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**BUILDING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS: THE APPROACH  
OF TWO PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS**

By

Lamont Alexander Jackson

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2016

Dissertation Committee:

Frank R. Kemerer, PhD  
Zachary Gabriel Green, PhD  
Lea Hubbard, PhD

University of San Diego

PROQUEST PAGE

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN DIEGO  
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION SCIENCES

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MEMBERS: THE APPROACH OF TWO PUBLIC SCHOOL  
SUPERINTENDENTS

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## **ABSTRACT**

The position of public school superintendent has experienced both a redefinition and a rebirth in its criticality. With increased accountability due to the shifting public school “Back to Basics” educational perspective in the 1980s, the launch of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, and the signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 by President Barack Obama, the role of superintendent has seen a shift from that of an organizational manager to that of an instructional leader.

Much has been studied about the importance of the public school superintendent, particularly the challenge of superintendent retention. High turnover rates appear to contribute to the lack of continuity required to move an educational organization in the direction of its mission. One factor accounting for high turnover appears to be some superintendents’ inability to build relationships with their school boards.

This multi-case study/cross-case analysis examined why superintendents struggle to create and sustain significant relationships with their school boards. It explored the metacognitive processes of two superintendents, what factors contribute to their use of specific strategies, and how decisions relating to the strategies have been made. This study provides an important investigation into a topic that may offer greater understanding of ways to improve superintendency tenure, and how educational preparation and training programs for superintendents can be improved to equip superintendents with leadership skills to work collaboratively and constructively with school boards.

Chief findings showed how the two superintendents in the study used strategies of relationships, management of ego, communication, educating the board, and politics to

build and maintain relationships with their school board members. While the findings show these superintendents were mindful, thoughtful, and strategic, the data also indicate a linear, technical, and interpersonal connection between these superintendents' leadership and their board member relationships. The findings suggest ways to enhance superintendent leadership by having them focus on transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, and interactions with board members that affect the organizational system as a whole. Each of these is influenced by both superintendent and board member contextual understanding, political interplay, and organizational learning.

## **DEDICATION**

While this journey was not without great sacrifices made by so many, this dissertation is dedicated to my father, the late Warren Lavoy Jackson. In his short 44-year life, he instilled respect, integrity, honor, and perseverance. All are qualities that have lived throughout this process. His guidance and wisdom will forever live in my heart and certainly in my mind. Without his insistence that every journey deserves “completion to the end,” this certainly would not have been possible. Dad, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and this is a testament to your life of courage and perseverance. There were many days that I wanted to quit, and you were there to whisper in my ear, “Keep going.” I love you and thank you for your words of life and your encouragement in spirit. This I share with you and for you. I love you!

And to two young men, Daniel Ian Jackson and Noah Alexander Jackson, this dissertation is dedicated to you. I encourage you, as my father did me, to pursue each journey to completion; this means your educational career. May this be the beginning of a long lineage of doctoral degrees for the Jacksons. Thank you for being amazing, and thank you for your understanding during this time in my life. I love you!

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Thank you to both the Chula Vista Elementary School District and the San Diego Unified School District. Thank you to the respective school boards, the members, and the staffs for their participation and support during this project. A special thank you to Dr. Francisco Escobedo and Mr. Bill Kowba for serving as key participants. Thank you for your candid insight into the world of the superintendency. Thank you for your guidance and direction. The access you provided gave great insight into the challenges and the beauty of a position in our education system that needs leaders like yourselves.

I want to thank my mom, Ira Henderson, who throughout my life served as guide, teacher, mentor, role model, and driver when I could not do it myself. I know at times I was stubborn, and I thank you for never giving up on me. To my mother, Theresa Nichols, who always encouraged me to do great things, even though she was miles away.

I am lucky to have two people serve in this capacity when most people get only one. And to the many family members and friends who I call family, I thank you.

There are many friends and dearest colleagues who have been instrumental in my growth and development and more importantly inspirational along this journey. Your countless words of wisdom, encouragement, and challenging phrases have all been motivation to accomplish this dissertation. Thank you for the laughter, loyalty, and love along the way. I AM, BECAUSE WE ARE! Thank you to Kaitlin Barr Nadal, for without her tremendous help this would not be possible. Thank you to Litta Buras, Connie Moore, and Frances Flores. Your support throughout this process has been incredible. I appreciate each of you and the support you provided.

Finally, thank you to my wife, Tiffany, who endured more than anyone should and supported me throughout this journey. Honey, I am so sorry for all the challenges I put you through and grateful for your commitment during this grueling journey. We finally made it. This is as much your accomplishment as it is mine. I love you.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Since the early 1980s, there has been general agreement among researchers and politicians that K-12 education in large urban school districts needs to improve (Houston, 2010; Fink & Markholt, 2011; Schmoker, 1999; McEwan, 2003; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Zhao, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ravitch, 2013). There is also considerable agreement that the lack of improvement in large urban districts is, in part, related to unstable leadership at the level of the superintendent, a position in which turnover rates are high. In fact, the average tenure for a K-12 urban superintendent is 12 to 36 months (Glass, 2010).

This high turnover rate is at least somewhat understandable. After all, K-12 superintendents face incredible challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including but not limited to heightened federal and state requirements, as well as an array of political landmines. Moody (2007) has suggested these landmines are based on three factors. One is the national accountability system of No Child Left Behind (NCLB); the second is the reality that school boards have maintained political power over superintendents since the early development of the superintendent position. The third is the fact that there are no practical limits on school board power. Therefore, it is not surprising that Aleman (2002) suggested superintendents in urban districts need to become more politically savvy in dealing with political friction. Indeed, superintendents are under unprecedented pressure to manage an array of situations while still providing the sort of leadership that results in improved student performance (Glass, 2010).

None of this is completely new, of course. Historically, the superintendent's role has encompassed a myriad of responsibilities. The role of the superintendent was not

born from inception but rather created out of necessity. The position of superintendent emerged a decade or so after the creation of public schools. Initially, there were no superintendents of schools. First, state boards ran schools, and then local lay boards did, both without the benefit of professional help (Houston, 2010). As public schools began to grow and develop, so too did the role of the superintendent.

The first superintendent, hired in 1837, coordinated programs, aligned instructional practices among teachers, managed business practices, maintained financial records, and developed purchasing processes across the schools for which the superintendent was responsible (Glass, 2010). Over time, the role evolved. Bjork and Kowalski (2005) found that the superintendent's role developed historically in stages: from teacher-scholar (1850–1900), to business manager (1900–1930), to educational statesman (1930–1950), to social scientist (1950–1967). Bjork and Kowalski also identified a communicator stage (1850–2003), a stage that has overlapped and spanned a number of other stages. Thomas (2002) suggested the position has reflected the needs and direction of the community as the superintendent's position has matured and shifted, first from a clerical role to an instructional leader role, then to an expert manager role, and finally to its current definition as chief executive officer.

Today, according to Glass (2010), the superintendency requires at least enough knowledge of leadership, pedagogy, policy making, school reform, federal and state accountability measures, financial issues, and politics to oversee and manage staff members who have expertise in at least some of these areas. The superintendent also needs expertise in areas that cannot easily be delegated to others. Glass also suggested that superintendents must possess the ability to develop partnerships that can contribute

politically and financially to developing an organizational system that promotes and produces student achievement.

Similarly, Casserly, Snipes, Horwitz, and Soga (2008/2009) have argued that superintendents must find ways to unite parents, educators, school boards, and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional improvement. In short, superintendents must sit in the gap between competing political and educational forces by managing the tension between these competing priorities. Superintendents may be able to do so through deliberately establishing and maintaining their relationships with school boards, union leaders, and other business partners while maintaining their focus as agents of change amid the highly politicized environments of school districts.

Ultimately, of course, the role of today's superintendent includes the ability to preside over a system that improves student achievement and to manage people and resources in ways that accomplish this goal. An important part of this work is developing a working relationship with the board of education so that board members support and help promote or, at the very least, do not interfere with efforts to improve student achievement. While there are many factors contributing to the superintendent leadership dilemma, political contexts and relationships appear to be the leading indicators.

### **Problem Statement**

Thomas Glass (2010) argued that superintendents could accomplish varied tasks associated with their role through effective communication and skilled management of the school board. K-12 superintendents, themselves, have identified their relationship with boards as the single most common reason for departing from the position (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006). Rueter (2009) agreed and suggested superintendents make

building relationships with school boards a priority and invest the time up front in developing lines of communication in order to determine the often-fluctuating expectations and needs of the board. After conducting research and collecting surveys on superintendent relationships with their school boards, Rueter identified relationships as the greatest factor for superintendent success. While success may be defined in various ways, in this study the length of a superintendent's tenure was used as an indicator of success. I will elaborate on the use of this indicator of success in both the literature review and the methodology sections.

Glass (2010), Rueter (2009), and Byrd et al. (2006) provided relevant research on *what* superintendents must do to strengthen relationships with school board members and other educational constituents. For example, they identified strategies such as opening lines of communication, developing skilled management strategies, and investing time in establishing relationships with board members. However, what is not discussed much in the literature is precisely *how* superintendents execute strategies of communication, planning and investing time, and developing their management skills. The assumption here is that learning about the precise processes superintendents use to communicate with their boards can be accomplished by tapping the metacognition of a superintendent. Senge (2006) has suggested metacognition is a state whereby one becomes consciously aware of one's own processes and then becomes further aware of the learning organization's thinking, thus creating a state of metacognition through the development of systems thinking. The term *metacognition* in this context refers to how superintendents think about their own process of communication and their own investment of time in order to develop the thinking within the system about relationships

and the development of such relationships that further influence the system. For example, a metacognitive focus would ask questions as to how a superintendent determines how much time individual board members should spend with the superintendent and whether superintendents consciously invoke the goals and the mission of the district in conversations with board members in an effort to build and maintain relationships.

Relationships can be difficult to build, especially when superintendents and school boards do not see eye to eye on staffing, evaluation, budgetary issues, or the primary functions of the school board and superintendent (Castallo, 2003). It is, therefore, important to examine not only what superintendents generally need to do but also precisely how superintendents think about the actions they take to build and maintain relationships with school board members.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine how two superintendents built and maintained relationships with their school boards. The study attempted to identify the particular attitudes, methods, and strategies these superintendents employed to communicate effectively and manage their relationships with their board members. In short, this study explicated the actions of two superintendents in the area of school board relations. In addition to the two key informants, this study included eight (school board member) participants, four from each of the respective school districts who worked directly with the two key informants in order to gain additional perspectives on the credibility of the data from the two key informants. This snowball sampling, which is explained further in the research design section, was utilized to amplify the research and

provide depth to this study (see Appendix A). This study documented the work of a former superintendent of a large urban school district in southern California and another superintendent who currently serves as the superintendent in a large elementary school district, also located in southern California. While the methodology section discusses the selection of subjects in depth, it is important to note here that I looked closely at the differences between the two subjects and selected the subjects based on their very different backgrounds: One had a career in the military prior to becoming a superintendent; the other had a more traditional education-oriented trajectory to the superintendent's office.

This was an exploratory study (Patton, 2002), as little recent research has been done except for a few dissertations, which are outlined in the literature review. With a recognition of the small case size and quantitative depth and detail, the narrow focus on how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members, and the fact that there is a myriad of challenges that superintendents face, this study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways do superintendents' interactions with school board members influence the building, strengthening, and/or maintaining of their relationship?
  - a. What are the complexities, factors, and/or supports that either impede or progress relationships with school board members?
2. What influences the superintendents' metacognition as they contemplate the approaches they deploy to build and maintain relationships with their school boards?

3. How do formal education and previous experiences shape and affect a superintendent's ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members?
4. How does the political and/or social context of a district affect superintendents and the relationships they build and maintain with school board members?

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The lack of improvement in K-12 public education evidenced in recent decades is arguably related to the unstable leadership at the level of the superintendent, a position in which turnover rates are high (Byrd et al., 2006; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; DeKoninck, 2009). According to the Broad Foundation, and based on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and 2012 data from Editorial Research in Education, in 2011, two out of three eighth graders were not reading proficiently and nearly two-thirds of eighth graders scored below proficient in math. Additionally, approximately 1.1 million American students drop out of school every year. These data are exacerbated when it comes to African-American and Hispanic students across the United States; dropout rates are close to 40%, compared to the national average of 27%.

Because the public education superintendent faces such incredible challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including but not limited to heightened federal and state political regulations (or policies) and local board members and business leaders who have vested interests in the superintendent's actions, there is a need to improve the tenure of public education superintendents. The nature of this need continues to be argued between school reformers (also known as charter school proponents), whose loudest plea came from the production of *Waiting for Superman*, and leading educational historian Diane Ravitch, whose latest book *Reign of Error* attempts to refute the reformers' views on public education. Ravitch (2013) argued that most charter schools are not outperforming public schools, and, in fact, the only way charter schools do outperform public schools is by skimming off the best students from the public schools.

