students, and level of education in these communities.

For this reason, a second qualitative part of this phase of the study was added focusing on the board members from two districts within region 10. The five items of significantly different beliefs among board members across the entire state included the importance of specific board behaviors in relation to professional development, the importance of establishing a focus for improvement, and the importance of establishing a connection with the community.

Individual interviews with 11 board members from the districts in region 10 were conducted to further examine the influence these specific factors may be having on board members' beliefs and actions. A semi-structured interview with open-ended questions was used. The questions focused on how the board members describe the role of the board for improving student learning, the board members' view of the most important board behaviors related to improving student learning, how they came to those beliefs, how their beliefs influence their actions at the board table, and their beliefs about the board impact on student learning. An inductive process and matrix analysis was used to identify emerging themes.

LIGHTHOUSE STUDY FINDINGS

Due to the close relationship between the board members and their superintendents, it was important to examine their beliefs in relation to one another. The study survey asked superintendents and school board members to indicate how much time boards spend, and the importance of boards spending time, on 14 specific tasks related to improving student achievement. Table 1 indicates that board members and superintendents were significantly different in their beliefs about what was important for boards to do. Board members believed each of the behaviors described in the survey was a more important aspect of their role than superintendents believed the behaviors were. Board members believed they spent more time in board meetings and work sessions than superintendents perceived board members spent, and there was little or no relationship between how important board members believed certain behaviors to be and how much time they spend doing them. During interviews, board members with lower expectations for their role talked more in terms of what they "should" be doing rather than how they were currently playing their role, and expressed dissatisfaction with their current level of functioning. This dissatisfaction seemed to be rooted in perceived limits to their performance placed upon them by the current administration. When the superintendent was not enhancing the leadership of the board, the board members felt helpless to change their role without a change in personnel.

The board members believed the most important board behaviors for improving student achievement were (a) discussing student learning in their deliberations, (b) expressing a belief that staff could impact student learning, (c) ensuring strong leadership within the district, and (d) adopting long range goals. There is general agreement that these are important governance behaviors, however, these behaviors could also be considered more passive than the behaviors board members identified as being the *least* important (a) establishing criteria to guide actions, (b) evaluating the results of professional development for improving student learning, (c) establishing and communicating a singular focus for improvement, and (d) adopting procedures for informing the community about student learning progress.

TABLE 1: LIST OF 14 SPECIFIC TASKS COMMON FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS INDICATING SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT RESPONSES CONCERNING THE IMPORTANCE OF SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS FOR LOCAL BOARDS BETWEEN BOARD MEMBER AND SUPERINTENDENT RESPONDENTS

School Board Member Task Descriptions
Discussing improvement in student learning.*
Ensuring time exists for all staff to work together to improve student learning.*
Developing and expressing a belief that the staff can significantly affect student learning.*
Establishing criteria to guide the staff in choosing initiatives to improve student learning.*
Evaluating the effectiveness of professional development for improving student learning.*
Monitoring progress of student learning in relation to improvement goals.*
Influencing a community-wide belief that all students can and should be expected to learn the basic skills necessary to succeed in the current grade level.
Mobilizing the community to support the goals for improving student learning.
Ensuring there is strong leadership for improving instruction in ways that result in improved student learning.*
Establishing and communicating a singular focus for improved student learning.*
Adopting and monitoring long-range and annual improvement goals to improve student learning.*
Adopting and monitoring plans for improving student learning.
Adopting and monitoring procedures for regularly informing the community about student learning progress.
Discussing/reviewing legal mandates and rules related to improving student learning.*

* Indicates significant variation in importance

Level of significance: $p < .05$

Need to Know More

Board members in this study knew little about, and ascribed minimal importance to knowing about teaching and learning, curriculum and instruction, and the learning environment. The need to know more about work inside the district without becoming professional educators created an ongoing dilemma for school board members in this study. School board members are not professional educators, but still have important responsibilities to develop sufficient understanding, knowledge, and beliefs in the area of teaching and learning in order to create the conditions within the system that will ensure professional educators can grow in their educational expertise and generate productive change.

Emphasis on Separating Roles

Consistent with previous studies (Goodman & al., 1997a; The Twentieth Century Fund & Danforth Foundation, 1992), there was a strong indication throughout this study that super-

intendents and board members alike believed there should be a clearly defined distinction between the responsibilities of the board and the responsibilities of district staff. At a time when current understandings about the leadership needs in school districts would indicate that leadership must be shared (Elmore, 2000; Waters & Marzano, 2006), a focus on separation of leadership roles rather than a focus on building interdependent leadership teams may inhibit the development of the type of strong leadership necessary for systemic change in schools.

Factors Not Explaining Differences in Beliefs

The second research question in the Lighthouse study sought to understand what factors influenced the beliefs of board members about their role. As shown in Table 2, the results of the multivariate analysis of variance and covariance indicates there were no significant differences in the responses of board members attributed to many of the variables tested. Unlike previous studies investigating contextual factors that impact governance (Hofman, 1995; Hofman & al., 2002; Teddlie & al., 2000) board members were not different in their beliefs based upon district size.