This ongoing debate and the increased pressure on chief educational leaders in school districts have resulted in a shortage of candidates qualified to do the job (Rueter, 2009). One possible reason for the high turnover rates is the changing role of the superintendent. Another possibility is the increased accountability placed on school districts from both the state and federal governments. An alternative explanation for the high turnover rates may be the lack of quality relationships between superintendents and their school boards. Superintendents often have tenuous relationships with school boards (Crump, 2010). Perhaps the high turnover rates are due to superintendents' inability to work with a school board that has the responsibility to ensure a high-quality education is provided to all students throughout the school system without the responsibility to do the actual work. This may create an imbalance of power between the policy makers and the superintendent, who is charged with implementation. Public education superintendents are vital to improving student achievement, and school boards influence school systems through policies and direction. Therefore, it is imperative to seek understanding of the interaction effect between school superintendents and school boards to understand superintendent turnover rates and ways to limit them. This review of literature presents research that has examined factors for superintendent turnover as well as research that establishes ways for school districts to keep superintendents in place. For the purpose of this paper, the complete literature review has been modified to provide a brief overview of critical topics and subtopics.

### **The Role and Responsibilities of Superintendents**

The superintendent's role has change significantly throughout public education. Perhaps these changes are inevitable, based on the changing times, or perhaps the change

is part of the political culture in the United States. Whatever the reason, change has been part of the fabric in public Education in America.

### **History of the Superintendency**

Historically, the superintendent's role has encompassed a myriad of responsibilities. The first superintendent, hired in 1837, coordinated programs, aligned instructional practices among teachers, managed business practices, maintained financial records, and developed purchasing processes among the schools and was theoretically a secretary to the board of education (Glass, 2010). Additional responsibilities and the superintendent role's identity did not emerge immediately but were developed and recognized in relation to the changing fabric of American history. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, superintendents emerged from being secretaries to the board to become teachers and scholars. As this was a time in United States history when more than half of the nation's white children did not attend formal education institutions, concerned religious activists advocated for laws to require education. At the same time, Jim Crow laws restricted or segregated education for African-Americans, and the rate of illiteracy was increasing. These political and social structures required superintendents to develop skills as teachers, scholars, business managers, and truant managers (Kowalski, 2005). As superintendents developed these skills, the nation saw additional social issues emerge in the 1920s and the onset of the Progressive movement, requiring superintendents to develop into educational statesmen from the turn of the decade to the mid-1950s (Hanks, 2010). As Americans saw a shift in social, cultural, and economical structures in the 1960s and an increased focus on vocational education and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, superintendents were required to expand their

responsibilities, encompassing the roles of teacher, scholar, statesman, and social activist all while developing communication practices and political ties (Kowalski, 2005). While the superintendent position did exist during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it did not develop into the iconic role it is today until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The contemporary superintendency emerged from these transitional periods to become a position held by respected professionals in education. The early form of the role was created by local boards without statutory authority or support. However, as local districts began to grow and the complexities of running school districts increased, more districts hired superintendents. The high water mark came in the 1960s, when there were more than 35,000 superintendents nationally (Houston, 2010). Their power also increased and peaked at about the same time. During the first half of the century, superintendents became the most powerful individuals in the school district and one of the most visible members of the local community. The large-city superintendents who shouldered responsibility for educational programs quickly became the most visible and respected educators in the country (Glass, 2010). They were considered civic leaders who held their positions for many years and who wielded enormous authority over the daily life of the school system (Houston, 2010).

Today, the responsibilities for the superintendent position continue to grow at a rapid pace. The superintendency is a position that requires the uncanny ability to be an expert in the areas of leadership, pedagogy, policy making, school reform, federal and state accountability measures, finances, and politics, with the ability to develop partnerships that can contribute politically and financially toward the development of a system that supports student achievement (Glass, 2010). Furthermore, with an increased

focus on school governance and student achievement, and a lack of federal and state funding, superintendents have the responsibility to operate with heterarchical and hierarchical bureaucratic systems that create power dynamics in relationships, influence, and decision making (Oliver-Brown, 2009). Casserly et al. (2008/2009) suggested superintendents must find ways to unite parents, educators, school boards, and community leaders behind a clear and coherent vision of instructional purpose. In other words, superintendents must be facilitators, balancing their relationships with school boards, union leaders, and other business partners while maintaining their focus as agents of change amid the highly politicized environments of school districts. While the superintendent's role and responsibilities have been defined and redefined based on the contextual footprint of public education in different eras, one constant in the primary role of superintendent is to manage people, mainly the board of education and their constituent groups, through the process of change and adherence to educational policy (Casserly et al., 2008/2009).

### **Superintendents as Instructional Leaders**

Changes over time have certainly affected the role of the superintendent. Since the inception of the role, the demands and expectations on superintendents have changed and caused these leaders to shift and adapt as a result of competing social, political, and economic trends (Peterson & Barnett, 2005). Some educational theories suggest the role of superintendents is to continue leading as managers, while others indicate superintendents should be instructional leaders. Belden, Russonello, and Stewart (2005) found that much of the current research and many of the articles on superintendent leadership suggested superintendents are becoming more actively involved in their roles,

focusing on improving instruction in their districts. The Educational Consultants and Research Associates (2010) indicated that superintendents must actively evaluate the instructional programs in their districts, communicate the expectations for adult learning, monitor the progress toward student achievement, and design professional development to enhance staff effectiveness in implementing instructional practices.

This concept of instructional leadership is not new, but perhaps it has become more popular because more accountability has fallen on local education agencies (LEAs) in recent years. Fullan (2001) suggested that the role of the superintendent, as an instructional leader, plays out, as their responsibility is to develop the school principals as instructional leaders, saying this is the key to the success of the superintendent. Similarly, Rueter (2009) argued that the superintendent is expected to be the primary instructional leader in the school district, able to develop a district-wide vision for student success at all levels of the organization. Cuban (1998) acknowledged the components of instructional leadership but claimed that superintendents who have success possess strong managerial and political leadership strategies. The earliest superintendents needed to be leaders of curricula and instruction, operational leaders, and secretaries to the board; this kind of leadership is expected today (Hanks, 2010). Unfortunately, given the history of the superintendent, the politics within the role and the current educational contexts may supersede the notion of instructional leader.

### **Superintendents as Managers and Political Figures**

Certainly today, instructional leadership takes center stage in the complex role of the superintendent; however, modern superintendents are also charged with maintaining a balanced budget, maintaining human capital, providing parent involvement programs,

and establishing community-based organizations that support and ensure student achievement. The superintendent must also be a master communicator, working with a political board, forming working relationships with public and private groups, and especially serving as the connecting link between communities (Glass, 2010).

Previously, superintendents were more like organizers within the business of schools. These superintendents were hired to relieve boards of education of managerial tasks and business affairs. They controlled the business affairs of the organization, under the direction of the school board. They were not expected to be change agents, instructional leaders, or politicians. They did not lead reform efforts and were not accountable for the results of students.

As school systems began to develop in the cities, superintendents saw themselves taking more of a leadership role, becoming visible in the field of education (Glass, 2010). In fact, superintendents in urban districts needed to become politically savvy during their emergence into leadership as they encountered political friction similar to that of today's superintendents (Aleman, 2002). Culotta (2008) suggested that, while superintendents are not necessarily politicians, they do need to find ways to maintain political attributes, as they are required to build coalitions in support of school improvement while working to raise outside funding to supplement decreased state and federal funding.

While political awareness and management skills are required, there appears to be an essential skill lacking for superintendents that is common to both management and politics: *relationships*. Culotta (2008) found multiple studies supporting this idea and said that first-time superintendents spent an enormous amount of time building local business and parent coalitions and developing relationships with school boards. If

superintendents are not able to develop relationships with school boards, there may be more short tenures among the neediest positions. This is not a new phenomenon, but it certainly supports the argument for superintendents to build and maintain relationships with school boards. In fact, Glass (1992) found that short employment tenure may be due to the greatest challenge faced by modern superintendents: the encroachment into the superintendent's authority by involved citizens and school boards. Political and management roles may be key factors, but there are other factors as well.

### **Factors of Increased Turnover Among Superintendents**

While most organizations suggest turnover is inevitable, the turnover rates among public education's superintendents exceeds what is normally seen in an organization.

What is it about this role that causes the rates of turnover?

### **Greater Accountability for School District Performance**

One of the possible reasons for short tenure among superintendents is the increased expectations and high-stakes accountability imposed on them by the federal government. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was drafted to strengthen the requirements of the Title I programs for students attending public schools, primarily for underserved populations, including students of diverse races, ethnicities, primary languages, socioeconomic statuses, and abilities. Superintendents and schools were required to implement strategies to ensure that federal dollars provided to support these groups are making a difference. Now that NCLB was replaced with the Every Student Success Act (ESSA), signed by President Obama in 2015, The NCLB expectations are obsolete. The major emphasis of the ESSA Act focuses on equity and access. However, districts are still required to meet federal and state requirements. Meaning Schools are

still required to develop “Single Plans for Student Achievement” that outline instructional strategies and additional supports and include a financial plan for improving student achievement within the categories of race, poverty, and language acquisition.

NCLB has had a significant effect on public schools and has created a system that places more pressure on superintendents to develop reform efforts to increase student achievement and teacher efficacy. Superintendents are now feeling the pressure to maintain their leadership within these explicit expectations (Lashway, 2002). Prior to 2001, while there was state testing and the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) testing, accountability from the federal government and the distribution of Title I funds were not connected.

These external federal expectations and measures of accountability may be causing high turnover rates among those in the position of superintendent. Superintendents claim to face a more robotic approach to decision making and are less flexible with the creative reform efforts they envisioned when entering the profession. Superintendents in low-performing districts face an additional challenge, as corrective action for these schools and school districts must be based on scientific, research-based practices, and this confines leadership (Lashway, 2002). While the current accountability system appears to focus school districts on the work of educating all students, it may be perpetuating a cycle of dysfunctional superintendent leadership and superintendent turnover, as superintendents receive the brunt of the responsibility for the lack of progress. Houston (2010) suggested that the current accountability measures have created a shortage of superintendents in the profession, as the new role, with its new responsibilities, is not viewed with the same prestige as it was in the past. In a similar

vein, Fullan (2001) previously suggested that education policy is at the point of focusing on superintendents, school boards, unions, and others charged with making the system work, rather than the accountability structures themselves. NCLB supporters claimed to have created a system that puts districts and superintendents on notice and no longer allows districts and superintendents to under-serve students, continue to place unqualified teachers in classrooms, and misuse funding allocated for improving student achievement. It is within this context that superintendents work. It is within this culture that they must provide their communities with school systems that function operationally and provide quality teaching and learning for all.

### **Inadequate Training and Preparation**

Superintendents face many challenges, and none may be greater than the political minefield that may make or break a current position or a career. However, the ability to be an instructional leader is increasingly as important. Byrd et al. (2006) found that more than half of superintendents listed the most daunting task faced on the job as increasing achievement for all students. The direct supervision of schools may not be the role of the superintendent, especially in large school districts; however, superintendents are ultimately held responsible for school outcomes at every site within a district.

This work can be daunting and requires expert leadership skills, which includes the ability to be an instructional leader. Byrd et al. (2006) found that superintendents of successful districts adopt a hands-on approach in regard to instructional matters. This differs from what many superintendents have been prepared to do. The instructional expectations discussed by Lashway (2002) and the managerial and political aspects described by Cuban (1998) provide only some level of understanding of the role of the

superintendent in this age of accountability. Superintendents of the school district face a great number of unpredictable problems that require a repertoire of problem-solving skills along with a considerable knowledge about the business. Kowalski (2005) believed that superintendents must expand their own professional learning in order to lead school districts that are under more scrutiny due to the increased expectations based on the national standards.

Cuban, Rueter, and Kowalski have made what is causing superintendents to turn over at high rates clear. Studies have also indicated that superintendents' high turnover rates are partially based on the role and responsibility of the superintendent. To combat this phenomenon, superintendents will need to prepare themselves professionally in organizational management, relationship building, instructional leadership, financial planning, and political science to meet the current federal, state, and local expectations and the day-to-day challenges of the position (Rueter, 2009; Byrd et al., 2006). Superintendents will need to receive training in each of these areas. Most importantly, superintendents will need to receive ongoing professional development on best practices focused on leadership.

This training and preparation is much needed for superintendents to lead the necessary reform efforts in order to improve K-12 public education (Petersen, Fusarelli, & Kowalski, 2009). While many universities offer doctoral degrees in education and in philosophy, most of these programs have been programs for licensing, bringing into question the validity of preparation (Valdez, 2012). In 1993, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) developed eight professional standards focused on streamlining the expectations for universities across the United States: (a) leadership and

district culture, (b) policy and governance, (c) communication and community relations, (d) organizational management, (e) curriculum planning and development, (f) instructional management, (g) human resources management, and (h) values and ethical leadership (Valdez, 2012). After these standards were created, several universities and a few foundations, such as the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Wallace Foundation in partnership with the Harvard Graduate School of Education, developed programs to assist in training superintendents (Kowalski et al., 2011; Teitel, 2006, Valdez, 2012).

Unfortunately, some have been critical of these alternative superintendent programs, suggesting they offer insufficient preparation because they are singularly focused on superintendent leadership rather than broad-based leadership development that could incorporate more creative ways of leading and developing (Orr, 2006). However, in a survey of superintendents (Kowalski et al., 2011), participants reported that potential superintendents were proponents of learning more in the area of school reform, including superintendent and school board relations. This is a promising step in identifying areas of need, based on superintendent data; however, programs are limited, and universities must re-examine courses of study to ensure curricula that prepares superintendents in the area of board relations and leadership.

### **Increased Turnover of Boards of Trustees**

The mean period of service for school board members is 6.7 years, according to Hess (2002). Glass (2000) acknowledged that the tenure rate for board trustees is usually 4 years. It should be noted Glass also determined that these data may not be accurate, as in-depth longitudinal studies have not been conducted and few studies in general have

addressed this aspect of board trustee stability. However, according to some research (Hess, 2002; Mountford, 2004), there appears to be a decline in the number of candidates electing to run for seats or have their names considered for these positions.

It is not hard to understand why. Hess (2002) found that in the early 2000s incumbents saw relatively few competitors. On one hand, if the lack of competition allows the incumbent to continue, this creates some stability. Unfortunately, if the incumbent decides not to continue because of the lack of competition, tenure and turnover become a factor as continuous training is needed. In fact, Glass (2010) suggested that training be mandatory for school board members in the area of school board–superintendent relations.

School boards have come under fire in recent years as schools across the nation continue to decline based on limited participation in local election processes that govern school board elections. According to Land (2002), school board elections see only 10–15% of the electorate on average across the United States, which contributes to the criticism school boards have engendered for their failure to lead school reform. In fact, Land suggested school boards have been uninvolved in many district reform efforts, causing a shortage of interest in assuming the role. Perhaps the limited participation of electorates in school board elections is perpetuated by the fact that incumbents are often defeated. Alsbury (2007) suggested board turnover and lack of interest was connected to dissatisfaction theory (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). According to this theory, when people are dissatisfied with school boards, they will take action to cause board defeat or resignation.

In other words, when existing school boards are defeated in their multi-term political races, superintendents are likely to be relieved of their duties as a result. This may mean that superintendents need to study how to develop relationships with their current board members' opponents without jeopardizing their relationships with the current board members. Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) suggested laws will need to change and policies will need to assist school districts in identifying roles and responsibilities for board trustees, as well as focusing on goals and policies that support school reform.

### **The Challenges School Districts Face in Keeping Superintendents in Place**

Certainly superintendents themselves contribute to the increased rates of turnover. However, unquestionably there are other influences that impact superintendents.

### **Role of the Board of Trustees**

Superintendents and the school board of education are supposed to work hand in hand to support student learning and teacher efficacy, build parent involvement, establish community involvement, balance a yearly budget, and develop policies and procedures that ensure student achievement. It is particularly important for superintendents and school boards to establish a clear line of roles and responsibilities, resist micromanagement, and build relationships (Houston 2001).

Hutsell (2009) found the concept of a school board was established in the 1800s in New England. The idea was based on the people running the schools from the town hall meeting. By 1826, a separate school committee detached from the local government and created the first school board in Massachusetts. Over time, school boards gained more control, convincing the people of the importance of educating children. Early

school boards provided more than legislative affairs and were involved in the supervision of schools and the administrative process of day-to-day operations (Hutsell, 2009). In 1837, the first superintendent was hired to run the business affairs (Glass, 2010). Understanding that the superintendent was hired to operate the business and the first school boards were designed to supervise schools and administer the functions of the district, it is easy to see the dynamic relationship between superintendents and school boards in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

History seems to indicate that the roles and responsibilities of the school board may be a leading cause for the high rate of superintendent turnover. Castallo (2003) suggested superintendents become very concerned when school board members become excessively involved in the administration of schools. While excessive involvement may cause problems, an effective superintendent is obligated to collaborate with the board to establish vision and direction. School boards have been structured to function more like a legislative branch for the school district. It appears, however, that the school board and superintendents lack an understanding of who the responsible party is for implementation of policies and procedures. When school boards believe they should implement policies and procedures, superintendents feel the pressure of micromanagement.

School board micromanagement can be a natural pull as federal expectations have increased. School districts that do not meet state and federal expectations are subject to “receivership” or takeover by the state, thus relieving a superintendent and the school board of their governance duties. As accountability increases, school boards may resolve to carry out policy instead of establishing policy. This decision may affect the superintendent, who is also feeling the political pressures from the state and federal

expectations. This conflict results in superintendents not feeling supported as the change agents of reform. Byrd et al. (2006) suggested that a primary source of superintendent frustration stemmed from school boards micromanaging or interfering in superintendents' administrative responsibilities. Some school districts have school boards that find it necessary to be involved in the administration of the district and do not consider policymaking their responsibility. When board members direct superintendents as to how to implement policy, resentment builds (Renchlar, 1992).

### **Expectations Placed on Superintendents**

The role of the superintendent encompasses many different responsibilities. Rueter (2009) proposed superintendents are charged with leading instruction, managing governance, facilitating budget and operational matters, directing physical plant operations, and communicating internally and externally to stakeholders, while leading political entities simultaneously. Perhaps the most challenging responsibilities for superintendents are not the specific duties but rather managing the pressure of the responsibilities. Complying with federal mandates, releasing staff, and managing finances are additional expectations, increasing stress and creating some unbearable periods for superintendents (Gestson, 2009). Some have suggested that leading the financial stability of a district while navigating the political pressure from all stakeholders is also a major source of stress (Atherton, 2008).

Furthermore, there are expectations on superintendents to obtain school board support as they work to negotiate the responsibilities, accountability for student achievement, and management of the organization (Rueter, 2009). It is expected that, as a superintendent, one can work within the political context, lead through the power

dynamic, and deal with the human dynamic (Atherton, 2008). Superintendents are required to match their values and beliefs with those of the people around them.

### **Strained Relations With Board of Trustee Members**

Superintendents and school board trustees have an incredible responsibility, are faced with a variety of directions from many stakeholder groups, and find themselves challenged by their own group dynamic. Moody (2007) suggested the relationship between superintendents and school board trustees is challenged by its increasing complexity. Moody submitted the idea that social influences and the fact that board trustees have recently attempted to carry out administrative duties while working with superintendents. In other words board members are micromanaging. Therefore, some superintendents who do not believe this is the role of board trustees have developed incongruent relationships with board members.

When board members play outside of their roles and responsibilities of developing district policies and become more involved in administrative duties, it creates animosity (Renchlar, 1992). Playing outside their roles and responsibilities is only one aspect that contributes to strained relationships. Petersen and Fusarelli (2001) concluded that along with role and responsibility confusion come increased accountability measures and the long-term desire of board trustees to pursue their political aspirations. These factors create a disequilibrium that fosters tension, leading to stress in the relationship between superintendents and board trustees. Moody (2010) agreed, saying the relationship between the superintendent and board trustees is affected by the election process, the lack of skills and knowledge that board members have in education, the lack

of financial compensation, and the difficulty board trustees have balancing the many ideas from various stakeholders. So what is the direct impact?

School boards have the responsibility to create and influence district policy, direct superintendents to carry out reform initiatives, hire staff, terminate staff, and affect collective bargaining sessions. Similarly, as stated previously, superintendents view their role as influencing policy, carrying out reform initiatives as they see fit, and influencing the human capital, thus creating a relationship conflict that must be resolved if the system is going to collectively carry out these responsibilities. Therefore, this dynamic in roles and responsibilities develops a challenging situation for superintendents to carry out their individual vision for school reform (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001), leading to superintendent turnover. Consequently, the relationship a superintendent has with school trustees may have an impact on his or her tenure and the ability to lead in all aspects of the role and stability of a superintendent. For these reasons, the role of superintendents becomes that much more complex, as they can no longer focus solely on academics or instructional leadership. They will need to be politically savvy in order to lead and influence policy decisions.

### **Transforming Relationships Through Leadership Theory**

Leadership has been defined by many, and many have defined leadership based on context and era. Schein (1985) suggested leadership is about developing cultures. Schein found that culture includes the learning experiences of members as their organization evolves: “Culture basically springs from three sources: (1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of organizations; (2) the learning experiences of group members as the organization evolves; and (3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by

new members and leaders” (p. 225). This plays an important role for superintendents working to build relations with the collective board. Additionally, “Good leaders foster good leadership at all levels” (Fullan, 2001, p. 10). Fullan solidified the need for superintendents to utilize various leadership strategies:

Leaders will increase their effectiveness if they continually work on the five components of leadership with energy, enthusiasm, and hope: if they pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building and sharing, and strive for coherence, the rewards and benefits are enormous. (p. 11)

Fullan’s five components of leadership were, in no particular order, Moral Purpose, Understanding Change, Coherence Making, Knowledge, and Relationship Building.

Joseph Rost supported other theorists and concluded that there are many definitions of leadership. However, according to Rost (1993), leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes. According to Antonakis, Cianciolo, and Sternberg, “Leadership is required to direct and guide organizational and human resources towards strategic objectives” (2004, p. 5).

Peter Senge (2006) concluded with the following:

Leadership centers on subtler and more important tasks. Leaders are designers, stewards, and teachers. They are responsible for building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning. (p. 340)

This may appear to be a simple articulated definition of leadership when superintendents are challenged in their relationships with school boards. However, Senge said that the simple definition points to greater leadership in relations with others and specifically in schools, and he believed leadership is about creating energy and investing in experiences that matter deeply. In fact, Senge supported the idea that when energy

exists, people are more engaged. Covey (2004a) wrote in a similar vein as Senge in the foundation of his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* in the sense that Habit 1: “Be Proactive” includes the idea that leadership rests on how leaders choose to respond to people, engage in thoughts, or relate to people. Covey defined leadership as communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves. Therein lies Covey’s (2004b) 8<sup>th</sup> Habit, which articulates the importance of finding one’s voice and seeking to help others find their voices. This certainly echoes the importance of engagement in relational interactions as superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. While Senge (2006) and Covey (2004a, 2004b) focused on leadership in individual relationships, they provided levels of insightfulness relevant to what and why leadership is necessary. The question of *how* remains.

Therefore, entering on another level of leadership is transformational leadership. Transformational leadership can appear to be the answer for superintendents attempting to build and maintain relationships. Transformational leadership was introduced by James McGregor Burns and more recently acknowledged through the research of Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio, who have indicated that transformational leadership is about stimulating and inspiring followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, developing their own leadership capacity. According to Bass and Riggio, the ideas that “transformational leaders obtain the respect as role models and are individuals whom the followers trust” (2006, p. 6) are critical aspects for school organizations that rely on board members and superintendents to set and carry out the vision of the organization. This is a shared responsibility requiring the qualities of the leader to be

received by the followers. According to Kotter, a leading consultant and work on *Leading Change*,

To lead change, you need to bring together a coalition, or team, of influential people whose power comes from a variety of sources, including job title, status, expertise, and political importance. Once formed your “change coalition” needs to work as a team, continuing to build urgency and momentum around the need for change. (Mind Tools, 1998–2005, para. 9)

Bass and Riggio (2006) found that in addition to developing relationships, “leaders must inspire and motivate” (p. 6), requiring leaders to engage the followers in envisioning real change. The group will then create a shared vision and clear expectations, and commit to accomplishing the goals that have been articulated. The leader is essential in getting the followers to see themselves as leaders. Bass and Riggio suggested that “leaders must allow for innovation and creativity” (2006, p. 7). This supports the understanding that leadership is about mobilizing for adaptive work. Organizations foster solutions from everyone and require that leadership not criticize unique thinking and solutions. The leader plays a role of encouraging others to see things from different perspectives. Fostering trust in an organization can be difficult but is a necessity for building relationships. Bass and Riggio (2006) stated that “transformational leaders must act as a coach and a mentor” (p. 7). This component ensures the growth of all in the organization. Individual needs are considered, and leaders listen and respond differently depending on the needs.

Understanding leadership is often associated with “the leader”; transformational leadership considers the followers. Loyalty and trust can be developed when the leader considers the role of the follower as important (Antonakis et al., 2004): “For us, a necessary condition for effective and authentic leadership is the creation of empowered

followers in pursuit of a moral purpose, leading to moral outcomes, that are guided by moral means” (p. 5). When organizations create conditions that focus on the process, they will begin to see results that they may never have imagined. According to Bass and Riggio, “The strongest effects of transformational leadership seem to be on the followers’ attitudes and their commitment to the leader and the organization” (2006, p. 32).