TABLE 2: MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (MANOVA) FOR VARIABLES NOT INFLUENCING DIFFERENCES IN BELIEFS AND ROLE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Effect	*F*	Hypothesis *df*	Error *df*	*p*	Partial Eta squared	Observed power
Years on local board	1.001	14.000	358.000	.452	.038	.635
Time spent	.521	14.000	358.000	.920	.020	.328
District size	1.164	14.000	358.000	.301	.044	.720
Level of education	1.506	14.000	358.000	.106	.056	.851

Level of significance: $p < .05$

Other areas that did not have an influence on the board members' beliefs contradict culturally popular ideas about what are important characteristics of board members. Neither the level of education; their experience as board members, measured in terms of how long they had been on the board; nor how much time they regularly spend on board work, influenced the board members' beliefs.

Factors Explaining Differences in Beliefs

Table 3 data indicates that certain contextual factors and characteristics did influence board members beliefs about certain aspects of their role for improving achievement. Age, gender, and whether or not a board member has children in school mattered; but what mattered most was the geographic region where the board members resided. Most of the board members in this study were very similar in their beliefs about their role; however, the beliefs of board members from one specific region in the state, Region 10, were significantly

different from board members in the other regions of the state. The fact that one region stood out as being different from the other regions raised the question: What factors might cause one region to differ from another?

TABLE 3: MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (MANOVA) FOR VARIABLES INFLUENCING DIFFERENCES IN BELIEFS AND ROLE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Effect	*F*	Hypothesis *df*	Error df	*p*	Partial Eta squared	Observed power
Age	1.787	14.000	358.000	.039	.065	.917
Region	1.538	154.000	4048.000	.000	.055	1.000
Gender	2.274	14.000	358.000	.006	.082	.974
Children in school	1.902	14.000	358.000	.025	.069	.936

Level of significance: $p < .05$

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES EXPLORED

In addressing this regional phenomenon, district demographics were analyzed. Table 4 shows no significant differences in terms of the overall financial health of the school districts that could explain the differences in beliefs among the board members. There also were no differences in board stability ($p = .582$) across regions that could explain differences in beliefs. Differences did exist in the percentage of students in poverty between regions (p<.001), but most of the significant differences based on poverty were not between region 10 and other regions. Therefore, the percentage of students in poverty could not explain the differences in board members' beliefs.

TABLE 4: ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR FINANCIAL INDICATORS EXPLAINING THE MEASURED DIFFERENCE OF BELIEFS IN SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS IN REGION 10 OF THE STATE

Indicator	Between Groups Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Unspent balance	27758295.931	11	2523481.448	1.826	.048*
Solvency ratio	.361	11	.033	1.319	.212
Students in poverty	11470.216	11	1042.747	11.239	<.001**

Level of significance: $p < .05$

*Anova results show a modest overall effect for unspent balance between the regions however the post hoc tests conducted to determine where differences exist showed no significant differences among the regions.

**While several regions differed significantly from other regions in the state, Region 10 was not the region with the highest number of students participating in the free/reduced lunch program

Differences did exist between this region and other regions when comparing the amount of training the board members received over a three-year period (p =.007) and the achievement of students in the schools, as shown in Table 5. On the surface, the relationship between training, geographic proximity, board members' beliefs about their role, and the achievement of students may seem unlikely to be a meaningful relationship. However, the implications become more obvious when you consider the typical delivery model for board training, the research evidence that establishes a connection between the beliefs and actions of school boards and the achievement of students (Joyce & al., 2001; LaMonte & al., 2007; LaRocque & Coleman, 1993), and the research regarding the development of adult thinking and beliefs (Commons & al., 1990; Crain, 2004; Higgins & Kohlberg, 1991; Reimer & al., 1983). Further study would be necessary to understand the extent of the impact and the relationship to student achievement.

TABLE 5: PERCENTAGE OF DISTRICTS IN EACH REGION THAT WERE LOW-PERFORMING ON THE IOWA TESTS OF BASIC SKILLS (ITBS) FOR 8TH GRADE MATHEMATICS

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
% of Districts	42%	31%	48%	41%	30%	35%	30%	55%	70%	91%	62%	52%

Board member training, in this Midwestern state as in many other states, is most often delivered on a regional basis. If board members participate in limited training, and the few training experiences in which they participate only expose them to the thinking and beliefs of other board members with limited training, then it is possible that a particular ethos of limited beliefs and understandings about the role of the board for improving student learning could become a norm of beliefs within a region. This phenomena becomes even more meaningful when you consider the numerous conceptual frameworks for the development of reasoning and thought (Commons & al., 1990; Crain, 2004; Higgins & Kohlberg, 1991; Reimer & al., 1983) which describe the need for individuals to continuously be exposed to the thinking and reasoning of individuals at higher, more complex levels than their own in order to challenge and confront the patterns of reasoning that contribute to their beliefs. In this context it becomes possible to understand how the limited training of board members in a particular region may have an impact on their beliefs about their role and the actions they take, or don't take, as a result of their beliefs. To make the link to the achievement of students you must also consider the emerging understandings about how the beliefs and actions of boards can enhance or inhibit district efforts to improve achievement.

BOARD ROLES AND PERFORMANCE ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The original Lighthouse research, conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards, provided convincing evidence that school boards in high achieving districts operated with different beliefs about the capacity of the system to impact learning for all students than did board members in low achieving districts (Joyce & al., 2001). This portion of the Lighthouse research provided information about key roles of the boards, specific areas of board performance, and the knowledge, skills, and beliefs of board members that were associated with significant positive changes in school culture and the achievement of the students. The specific roles and areas of board performance from this study are summarized in Table 6.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, six areas of particular interest emerged from this study that warrant further examination in an effort to strengthen the linkages from the board to student outcomes (a) a shared uncertainty about the governance role of the board in relation to student achievement, (b) a lack of understanding of systemic change in achievement and a consensus that boards should avoid areas most likely to positively impact achievement, (c) the effect of proximity and regional characteristics upon board leadership and school outcomes, (d) the emphasis on separating roles rather than integrating them to build the capacity of the board/superintendent team for effectively leading toward improved learning, (e) the dilemma of needing to know more about teaching and learning in order to become good legislators for the system without implying boards need to become administrators of the system, and (f) the implied disconnect between the community and their public schools.

TABLE 6: BOARD ROLES AND PERFORMANCES ASSOCIATED WITH IMPROVED STUDENT LEARNING FROM THE LIGHTHOUSE RESEARCH

Role of the Board	Specific Areas of Board Performance Related to Each Role
Set clear expectations	Get clear about the greatest student learning needs – the most important content area to improve first Believe more is possible and communicate high expectations Establish a clear and narrow focus for improvement – clarify improvement goals and specific targets Focus on student learning and teaching (Improving teaching as the key strategy for improving learning)
Create conditions for success	Demonstrate commitment to the improvement focus Support quality professional development Stay the course Support & connect with districtwide leadership Develop and nurture the board/superintendent team leadership Align all parts of the system around the learning needs of students (curriculum, instruction, assessment; - goals, actions, resource allocation; etc.).
Hold the system accountable to the expectations	Use data extensively Determine what you will accept as evidence of progress/success Monitor progress regularly Apply pressure for accountability
Build the public will	Create awareness of the need Create urgency Instill hope that it's possible to change Connect with the community
Learn together as a board team	Establish board learning time Learn together Talk to each other – extensive board conversations (build consistency in communication) Develop a willingness and readiness to lead and allow others to lead Demonstrate commitment to the focus through board actions, decisions, and conversation Engage in deliberative policy development – lead through board policies

The results of this study indicated that boards and their superintendents may not have the beliefs and understandings about the role of the board necessary to provide the type of collaborative leadership it will take for large-scale improvement of achievement. The type of governance needed to create and sustain systemic change in student achievement can and should be generated and supported at the board/superintendent level (Alsbury, 2004, 2003; Fullan, 2005). Ensuring that superintendents' relationship with their boards is more of a partnership and not just "damage-control" is equally important for the relationship between the board/superintendent team and the community.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE STUDIES

School boards matter. Solving the problems of public education will depend upon the leadership of public schools (Waters & Grubb, 2004; Waters & al., 2003). School boards are critical players in the school change process and must be active leaders on behalf of the students in their schools. Without effective school board leadership, systemic, district-wide change becomes impossible and improvement of student achievement will remain episodic with only "pockets of excellence" sprinkled throughout school districts. How board-superintendent teams understand and carry out their roles can make the difference between dysfunctional leadership teams incapable of leading change and highly effective leadership teams that build district-wide capacity to ensure every student succeeds.

Even though school boards are removed from the teaching and learning that goes on every day in classrooms, there are critical linkages between the policy makers that guide local school districts and the behaviors of those that interact regularly with students. The Lighthouse studies focus on one of several important linkages—board members' beliefs and the factors that influence them—and was based upon the premise that improving local governance of schools is a critical first step for improving the outcomes of schools as measured by the academic performance of students in those schools.

Some researchers and governance models suggest that school boards are not democratic, not effective and, therefore, not the best means of governing public schools—is valid (Wirt & Kirst, 1982). However, in his essays on governance, Boyle (2004a, 2004b) purported that the measure of good government is not the degree to which it is able to satisfy all of the demands of the public but how well elected officials are able to keep the ultimate values of society in balance as they make decisions to solve social problems. Maintaining a balance of key public values implies that some needs take precedence over others at various points in time. Public schools were created to ensure an educated citizenry and, thus, student learning should be the primary, if not the only, criterion for judging the effectiveness of the system and the governing body that guides it.

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