It is important to note that the relationship between leader and follower within transformational leadership must be symbiotic. This is not to say that one person in the relationship does not have a title that places him or her in the subordinate role, but within the titles a bond of trust, openness, and respect must be accepted. Goethals, Sorenson, and Burns (2004) said, “Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (p. 870). This is about the process of leadership and not the authoritative positions that individuals hold. Joseph Rost (1993) said, “Leaders and followers are the people in a leadership relationship” (p. 151). This understanding between the leader and the follower will initially be modeled by the leaders in positions of authority but will become part of the culture over time. Bass and Riggio (2006) said, “A leader who is concerned but calm, who is decisive but not impulsive, and who is clearly in charge can inspire the confidence and trust of followers” (p. 57).

Transformational leadership is about the development of a process for transforming an organization and not the content of leadership. Once the development of the follower is a part of the system, it becomes necessary, according to Bass and Riggio (2006), to develop leadership to assist followers during difficult periods. This is important, as the effects of stress can be seen for many years after an initial event: “More

effective are transformational leaders, who are proactive, break with tradition, provide innovative solutions, and institutionalize new arrangements” (p. 59). Institutionalizing will provide followers the opportunity to seek their own leadership, building capacity to stabilize the organization and allow the vision to be met. Transformational leadership is about inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and individual consideration. It is about followers developing their leadership and leaders recognizing their leadership ability, thus building a relationship that is reciprocated. Transformational leadership must be about empowerment of the organization.

*Empowerment* refers to the ability for individuals to develop their competency, efficacy, and confidence in their own capability. It is imperative that the students are empowered. The number one relationship in a school setting is between the teacher and the student. Therefore, teachers must be empowered. The site principals facilitate professional development and must be empowered. A district staff that provides learning opportunities for stakeholders must be empowered. However, the empowerment process needs to be a focus. Content matters, but providing transformational leadership development opportunities must be the main focus.

How can organizations empower individuals? According to Bass and Riggio (2006), “Internalization of goals is an important component of successful empowerment of followers” (p. 197). As organizations develop transformational leaders, the relationships between leaders and followers become stronger. This is critical, as leaders developing an organization must focus on the process of learning versus the espoused information. The focus on collaboration and learning is necessary to develop an empowered organization. In their examination of transformational leadership versus

transactional leadership, Bass and Riggio (2006) discovered that “transformational leadership led to great employee empowerment and a more creative/innovative organizational culture” (p. 198).

While transformational leadership contributes to the leader and focuses the individual on awareness, metacognition, and the culmination of experiences to arrive at a higher place of being, it does not extend to the relationship and interconnectedness of one’s self, interactions, contexts, politics, and the unique situations that merge all of these single touchpoints that require a variety of approaches. As superintendents build and maintain relationships with school boards, they must consider this: Leadership is dangerous, and it requires knowledge of leadership versus management skills.

Heifetz and Linsky (2004a) suggested that “leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organization and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions” (p. 13). For example, leadership may need to recognize that one single solution does not exist for getting all students to achieve grade-level proficiency. Leadership *is* about fostering leadership, developing cultures, building trust within the followers, developing a change coalition, simply developing relationships, possessing the seven and perhaps eight habits of effective leadership, and transformation. These theories alone may foster responsive leadership and moreover authority for an organization in transition and, perhaps used in tandem, could support one’s leadership; however, each does not necessarily consider the interconnected nature of the components of leadership that a superintendent faces, nor the dynamic relationship of people and politics that frames the nuance of building and maintaining relationships for superintendents.

There is another perspective that provides insight into the consideration of the interrelations and the nested nature of leadership within the role of the superintendent. Ronald Heifetz may have the theory that superintendents who are striving to build and maintain relationships might thrive behind. Internalizing the theory is certainly required. Heifetz (1999) defined leadership as the ability to mobilize a group of people to engage in adaptive work. He suggested adaptive work occurs in situations where the problem is not clear cut and the answers to the problems are not available. Although focusing on adaptive work, he acknowledged that there are daily challenges that leaders face, which are problems that have solutions. He identifies these as technical challenges. In defining leadership as either technical or adaptive, he has developed a sense of context that leaders must realize, and the reaction to each requires different responses: “Indeed, the single most common source of leadership failure we’ve been able to identify—in politics, community life, business, or the nonprofit sector—is that people, especially those in positions of authority, treat adaptive challenges like technical problems” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004a, p. 14). A key component to defining leadership beyond technical and adaptive work is understanding that leadership should be seen as a process and not an individual. Heifetz in 1999 found the following:

Imagine the differences in the behavior when people operate with the idea that “leadership means influencing the community to follow the leader’s vision” versus “leadership means influencing the community to face its problems.” In the first instance, influence is the mark of leadership; a leader gets people to accept his vision. If something goes wrong, the fault lies with the leader. In the second, progress on problems is the measure of leadership; leaders mobilize people to face problems, and communities make progress on problems because leaders challenge and help them do so. If something goes wrong, the fault lies on both the leaders and the community. (pp. 14–15)

Therefore, it is important for superintendents to recognize that the role's various frameworks—the political makeup of the school boards, culture, climate, constant change of state and federal regulations, parents, history, funding, former superintendent tenure, stakeholder groups, historical perspectives, and current realities in the world, state, and local contexts—are singular and woven aspects that create a context that matters. The individuals' and groups' perspectives are not only increasingly essential but mandatory considerations and require deliberate actions from the leader to realize envisioned outcomes. Heifetz's description of the interworkings of systems provides a nuanced view of leadership that separates it from other leadership theories.

Consequently, leaders must be metacognitive when facilitating the ongoing process of getting a group to solve adaptive challenges. This requires leaders to have political knowledge, political will, and political skill. Leaders must be able to identify the adaptive challenge and pace the work for the group, so as not to have individual anxiety or the group's anxiety spin out of control. In other words, leaders must balance disequilibrium with individuals, groups, and individuals in the group. Although leaders must pay close attention to the anxiety levels of individuals, individuals in the group, and the group, it is the responsibility of a leader to ripen the issues at hand and stand steady, paying close attention to the dynamics, in preparation for facilitating the individuals' and the group's next move. During this time, it is critical that the leader give the work back to the group so the group can solve the issue. If this becomes an issue that one person can solve, it may not be an adaptive challenge but rather a technical issue.

Further complicating this matter is the difference between authority and leadership. One must be careful not to confuse leadership with authority, but recognize

that leadership and authority overlap. Authority is often based on a position held that has explicit expectations and responsibility. Positions of authority grant power to the person in the position, but that power can be taken away if the person does not meet the expectations. Heifetz (1999) described this as formal authority. Authority has a few key aspects that the leader is expected to execute. The leader must provide (1) protection against distractions, (2) direction by focusing attention to the issues, (3) orientation through clarifying roles and responsibilities, (4) management of disequilibrium, (5) management of resources, and (6) management of the policies and procedures of the organization or group. Another view of authority is informal authority. Informal authority is given to a person who meets the intrinsic needs of individuals or a group. Informal authority is typically granted during moments when anxiety levels are increased.

Those in positions of authority must protect the vision of the organization or the group. They must provide direction focused on the expectations and provide order in times of conflict. This can be done in most cases as the expectations are typically set based on technical problems. Given the fact that technical problems are easily identifiable and the current systems can solve the problem, those in positions of authority are likely to meet the expectations. Leadership challenges people to address the gap between their espoused values and how they currently behave. In addition, leaders must bring up difficult issues that include the hidden issues. As stated previously, this requires leaders to differentiate between adaptive challenges and technical problems. Often, leaders try to fix adaptive challenges with technical strategies and create a false sense of “leadership,” simply signifying that leadership is difficult because it often deals with

problems that experts cannot solve, when in reality those in authority are not displaying leadership.

One of the most essential components discussed by Heifetz is the idea of “staying alive,” the recognition that one cannot lead if one is in constant battle with, first, one’s self and, secondly, others. Staying alive is critical to leadership. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2004a), “When you take ‘personal’ attacks personally, you unwillingly conspire in one of the common ways you can be taken out of the action” (p. 191). When this happens, Heifetz (1999) and Heifetz and Linsky (2004a) offered a strategy of staying alive and the metaphor of “getting on the balcony,” the idea of “being in the game and observing it as a whole” (p. 51). Heifetz worked to show the power of being present and in the moment in order to recognize what you as a leader are aspiring to accomplish while getting to a state of understanding of the view of reality. In order to do so, leaders need to involve others, acknowledge the truth, and keep opposition close, accepting responsibility as well as the fact that not all group members will accept the challenge. Acknowledgment of this leadership framework and understanding the interplay of authority and leadership components, politics, and the multifaceted contexts provide substantial groundwork for specific leadership and functioning principles as to *how*, not just the what and the why, superintendents build and maintain relationships with school boards.

### **Emerging Strategies to Decrease Superintendent Turnover**

#### **Improving Relations With the Board of Trustees**

Superintendents have identified their relationship with the school boards they work with as a common reason for leaving a school district, which leads to increased

turnover rates (Byrd et al., 2006). Rueter (2009), after conducting surveys with multiple superintendents, found the superintendent's relationship with the school board is the greatest factor in a superintendent's success in a school district. Rueter extended this point, saying the superintendent must make this relationship a priority and invest the time up front in developing lines of communication in order to determine the often-fluctuating expectations and needs of the board. Relationships can be difficult to build, especially when superintendents and school boards do not see eye to eye on staffing, evaluation, or budgetary issues, primary functions of the school board and superintendent (Castallo, 2003).

Renchlar (1992) found that a key source of turnover is unrealistic expectations that school boards have for superintendents. McAdams (2006) indicated that one of the main obstacles facing superintendents was the school board, although he found that one of the major ways to overcome this obstacle was to develop a strong relationship with the school board. Houston (2010), supported by Lashway (2002) and Cuban (1998), spoke of the uncertain political climate requiring superintendents to be proficient in politics and the art of persuasion, therefore giving credence to the idea that superintendents must focus their attention on creating and maintaining relationships. The school board is the most influential relationship that the superintendent will experience throughout his/her tenure, and this relationship is, undeniably, extremely political (Rueter, 2009).

With public education facing extreme pressure and scrutiny, a strong relationship between the superintendent and school board is especially important. One way to develop relationships is to maintain open lines of communication. Gestson (2009) found that the interaction between superintendent and board of trustees is one of the most

important factors in superintendent effectiveness. Wright (2009) suggested superintendent longevity greater than 12 years developed open communication with the school board and community. Other research suggested that the primary role of the superintendent is one of communication (Kowalski, 2005). Positive interactions and relationships between superintendents and school board trustees are essential to both student achievement and superintendent job security. In fact, lack of open communication has been a primary reason for superintendent turnover (Wright, 2009).

### **Communication and Collaboration Within the School District**

Although there are many attributes of the role of the superintendency, research by Lashway (2002), Cuban (1998), Kowalski (2005), and Houston (2010) suggested the superintendency is a position that is most affected by the relationships with board trustees. Superintendents must balance the level of collaboration and communication that addresses the needs of all stakeholders. Superintendents who sustain longer tenure make themselves available when concerns arise to provide accurate information, alignment, and focus during difficult times (Rueter, 2009). For superintendents to accomplish this type of leadership, they must develop trust and trusting relationships through open and honest communication (Moody, 2007). Recognizing that relationships are vital to one's success, superintendents must develop skills and knowledge around communication. Like other researchers, Rueter (2009) suggested,

The superintendent must make this relationship a priority, and invest the time up front in developing lines of communication in order to determine the often fluctuating expectations and needs of the board. The superintendent must accept primary responsibility for building and maintaining a strong, positive working partnership. (p. 22)

Moody (2010) agreed that superintendents must ensure trust and collaboration. Additionally, they are responsible for building trusting and collaborative relationships. Moody further suggested that communication and collaboration can be developed through the organizational structures and procedures that allow mutual agreement around the evaluation process. Research by the Educational Consultants and Research Associates (2010) confirmed that successful superintendents are proactive and constantly communicating in order to build trust so they are better able to provide actionable steps for those they supervise. Unfortunately, according to Finnigan and Daly (2014), there is no reform that focuses on relationships; the focus is rather on more technical reform efforts such as curricular shifts and programmatic changes. These perspectives suggest greater knowledge, vision, and leadership is needed and indicates a need for more rigorous training and preparation to enhance this skill set for superintendents.

### **Targeted Training and Preparation**

Training for superintendents consists of graduate programs and superintendent programs such as the Broad Academy and the Harvard University Superintendents program. These programs are geared to develop superintendent candidates for the rigors of the position. While Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) agreed with the concept of these types of superintendent programs, they suggested districts play a more critical role in recruiting and developing superintendents:

To both attract qualified leaders and to prepare them properly, we believe that the school system and the university should jointly plan programs and select candidates that the school system wishes to groom for leadership positions. The school system would then have reason to invest in their preparation, make scheduling accommodations, and provide for high-quality internships. Working in tandem with universities, school systems would have new ways to demonstrate their commitment to new and better trained leadership. (p. 21)

Graduate programs will need to focus superintendent candidate learning on enhancing the limited political skills of the potential superintendents. Therefore, the focus will need to include general management development, instructional leadership, and student achievement as well as organizational leadership, developing relationships, and political capital development. Table 1 below depicts these specific stressors, areas of focus that can assist university programs and national programs attempting to develop superintendent leaderships, and possible impacts for developing superintendents to be able to build and maintain relationships with school board members. This study did not intend to identify every possible stressor but did highlight key stressors identified in the research studied in this literature review.

Table 1

*Improving specific knowledge base and skills of superintendents in key areas to support a greater return for superintendents to build and maintain relationships with school board members*

Stressors on superintendents	Areas of focus for development	Possible impacts
Role and responsibilities	How to work with Board of Education to identify the “big picture” of the role and responsibility	Develops a clear plan of organizing the collective approach while delineating roles and responsibilities
Communication	How to determine core values and align to honest, fair, and transparent ways of leading	Advances consistency for each board member and maintains a high level of integrity
Unreasonable expectations and accountability	How to become “the great simplifier”	Creates opportunities to assist BOE members in articulating the vision, goals, and direction of the school district and maintains a consistent message between the policy and procedures and one’s own actions to meet the vision

Table 1 cont.

Stressors on superintendents	Areas of focus for development	Possible impacts
Board relations	How to build and maintain relationships with school board members	Demonstrates the ability to listen, develops the metacognitive skills necessary to understand own actions and actions of others, provides space and time for investing in these relationships, opens lines of communication, and draws parallels between individual BOE members and the collective vision of the school district, potentially allowing superintendent to maintain longer tenure
Politics	How to develop a political stance while attending to the educational needs of the school district	Provides a space for being political without being a politician. Demonstrates an understanding of the political nature of education while focusing on learning, teaching, and leading

The new role for superintendents requires training in politics within educational reform (Renchlar, 1992). Furthermore, Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) suggested training must be strengthened at the graduate level to focus on collaborative leadership,

school governance that emphasizes relationships with board trustees, and aspects of engagement. Additionally, they suggested a new set of standards and certification for potential superintendents.

### **Developing Political Leadership Skills**

Now more than ever, urban superintendents are required to engage in political contexts as they lead school districts (Aleman, 2002). Therefore, superintendents must identify the political constructs, develop relationships, and lead others in reform efforts focused on student achievement. In order for this to occur, superintendents must work with all stakeholder groups in defining the goals and outcomes for their communities (Educational Consultants and Research Associates, 2010). This suggests that superintendents should come into the position with the skills and knowledge to navigate such political terrain. Aleman (2002) discovered that effective superintendents needed to be skilled in group dynamics.

Political knowledge is not a new proposition. In fact, Hentges (1986) suggested that the political battle began as early as 1895, as the battle for who would run the school district ensued. This is similar to the situation for today's superintendent. It is important for superintendents to understand the historical context of power and politics in order to securely develop and maintain the political relationships necessary to sustain tenure. Recognizing that collaboration can assist in determining the ultimate direction of reform efforts, current superintendents must employ political savvy to get support from their board trustees (Educational Consultants and Research Associates, 2010). In addition to the board trustees, Aleman (2002) found that superintendents need to have the political fortitude to work with the public, business partners, and other educational groups. Lastly,

Aleman suggested superintendents need to be mindful of the local media, as the media could adversely affect the superintendent.

The need for superintendents to possess skills to manage the political climate will require superintendent programs and leadership development programs to align their courses of study to not only cover political studies but also organize coursework that provides depth of knowledge in that area. Unfortunately, this is an area that lacks research. Recognizing that political knowledge has played a significant role in the superintendent position, it would appear that higher education and superintendent programs would make this a focal area for training and development. This is not the case according to Melver (2011), who found educational literature is insignificant when addressing how superintendents think about politics and, furthermore, the literature surrounding political sophistication is somewhat nonexistent.

### **Summary**

This review of literature examined more than 50 bodies of research from peer-reviewed research articles, dissertations, and published presentations. The literature reviewed focused on what the potential causes are for the increased rate of superintendent turnover, indicating a significant dilemma faced by public education superintendents. The decision to structure the literature review was based on the composition of the study, the historical perspective of the researcher, methodological practices, and the institution affiliated with the researcher. The literature clearly points out that, given the pressure on superintendents and school boards, relationship building between these two major constituents seems essential if education is to ever remedy the current attrition trend. Unfortunately, to date, the literature does not identify how superintendents can overcome

the constant superintendent turnover. Examining how some superintendents have built reasonably strong relationships may provide insight to assist future superintendents in building and maintaining relationships with school board members.

Academic research suggested superintendents' success or failure may be affected by how they manage roles, politics, and relationships. Houston (2010) and Glass (2010) agreed that the role of the superintendent is complex and places incredible pressure on superintendents in a position that is currently unmanageable due to the vast size of the role and the intricacy of the responsibilities. Hubbard, Mehan, and Stein (2006) clearly articulated the thrust of their findings: "Understandably, educators are often enticed to adopt reforms that have been successful elsewhere. Doing so, however, overlooks the complicated process of negotiation and collaboration that is needed to adapt and develop reforms that local constituencies support" (p. 252). This suggests that context matters, and if indeed it does, how does it play out beyond the research? The literature fails to provide sufficient understanding as to how superintendents can overcome the challenges they face when leading school districts. The literature speaks extensively to the demand for superintendents to build strong relationships with school boards and unions (Castallo, 2003; Eller & Carlson, 2009) but continuously fails to identify how superintendents can actually overcome their insufficient ways of leading board trustees to effective relationships. This research provides the opportunity to study cases in a working context that may provide insight into the complex role of the school superintendent.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to understand how two superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. This study focused on the following research questions:

1. In what ways do superintendents' interactions with school board members influence the building, strengthening, and/or maintaining of their relationship?
  - a. What are the complexities, factors, and/or supports that either impede or progress relationships with school board members?
2. What influences the superintendents' metacognition as they contemplate the approaches they deploy to build and maintain relationships with their school boards?
3. How does a superintendent's education and previous experiences shape and affect a superintendent's ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members?
4. How does the political and/or social context of a district affect superintendents and the relationships they build and maintain with school board members?

In this section, I provide an overview of the research design and discuss the rationale for the decisions in determining the specific design. Additionally, I discuss the research participants and the reasons behind these selections as well as the research sites for this research. Furthermore, I provide a description of the data collection strategy and describe how I analyzed these data.

### **Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research approach. Specifically, I deployed a multi-case study/cross-case analysis design. Two cases were studied. The purpose behind selecting the qualitative method was to understand thinking and actions associated with decision making on the part of each superintendent as they build relationships with school board members. I wanted to describe and uncover the intentional actions behind building these relationships versus identifying the fact that relationships are an important function for superintendents. Creswell (2003) indicated,

A qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. (p. 18)

Recognizing that two cases may be limiting in scope, I would suggest otherwise in the context of this qualitative study. Hubbard et al. (2006) suggested that organizations maintain both practical and cultural constructs. This then provides the need for individuals to use their everyday decision making to navigate these constructs. Therefore, this study benefits from the limited studies to maximize the depth of the decision making of superintendents to navigate the relationships they develop with school board trustees. Additionally, Hubbard et al. (2006) extended their support for leaders to develop the skills to navigate contexts, explaining that organizational rules and guidelines are never sufficient to guide decision making in concrete situations or to plot a specific course of action, as the rules can be vague and ambitious. Therefore, in order to capture the nuances of decision making in the essence of metacognitive strategies that align with leadership theory, educational training, and superintendent experiences, I decided to limit

the number of cases to gain access to the deeper thinking that influences decisions within the context of each school system and each relationship between the two superintendents and their board members.

For the purpose of this study, each case was defined as the interactions between a superintendent and school board members. For each case, I identified the superintendents as the key informants. Additionally, for each case, school board members who were selected to participate were interviewed. They were identified in two ways. First, each key informant identified two board members, one whom they believed shared the same perspective on their beliefs around building and maintaining relationships, and one whom they believed shared the opposite perspective. I then interviewed the respective board members and asked each one to identify one other board member who shared the opposite perspective (see Appendix A). This snowball sampling process (Patton, 2002) where the key informants identify additional informants and the additional informants identify confirming or disconfirming informants (Marshall, 1996) allowed me to expand the sample size and provide depth to the study. Furthermore, the interview data, observations, and document reviews were utilized to triangulate data collected from the key informants. According to Patton, “By triangulating with multiple data sources, observers, methods, and/or theories, researchers can make substantial strides in overcoming the skepticism that greets singular methods, lone analysts, and single perspective interpretations” (2002, p. 556).

Patton (2002) identified the appropriateness of utilizing a case study design when the study is attempting to capture stories within an organization and help develop organizational learning. According to Yin, “The essence of a case study, the central

tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (2009, p. 17). Therefore, a multi-case study/cross-case analysis design is appropriate for several reasons. A case study allowed me the ability to capture the personal experiences of the superintendents relative to the context for which they functioned and to obtain from school board members perspectives on relationships with the superintendents.

Additionally, as I mentioned in the literature review discussion, very little is known about *how* superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. Therefore, by using a multi-case study/cross-case analysis design, I had the opportunity to explore approaches that two superintendents may have employed while building and maintaining relationships with school board members that may not otherwise have been possible within other research designs. Furthermore, because the plan for this study created the opportunity to explore the interaction between groups of people (superintendents and school board members) to discover the “how” and “why” processes of each key informant based on real-life experiences, a case study design was the preferred method, based on Yin (2009).

Aligning a cross-case analysis design with a multi-case design allowed me to compare and contrast the approaches of each superintendent from the key informants to identify the emerging themes that provided a more in-depth understanding as to how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. By utilizing a cross-case analysis, I was able to strengthen the data that could be subjected to further questioning if studying one case. Finally, in comparing and contrasting the two

cases, I was able to provide depth for the emergent concepts or themes that might not have been sufficiently described if I had conducted only a single case study.

### **Research Sites and Participants**

This study focused on the relationships built and maintained between superintendents and school board members. It was important to select participants who could offer greater insight into this study. Additionally, because of the small sample size, I also needed to consider participants and districts that could represent other school districts in California. California, particularly San Diego, has had an influence on the national level regarding educational reform. While this research may influence thinking nationally, I am careful not to presuppose that the contexts of each selected case, within the southern California context, match the contexts of other regions within the United States. While selecting school districts that represent the various regions in the United States would be optimal, I would need a longer research period, the depth of data collection would be missed, and the capacity of one researcher would not be sufficient. I selected superintendents from two California school districts for several reasons. The first school district is the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD). For the past 20 years, the SDUSD has been at the forefront of national reform work in urban education. The SDUSD is the second-largest urban school district in California and is in the top 10 largest in the nation. In 1998, the SDUSD made national headlines when then-Superintendent Alan Bersin hired Anthony Alvarado, former school chancellor in New York City, to implement the Blueprint for Student Achievement, setting the stage for what some consider positive yet tumultuous reform effort. Additionally, a very comprehensive study was conducted (Hubbard et al., 2006) that discussed superintendent and school

board member relations, identifying the impact of achievement and the shortcomings of the SDUSD reform efforts that included indications of board dissension: “[Bersin] needs support, he needs to have the backing of the school board. He needs to have the board in support of his activities and the agenda he has going” (Hubbard et al., p. 212). Other researchers, including Betts, Zau, and Rice (2003), Betts, Zau, and King (2005), and specifically Hightower (2001), suggested,

Not all outcomes and responses were positive, however. Vocal resistance to the reform came from schools and more subtle resentment from some central office staff. While few questioned the necessity for the reform’s ultimate goals, consensus broke down over implementation strategy. Some principals and many teachers questioned the reform’s speed, abruptness, and top-down character. The teachers’ union served as a rallying point for these feelings for both teachers and administrators. And two of the five board members were increasingly uncomfortable with the process taken by district reformers. (p. 15)

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a discussion of the intentionality on behalf of the superintendent to build and maintain the relationships with his school board members that may have shielded the negativity that arose within the “positive” efforts. Interestingly enough, after the departure of Alan Bersin, the SDUSD hired eight superintendents in 11 years (including three interims), a turnover rate that is higher than the national average. This case is worth examining as Hubbard et al. (2006) suggested: “A second and closely related policy recommendation for districts considering systemic reform concerns the relationship between the technical, cultural, and political dimensions of reform” (p. 253). The relationships between superintendents and board members are a good start to addressing this suggestion.

The second school district selected for this study is the Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD). The CVESD is the largest K-6 school district in California. Located in the South Bay region of San Diego County, Chula Vista has a similar ethnic

demographic as San Diego but with a smaller African and African-American population. It has not experienced such superintendent turnover, nor has the CVESD been involved with major national reform efforts. However, this year the CVESD was one of 11 school districts awarded a state “Honor Role” award for closing the achievement gap.

Additionally, the CVESD has had only three superintendents in 22 years, far exceeding the average of 3 years for superintendents. Furthermore, studying a different case within the same region as the SDUSD, with similar demographics but less superintendent turnover, provided relevancy in terms of context. Recognizing that K-5 programs are not as vast, budgetary impacts are different, the community that is served is not as delineated, and the political context may be less constrained by outside stakeholders because of the limited scope of influence, this case may offer some insights that a large urban district may not offer. Therefore, the similarities in demographics, region, academic foci, and student achievement along with the differences in size, educational programming, and competing superintendent turnover along with the idea that context may influence how a superintendent builds and maintains relationships with school board members influenced the selection of these two school districts. The backgrounds of the key informants also contributed to the selection of case studies.

While Patton (2002) and others have described several sampling strategies, for this study I used a combination of *purposeful sampling*, *snowball sampling*, and *convenience sampling*. According to Patton,

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry, thus the term *purposeful sampling*. (2002, p. 230)

Additionally, convenience sampling and snowball sampling provided the opportunity to delve deep into the thinking of the key informants and the thinking of the other informants who were identified. I aimed to provide depth versus breadth. As Patton (2002) described it, this qualitative approach provides the opportunity for inquiry and gives attention, detail, context, and particularly nuance to these two cases without the constraint of predetermined categories or large sample sizes (p. 227).

Furthermore, it was not reasonable to research all superintendents across the public educational system in the United States, or in any particular state. Therefore, I decided to select two superintendents, my key informants, who offered both comparisons and contrasting perspectives and the potential to provide a great deal of insight. This decision was based on individual contexts and the varying degrees of their personal backgrounds, educational history, leadership training, enrollment, and the grade level and staffing size of their respective school districts, and the fact that both school districts have been part of the state- and national-level discussions on educational reform for the past 16 years. Additionally, the selection process was somewhat based on convenience, as I have worked with both superintendents and had the ability to access them.

The first key informant is a former superintendent of the second largest urban K-12 public school district in southern California. Bill Kowba, former superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District, is a nontraditional superintendent. He spent most of his professional career in the Navy, retiring as a rear admiral. He became a superintendent under unique circumstances, as he was unanimously selected as a superintendent after serving in the same school district as a chief financial officer following the dismissal of three traditional superintendents who served fewer than four

consecutive years combined in the SDUSD. Kowba's appointment was unprecedented at the time in this particular school district, as some would have argued that this particular school board was very contentious. This key informant may be able to offer rich information as to how he built and maintained relationships when other superintendents appeared less adept. Bill Kowba will have a unique perspective due to his length of tenure; he was the longest-tenured superintendent in the SDUSD post-Alan Bersin and after the school district hired and released two other superintendents. It might be a coincidence, but both were nontraditional superintendents, Bersin having come from the legal sector and Kowba from the military. This case may offer some nontraditional perspectives that educators could learn from.

Additionally, Bill Kowba's tenure was arguably during the district's most dire financial period in its history. Kowba led through the change of three school boards and received unanimous board member votes, reducing the district's budget by more than \$500 million dollars in four years. He also received support for three district layoffs of more than 7,000 employees during his tenure, in which 98% of the employees would be recalled, perhaps because of his leadership and relationships with his board members.

The second key informant, Dr. Eduardo Escobedo, currently leads the largest K-5 school district in southern California. This key informant is considered a traditional superintendent, as he has more than 30 years of educational experience as a teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent and now superintendent. He possesses the standard doctoral degree, which some consider a prerequisite, and has spent his entire leadership career in public education, although it is worth noting that prior to education he spent 2 years as a police officer.

This key informant has served as an adjunct professor of educational administration at San Diego State University (SDSU) and has also served as a member of the doctoral faculty at SDSU. This experience may inform the ways in which he thinks about relationships beyond a school district. Furthermore, unlike the first informant, this informant's appointment was more controversial, as some suggested his position was received based on his previous relationships with some of the school board members; he worked with these board members, as all were employees in the South Bay Union School District at the time. This key informant offered information-rich data addressing the purpose of this study in how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members.

In addition to the key informants, school board members were used as part of the case study. Each superintendent was asked to identify two school board members whom they believed would offer opposing perspectives on how they approached building and maintaining relationships. This initial selection process produced four school board members whom I invited to participate in this study. I then asked each of the four to identify one school board member they believed would offer a view different from their own. I then invited these four additional board members to participate. I continued the selection process until I had eight total board members to participate in my study (see Appendix A).

This study was conducted in two school districts with some similarities. Interviews were conducted at times and locations convenient for each participant. I decided to allow the participants to select the location for the interviews based on a prior research study I previously conducted. In 2011, I was able to conduct a single case study

and found that conducting interviews based on the convenience of the superintendent allowed me greater access to the superintendent given the complexity of a school superintendent's daily schedule. Furthermore, presumably providing the participants with optional locations offered the participants a sense of familiarity and, consequently, a higher level of comfort while discussing sensitive topics.

Prior to conducting any interviews and data collection, I sent a formal request for approval, along with Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms to all participants and each school district whose employees were participating in this study.

### **Data Collection**

Because this study had a qualitative research design, I used what Patton (2002) called the three kinds of data collection: in-depth interviews, observations, and document reviews.

### **Interviews**

The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews. Patton (2002) suggested,

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observation data are more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-report data. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meaning they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about these things. (pp. 340–341)

Because I conducted a multi-case study/cross-case analysis, I utilized an interview guide approach. I chose the interview guide approach for four reasons. First, it allowed me to explore the decision-making process of each participant. Second, because I conducted a series of one-on-one interviews with the superintendents and selected school

board members amid their busy schedules, an interview guide allowed me to structure the interviews to better utilize time efficiently. Third, the approach allowed for flexibility in probing and exploring topics in depth as they arose within the interviews. Fourth, understanding the participants' decision-making process included probing deeper into the psyche of the participant by using follow-up questions such as "Why was that significant?" and "Why did you make that decision?"

The interview guide approach required a prepared set of questions (Appendix C and Appendix D) that ensured the basic lines of inquiry were used for participants (Patton, 2002). I used a tiered approach during the interview process. The initial interview guide questions were framed from the research questions. Subsequent interviews also followed a prepared interview guide, but the questions were designed based on the responses of the participants during the initial interviews. Similarly, I designed an interview guide for the participating school board members from the responses of the key informants.

In order for me to provide some sense of reliability and to validate the data collected from all interviews, I engaged in member checking. Member checking is utilized to determine the accuracy of findings by taking data back to participants and determining whether the participants believe the data are accurate (Creswell, 2003). While there are several different methods of member checking, I conducted member-checking practices during the interview process rather than after all interviews had been completed. If time did not permit this to occur during the interview process, I conducted member checking after the development of my final report of all interviews. In other words, I took the themes and specific descriptions from my interviews with key

informants back to the key informants and asked if the key informants believed that these themes and descriptions were accurate. Creswell (2003) indicated member checking provides credibility and completeness to the interview data collection process by allowing participants to reflect on their interpretations, approaches, and experiences.

### **Observations**

A secondary approach to data collection was through observation. Yin (2009) stated that one of the major strengths of a case study method is the ability to capture different types of resources. Additionally, using multiple resources allows for a broader range of historical and behavioral issues (p. 115). Patton (2002) stated, “Observational data, especially participant observation, permit the evaluation researcher to understand a program or treatment to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews” (p. 22). Therefore, in addition to using more interviews, in the case of one key informant I attended his board meeting to observe how he interacted with board members, being sure to script his actions pertaining to interactions with school board members. In other cases, where I was not able to be present or where real-time board meetings had already occurred, I reviewed board members via video recording, as they had been recorded.

### **Review of Documents**

In addition to interviews and observations, I reviewed and examined district documents, ways in which the key informants had communicated to the public and their respective school board members, and relevant local and national press reports. Examining district documents afforded me the opportunity to collect data relative to how, what, and why these two superintendents communicated with school board members.

Similarly, I assessed press documents that the local media developed to gain additional perspective into how public perception affects the ways in which superintendents may build and maintain relationships with school board members. I determined not to use social media, as this can become a “rabbit hole”; social media maintains a single point of reference in each post, and data collection may be easily represented, but the findings can be scattered and disconnected in drawing final conclusions.

### **Data Analysis**

This study attempted to discover the ways in which superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. This study was oriented toward exploration and discovery. Furthermore, as the cases were structured to focus on the interaction between superintendents and school board members, this study attempted to understand both the uniqueness within each individual case and the comparisons and contrasts of both cases. In essence, there were similar strategies that each superintendent used; however, I aimed to capture the nuances in their decision making and metacognitive practices to get at the process of decision making as well as the content of the decisions. Therefore, I utilized a synthesis design for analysis of each case as a separate entity and a cross-case analysis approach to enhance understanding of the study. As Patton (2002) described, Qualitative synthesis is a way to build theory through induction and interpretation. I aimed to develop a theory that superintendents can develop the metacognitive skills, if practiced, to develop and maintain relationships with school board members.

### **Synthesis and Narrative**

While this was a multi-case study, Patton (2002) suggested each qualitative study

is a case and therefore requires its own analysis. The purpose of synthesis analysis allows for each case to reveal its unique qualities in context. Superintendents may certainly have approaches that are commonly used; however, context matters, and allowing each of the cases to be understood in isolation may create the opportunity to “extrapolate lessons learned” (Patton, 2002, p. 500). Therefore, I synthesized each case through narrative prior to the process of cross-case analysis. Polkinghorne (1995) suggested a narrative process allows the researcher to develop data into a story. Because this study sought to understand how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members, telling each superintendent’s story allowed for deeper understanding into the metacognitive process of each superintendent and justified the use of a qualitative approach to get at the what, why, and how with each case.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

According to Patton, “A qualitative study will often include both kinds of analysis—individual cases and cross-case analyses” (2002, p. 440). After synthesizing each case individually, I analyzed both cases through cross-case analysis. This allowed me to examine common thinking, strategies, and themes across cases. When describing this process, Patton (2002) said cross-case analysis includes identifying common responses from different people and identifying different perspectives on common ideas or themes. Through the cross-case analysis of the interactions between superintendents and school board members, I hoped to deduce the common methods and strategies for how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. Additionally, while single cases provide understanding, it has been noted several times in this study that context matters. Therefore, the intention behind cross-case analysis in this

study was to capture possible intricacies that may have been context specific, for example, small districts versus large districts or perhaps previous working relationships with school board members. These contextual nuances created deeper understanding and specific areas of awareness that single case reporting might not have revealed.

### **Data Coding**

Saldaña (2009) defined coding as a way in which a researcher assigns a word, symbol, or short phrase to a salient, provocative idea from a portion of data. Because I was attempting to explicate the thinking of the participants, it was important to identify ideas through their words and actions. Through the coding process, I was able to identify patterns and themes that provided the framework for the narratives.

#### **First-Cycle Coding**

While there are seven broad subcategories within first-cycle coding, according to Saldaña (2009), I began by using what Saldaña described as *in vivo* coding. *In vivo* coding is a process of coding whereby the researcher labels data with words or phrases from the transcriptions of each participant. For example, this was a key informant's response to a question regarding his role and responsibilities in school board meetings, specifically on the dais:

After I was appointed, I moved my seat on the dais to the side of the board members. It was previously positioned in the center of the school board members, and I wanted to show that the board meetings were about the board and not about me as the superintendent.

The *in vivo* coding process allowed me to code this as “moved seat on dais” and “demonstrates positionality.” By using the words and phrases from each participant, the researcher is able to identify a starting point within the data in order to further explore emerging ideas. While *in vivo* coding could be used as a sole method of coding

according to Saldaña, it would have hindered my ability as a researcher to see a broader perspective in the data. Therefore, I used a second cycle of coding to reach the depths of analysis needed for this qualitative study.

### **Second-Cycle Coding**

According to Saldaña (2009), second-cycle coding helps the researcher develop categories, themes, and conceptual ideas from the first-cycle coding. As with first-cycle coding, there are multiple subcategories. For the purpose of this study, I used what Saldaña described as focused coding. For instance, this is the same quotation used in the in vivo coding example:

After I was appointed, I moved my seat on the dais to the side of the board members. It was previously positioned in the center of the school board members and I wanted to show that the board meetings were about the board and not about me as the superintendent.

The in vivo coding process allowed me to code this as “moved seat on dais” and “demonstrates positionality.” The focused coding process, however, allowed me to begin categorical fields such as “Roles,” “Positionality,” and “Informal and Formal Strategies.” Saldaña indicated focused coding not only follows first-cycle coding but also searches the most frequent or significant initial codes to develop “the most salient categories” (2009, p. 155). By reducing the number of codes, I was able to illuminate the uniqueness of each case while comparing and contrasting cross cases. This focused coding process was used to identify patterns and trends within each case and across cases in hopes that the data would reveal specific actions that superintendents take in order to build and maintain relationships with board members.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As mentioned in the purpose of the research, this was an exploratory study (Patton, 2002). This study aimed to uncover some aspects of how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members and did not attempt to exhaustively address the concepts, strategies, and skills needed, nor did it attempt to give answers to a definitive issue facing public education. It did seek to advance the research that has previously been conducted, bring awareness to some possibilities for further study, and begin a dialogue of possibilities to advance superintendent leadership in public education. Furthermore, this study was an example of the limitations of scientific generalizability for several reasons. One, this case study focused on two superintendents and two school districts. Two, recognizing that context does matter, especially when studying education, where fluctuations in the players, daily situations, and external and internal forces create an ever-changing environment, the study was limited in that what can be learned about these two cases does not necessarily transfer across counties, cities, states, or nationally, as cultures, religious practices, belief systems, gender, and other factors contribute to the specific regional expectations of public education. Three, the study was conducted in two districts, one K-12 and the other K-5. There are nuances within K-12 school districts that may not be relevant in a K-5 district, as a K-5 district does not manage systems within the secondary levels. Therefore, it should not be suggested that the ideas that were discovered be applied in other districts under different contexts: "People's educational aspirations, needs, and contexts differ from place to place. Accordingly, what works in one location won't necessarily work in another" (Hubbard et al., 2006, p. 252). However, the practices may appear general enough to be

applicable in similar districts and should be considered when examining all public education superintendent leadership and school board relations.

Although I strengthened my data collection and analysis through member checking, there remained many gaps in this limited study. The participants came from different backgrounds, educationally and professionally, and had different training and preparation. Further, the information I gathered from the participants was in part *ex post facto*, meaning the participants were asked to recall situations and information that had already occurred, and therefore their perceptions of what transpired may have been incomplete or even inaccurate.

While many researchers are associated with their field of study and the research topic, I am mindfully aware that my previous role as the chief human resource officer in the San Diego Unified School District, reporting to the superintendent, at the time of Bill Kowba's tenure, and my current position as an area superintendent in the San Diego Unified School District have particular benefits and limitations. Under the leadership of Bill Kowba, I had firsthand knowledge, experiences, and interactions that certainly slant my particular views of Kowba's leadership strategies. As an executive member in his leadership cabinet, I was also associated with several discussions and decisions involving the school board. My position afforded me vast experiences that could influence my research, and I am constantly aware and pushing myself to be an objective researcher, allowing Kowba's accounts, experiences, and story to be the study and not my opinions or experiences. While the biases are present, my positions have also benefited me, as I have been able to observe Kowba at work with staff and board members and was able to utilize this experience as a form of triangulation, to enhance my questions, and certainly

to probe within the research study. I also believe my position has afforded me access to these two school districts, two superintendents, and board members who may otherwise not have allowed research access. Likewise, as an executive within the second largest school district, during the district's greatest financial trials and certainly within the staffing challenges faced by the San Diego Unified School District, my role and responsibility provide credibility within this study. This certainly shaped my views and required me to be conscious of my experiences in order to release them so the study could stand on the merits of the participants and not my professional involvement. I do not take this for granted and recognize both the benefits and the limitations of my professional responsibilities.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study set out to examine how two superintendents build relationships with their school boards, including the particular methods they employed and the interactions that followed. I designed a study to explicate the actions of two superintendents in the area of school board relations. This study looked for some explanation of the beliefs and actions of two superintendents in their relationships with school board members. This is considered a small study examining ways in which other superintendents might develop their relationships with school board members.

I intended for this study to explore and describe the importance of core beliefs, developing structures to facilitate relationship building, supporting the developed relationships through leading and learning through one's own internal process of strategically building and maintaining relationships with school board members. Other superintendents can examine findings from this study and the relationships of the

participating superintendents and school board members as they work to navigate two very difficult roles in public education, roles that are compromised by ever-changing budgets, politics, and hidden agendas that are often blind to the needs of students. The intent of this study was to provide insight into the ways superintendents seek to maintain relationships with their school board members, how successful they are in doing so, and what training and skills would have helped them in this process. The findings should provide the basis for larger studies on this topic.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Leading a school district is the sole responsibility of the school district superintendent. However, according to Paul Hill (2003), “the hero-superintendent is an ideal seldom realized. The whole governance structure is tilted against strong executive leadership” (p. 3). The expectations placed on a school superintendent can be considered unrealistic. Rueter (2009) has said that a significant strategy to combat the unrealistic and often-fluctuating expectations is to build relationships with school board members and invest in the relationship on an ongoing basis. The strategy of building relationships may include opening lines of communication, developing skilled management strategies, and investing time in relationships with board members (Glass, 2010; Rueter, 2009; Byrd et al., 2006). This study explored how two superintendents utilized their personal strategies to build and maintain relationships with their board members in order to understand commonalities and differences. It explored the metacognitive processes of these superintendents, what factors contribute to the use of specific strategies, how decisions relating to the strategies are made, and how much time is spent on the process of building and maintaining board relationships. This study then compared the responses of the superintendents to these matters with those of school board members in the districts they serve(d). This multi-case study/cross-case analysis attempts to provide an important investigation into a topic that may offer greater understanding of ways to improve superintendency tenure and improve how educational and training programs for superintendents can better prepare superintendents for leadership skills in working collaboratively and constructively with school boards in the interest of providing quality public education.

The following research questions were explored:

1. In what ways do superintendents' interactions with school board members influence the building, strengthening, and/or maintaining of their relationship?
  - a. What are the complexities, factors, and/or supports that either impede or progress relationships with school board members?
2. What influences the superintendents' metacognition as they contemplate the approaches they deploy to build and maintain relationships with their school boards?
3. How does a superintendent's formal education and previous experiences shape and affect a superintendent's ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members?
4. How does the political and/or social context of a district affect superintendents and the relationships they build and maintain with school board members?

### **The Selected School Districts**

I was fortunate to have two school districts participate in this study, Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD), the largest elementary K-6 school district in the state of California, and San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), the second-largest K-12 school district in California. While the districts are elementary and K-12, serving roughly 29,700 students and 130,000 students, respectively, each district has similar demographics, serving a large number of language learners and maintaining large numbers of Title I campuses (51% and 59.4% free/reduced lunch), special education

students, and students with special needs. Each district also serves a large military contingency. The districts share a common governance structure (Table 2), maintaining five board members, although the board of education members in the SDUSD represent five different geographic regions within the school district boundary.

Table 2

*Board of education*

	Chula Vista	San Diego		# Votes
School district	Elementary	Unified School	Quorum	needed to
	School District	District		adopt items
<i>Undergraduate</i>				
Board member total	5	5	3	3
Geographic areas	1	6		
Ethnic diversity				
<i>Latino</i>	3	1		
<i>White</i>	2	3		
<i>Black</i>	0	1		
Gender diversity				
<i>Male</i>	2	4		
<i>Female</i>	3	1		

In selecting school districts, I examined size, demographics, and achievement of several elementary school districts, and the Chula Vista Elementary School District stood head and shoulders above the rest in all three categories. Upon further examining this district, I found the CVESD was 1 of 11 school districts awarded a state “Honor Role” award for closing the achievement gap. The gap in public education are notable when students within a particular subgroup outperform those from another subgroup and the

gap is statistically significant. Additionally, the CVESD's turnover rate was significantly different from that of the SDUSD, having had only three superintendents in 22 years, far exceeding the average tenure of 24–36 months for superintendents (Glass, 2010).

The second school district was the San Diego Unified School District. For the past 20 years, the SDUSD has been at the forefront of national reform work in urban education, in part because the SDUSD is the second-largest urban school district in California and is in the top 10 largest in the nation. The SDUSD also made national headlines in 1998 when it implemented the now-infamous “Blue Print for Student Achievement” under the direction of Alan Bersin and Tony Alvarado.

In addition to the academic gains in these two districts, both districts also have been supported by parent groups and community activists. Each school district has been able to secure the support of voters. San Diego Unified had three major bonds passed and several questionable property sales; the most debated was a property in Mission Beach, where property is at a premium and costs of property on the Pacific Ocean and bay front are typically in the millions. The SDUSD has used these bonds in an effort to provide a quality school in every neighborhood. These bond funds have had community oversight through various committees and have been able to repair, renovate, revitalize, and build new district schools. These major projects have included technology (21<sup>st</sup>-century learning or i21 learning that is interactive) as well as safety upgrades, at both the site and district offices levels. These renovations have supported all learners, including following the Americans with Disabilities Act and new facilities for college, career, and technical education. Similarly, athletic fields and joint use (school district and city shared property) facilities have been modernized, and improvements have been realized.

The Chula Vista Elementary School District has also had several major bonds approved by voters, allowing the district to repair classrooms, outfit schools with air conditioning, update disability access ways, and modernize classrooms. Most recently, the CVESD secured a bond that allowed it to create facility improvements in 44 schools, updating computer laboratories, improving lighting, and creating “green” classrooms through more energy-efficient systems.

Table 3

*CVESD and SDUSD at a glance*

School district	Chula Vista Elementary School District	San Diego Unified School District
Enrollment	29,700	130,000
Number of schools	45	226
Title I	Yes	Yes
English language population	35%	26.5%
White	13.0	23.4
African American/African	4.0	10.2
Hispanic	68.0	46.5
Asian	3.0	3.3
Filipino	11.0	5.4
Other	1.0	11.0

After identifying school districts that would offer unique and similar perspectives in this study, I needed to determine if the superintendents would equally resonate with this study. The criteria for superintendent selection were initially based on the size, history, success of each district, and of course the selection of the school districts.

*Success* in this study was defined as having had instructional gains on both the state and

federal levels and having been recognized as models of forward thinking, teaching, and learning.

### **The Participating Superintendents**

I secured key informant superintendents. The first was the former superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District Bill Kowba, a non-traditional superintendent who spent the majority of his career life serving in the United States Navy, retiring as a rear admiral. His experience in the Navy would serve as a foundation for his superintendent leadership. Additionally, before becoming the commanding officer for the San Diego Unified School District, he served the SDUSD's chief financial officer, which would also serve as a foundation for his success as superintendent. After the school board terminated the contracts of three predecessors, Mr. Kowba was selected to lead the SDUSD during arguably the direst financial times the school district had ever faced. He endured troubled financial stability, numerous layoffs, and a declining budget, for which he had to get approval for the reduction of more than \$500 million in 4 years. This key informant offered rich information as to how he built and maintained relationships when other superintendents appeared less adept. He may have been a coincidental and unbelievable selection at the time, but his experience in both public and governmental entities proved very valuable for the San Diego Unified School District, which received the Broad Prize (awarded to districts that close the achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color) in 2013.

The second key informant, Dr. Francisco Escobedo, a traditional superintendent in contrast to Mr. Kowba, currently leads the largest K-5 school district in southern California, the Chula Vista Elementary School District. This key informant has more

than 26 years of educational experience as a teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent and is the current seated superintendent. He possesses a doctoral degree in educational leadership, which some consider a prerequisite for current superintendents, and has spent his entire leadership career in public education. It is also worth noting that prior to education he spent 2 years as a police officer, and this particular training and experience has served Dr. Escobedo well as he leads an instructional focus that aims to close the achievement gap for Latinos and language learners and change the trajectory for those who have been underrepresented in college and are overrepresented in the criminal system. His past experience in law enforcement serves as a constant reminder of education that is aimed at prevention versus law enforcement that sees the outcome of a failed system.

Dr. Escobedo served in various educational capacities that bring validity and understanding to the ways in which he thinks about relationships beyond his school district. Furthermore, compared with Mr. Kowba's, Dr. Escobedo's appointment was more controversial due to his previous relationships with some of the school board members he worked with in the South Bay Union School District prior to his most recent appointment. Dr. Escobedo offered information-rich data regarding leadership, disposition, ego, intentionality, and understanding as he builds and maintains relationships with school board members, particularly now, during a recent school board transition.

Table 4

*Superintendent participants*

Name	District	Education	Years in education	Years as superintendent	Previous positions
Dr. Francisco Escobedo	Chula Vista ESD	Ed.D. Educational Leadership	26	6	Charter school Police officer
Mr. Bill Kowba	San Diego USD	MA and MBA	8	4	Retired rear admiral U.S. Navy

In addition to Mr. Kowba's and Dr. Escobedo's perspectives and insights, school board members were interviewed to triangulate the data from the key informants. Each superintendent identified two school board members, either active or former board members, to participate in this study. I invited each of the school board members to participate informally and formally through personal contact and email communication. Based on the recommendations of the initial interviews of four school board members, I asked each of the initial four school board members to identify one school board member, either current or former, whom they served with who may have different views from theirs based on specific topics from the interviews with Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba. In other words, I interviewed additional board members. In one case, in the SDUSD, the request for participation was not responded to, and therefore not used (Appendix B).

Mr. Kowba served as superintendent in the San Diego Unified School District under three different school boards, and what he estimates as 13 different board members. During his 4 years as the permanent school superintendent, he was hired by one group of school board members and his tenure came to an end under a different group of school board members, although two school board members on the hiring school board remained. Similarly, in his 6 years as superintendent, Dr. Escobedo has experienced one change on the Chula Vista Elementary School District school board. In 2015, the CVESD saw three seats change as a result of the latest school board election. This change has created a different context for relationships that Dr. Escobedo and board members continue to work through as a collective team.

Two case studies proved worthy in this study, as the nuances and details of each superintendent and board member provided explicit examples and accounts of individual interactions that led to a tangible narrative for each case and a synergistic narrative of the cross-cases. I recognize that context matters and organizations maintain both practical and cultural constructs (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006); therefore, I wanted the stories and experiences of each participant to come alive through their interactions and experiences rather than frame the experience and provide them with a narrative to complete. This allowed data to emerge and discovery that would eventually design the script.

In understand the nuances of decision making and the essence of metacognitive strategies that align with leadership theory, educational training, and superintendent experiences (Hubbard et al., 2006), limited the number of cases and thus gained access to deeper thinking regarding their decision making within the context of each school

system. I was able to examine how relationships were crafted between each superintendent and their board members.

I will present the data and findings in order of the research questions. Question 1 focused on influences, complexities, and interactions between superintendents and school board members, and factors that impede these relationships. Question 2 focused on how superintendents think about their strategies and how they act out their relationships with school board members. Question 3 focused on training, background, and education experiences that support superintendents in building and maintaining relationships with school board members. Question 4 focused on the context that affects the relationships between superintendents and school board members.

### **Interactions That Influence Relationships**

In what ways do superintendents' interactions with school board members influence the building, strengthening, and/or maintaining of their relationship? The major purpose of this question was to explicate the mindfulness of superintendents as they work through interactions, the nuances and influences of relationships, how they manage themselves, how they create opportunities for board members, and what communication strategies they employ in order to effectively build and maintain relationships with school board members. I utilized this question as a way to have these two superintendents think about factors and supports that impede or advance the building and maintaining of relationships with school board members.

### **Relationships**

Relationships with school board members may be the single most important factor in superintendents' ability to sustain their positions. The importance of relationships

seems obvious, given that superintendents are hired by the board of education, are evaluated by the board of education, and ultimately are the only people who work directly for the board of education. Unfortunately for many superintendents, relationships are not directly part of their educational coursework and position preparedness. Former San Diego Unified School District superintendent Terry Grier's tenure in San Diego was short lived, and his relationships could easily be considered tumultuous. In a 2015 article in *School Administrator*, Grier suggested superintendents rarely consider that their relationships with boards and their members will affect their leadership. This question allowed me to seek perspectives on what these two superintendents and their respective board members believed were key considerations in how relationships were built and maintained.

As I sat with Dr. Escobedo in his office, I quickly understood that this superintendent was a man of honor, family, and faith. He was cordial, open, and willing to share his experiences, beliefs, and knowledge. He does not take his position lightly, nor does he take for granted the idea that he leads the largest K-5 school system in California. He is humble, soft spoken, and precise with his wording. His disposition allowed our discussion, focused on how he builds and maintains relationships to become intimate almost immediately. When asked about the importance of relationships and the responsibilities of a superintendent, Dr. Escobedo suggested that one of the main priorities of a superintendent is to build and maintain relationships: "Besides student achievement, it ranks at the top three. I would say number two, right before student achievement." He further suggested that he considers two layers, the one-on-one relationships with school board members and the group relationship. This study aimed to

discover ways in which superintendents accomplished this high priority. Dr. Escobedo explained how he builds and maintains relationships with board members:

You want to know what their passions are. You want to know why they're in that position, and what's relevant to them. . . . Those interests, those passions, are going to create a perspective in how they see your district, how they see education. Perception is reality. . . . You will find that each board member has their own reality. And so what you try to do, then, is with each individual board member, you try to marry your reality with their reality, and try to find common points, common intersects as well.

A key aspect of Dr. Escobedo's viewpoint and how he builds and maintains relationships has to be his ability to connect with each individual on a personal and professional level. While he recognized the ultimate responsibility of the superintendent and the school board, he aligned his personal perspective of building and maintaining relationships to his actions. Board member 5, who has extensive leadership training, gave the following as an example of how Dr. Escobedo has built and maintained relationships with school board members through monthly individual meetings:

I think what was great about those breakfast meetings is that it was a mixture or a combination of . . . business and personal. So we not only talked about what's happening in the schools and any kind of emergency situations that he was going through at the time that's coming up, that we should be aware of, but we also talked about, "How's your family? How's your wife?" We talked about faith. I mean, we had conversations that were as professionals, as both caring adults—towards improving student achievement.

Board member 5 noted that although he is not a board member any longer, he still receives calls from Dr. Escobedo suggesting the need to get together and "get something to eat." The relationships are so sincere that they continue on in genuine fashion beyond the walls of the district.

When I began my interviews with Mr. Kowba, he had retired as a superintendent, had retired as a rear admiral, and was now an avid gardener. He too underscored the

importance of building and maintaining relationships with school board members. While he was the superintendent of the second-largest school district in California, serving two different school boards, Mr. Kowba said, “I think it’s critical to appreciate why they are on the board, what they view their role on the board is and how they want to conduct business.” By understanding the school board’s philosophy and direction, Mr. Kowba believes, he was able to develop relationships that contributed to better decisions for the district, his ultimate goal. Both Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba agreed that building relationships in general and with the board of education individually and as a group assisted them in gaining insight as to what each member wanted.

Mr. Kowba said that the rapport between him and the board members supported the collective rapport of the group and ultimately helped his relationships with all board members: “It is critical that the superintendent have a very open and solid working rapport with the members of the board, and in the case of San Diego Unified it was with five members.” Board member 1 said, “The key factor was his directness and his honesty.” Mr. Kowba, like Dr. Escobedo, said he built rapport through getting to know the individual board members’ views, values, and priorities:

What I have found that worked best for me is if you deal with a leader who respects all the different elements of an organization, is accessible to the different components, treats each of them with fairness and with openness and presents a position where people can approach, tell their story, understand that it’ll be heard, accepted, or respected, and that’s critical.

Board member 2 said, “Bill really tapped into what you are about,” and discussed how important connections are when building and maintaining relationships with board members. He said that he could not imagine Mr. Kowba not doing this in the face of budgetary cuts and the confrontational nature of this crisis during Mr. Kowba’s tenure.

For these two superintendents, it is important to understand the governing board not only as individual board members and human beings, but also as a collective group that has its own dynamics.

### **Group Dynamics and the Board**

While building relationships with individual board members is one of Dr. Escobedo's top three aspects of the position of superintendent, according to Dr. Escobedo it was also important that he build relationships with all board members as a group. He suggested that, in addition to one-on-one relationships, "you're building a relationship with the board as a whole, the board as an entity. . . . There's . . . a group dynamic when you have five, seven board members together in one room." All four board members from the CVESD agreed, suggesting that ensuring the board functions as a whole was essential to the organization and the success of the district. Dr. Escobedo not only indicated the importance but also reminded me that there is a huge distinction between individual board members and the collective board as a whole: "You serve the board, but you don't serve individual board members. Big, big difference there." It is the board as a collective entity that makes decisions, not individual board members.

Recognizing that individual members attempt to utilize relationships to orchestrate power and decisions, superintendents must understand dynamics among board members. When challenges arise, individual board members may attempt to sway the collective will. Both superintendents recognized that school boards can be dysfunctional at times, and that unity of purpose can be hard to establish. These dynamics can often occur during difficult financial times, board election periods, and union negotiations.

Therefore, it is a superintendent's responsibility to further the development of both individual and collective relationships.

Dr. Escobedo said he takes these opportunities to utilize data-driven decision making in addressing district needs so that he is able to neutralize the individual agendas and focus on the group's mission and vision. Mr. Kowba also discussed the importance of knowing individual board members to orchestrate the collective board. He recognized the individualism of the board members and used that knowledge to advance collective board decision making:

When the staff put together a particular initiative, I would try to make sure that we were addressing the issues with an eye to how will that board member ... respond. I'd say well, that board member likes to know ... the financial elements. We need to beef up the dollar-and-cents side. Or this board member would be interested in testing results. What's the history on testing? So I tried to understand where they each had their differences, and would be most focused on a particular side of a program, and make sure that information was there.

Another strategy for building and maintaining relationships was honoring the school board members, especially in public. Several board members identified this as a strategy each superintendent believed in and used. As one board member said, "Edify school board members, and put them on a pedestal." Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo were more indirect than board members in discussing this strategy, but they nonetheless agreed that honoring the role and responsibility of school board members was important to building and maintaining relationships.

For example, Dr. Escobedo refers to the board members as "trustee" or "trustee A" and notes to schools ahead of time that trustees will be visiting, requesting that a parking spot is reserved and that the site is ready to receive him or her. Board member 5 said, "Dr. Escobedo would roll out the red carpet, so I think that was a part of building

relationships. We understood that he valued our opinion. And *he* valued our position.”

Mr. Kowba was often forward thinking, ensuring that board members joined him during school visits but also honoring their positions and providing space for trustees to visit schools anytime, with or without him.

This spirit of appreciation for board members contributes to understanding how Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo view the importance of their relationships with school board members. Both humble men with quiet demeanors, they are quite aware of their own inner thinking and suggest their work includes managing their egos.

### **Managing Ego**

Superintendents have often been tasked to be operational specialists, instructional leaders, business managers, and decision makers, all positions requiring a great deal of skill, knowledge, and will. The idea that one person could possibly perform all of the duties within one position is not only challenging but may hinder the reality of one’s leadership capacity and awareness of reality. This may in turn create a false sense of identity for superintendents or an inflated ego. This false sense of identity may prevent superintendents from listening, considering, and acknowledging board members’ views and thoughts and impede their ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members.

Ego management is require. A great deal of personal reflection can help. Sigmund Freud indicated that the ego was one part of our personality that engages the consciousness of our decision making. Since Freud, others have certainly agreed and extended this core view of ego, suggesting that there is more to the ego than the notion of conscious decision making. For example, Cook-Greuter suggests a continuum from

knowledge to wisdom whereby a large percentage of the population resides in the conventional mind where self-consciousness resides (Green, 2012). She also suggests there is a space of transcendental soul, where knowing is being. According to Boeree (2006),

The goal of life is to realize self. . . . When you get older (assuming you have been developing as you should), you focus a little deeper, on the self, and become closer to all people, all life, even the universe itself. The self-realized person is actually less selfish. (p. 10)

The role of the superintendent may be full of opportunities that challenge one's sense of self. In speaking with Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba, I quickly learned that both men maintain a very humble attitude with a clear sense of self. Board member 1 said of Mr. Kowba managing his ego, "Well, it was just always done in a very factual, matter-of-fact sort of way; he wasn't making emotional arguments," and suggested that he was a great listener and "the great simplifier," able to summarize and synthesize information in strategic support of the board members. Board member 7 said of Dr. Escobedo, "He's not arrogant in any way." Board member 3 said of Mr. Kowba, "He's a great human being, a good man. And served our country honorably. And I admire those traits in him."

Both superintendents recognize themselves as servants for something greater than themselves, maintain family values, and understand that the role does not or did not define them. Dr. Escobedo remarked, "You know, your life is more than your job." Mr. Kowba found the superintendency was the most difficult job he ever had. In order to manage his ego, he said,

I think that you are going to have your ups and downs. . . . And I think that you try not to reinvent yourself. You have to be honest and authentic to yourself. When times and situations are difficult, some can lose themselves and I think that I tried to make sure that I didn't deviate.

He also utilized his executive team and would often ask them to “kick him” under the table if he was letting emotion overcome a stable, manageable approach to doing things.

Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba both said they turned to their respective wives to manage their ego. “My wife was my great first counselor,” said Mr. Kowba. “And I would talk to her, and she would remind me of who I was.” For Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba, managing the ego part of self is critical, complex, and manageable. They both discussed the importance of disallowing the ego to get in the way of the work, relationships, and the ability to maintain communication with school board members. They emphasized the importance of not allowing one’s feelings to interfere, noting that superintendents should avoid making decisions simply because they think it is the right way to go. Dr. Escobedo indicated there may be times when disagreements take place, and these occurrences may be often, but superintendents have to accept where individuals are coming from, and in the end the group’s decision is most important. Mr. Kowba agreed with Dr. Escobedo’s sentiment and indicated that whatever decision is made, one should respectfully follow it: “At the end of the day, it’s a democratically run organization in the sense elected board members are making decisions. I would defer to the board’s final decision on what they voted on.”

While the superintendents recognized the need to manage their egos, two board members from the CVESD board were not so quick to suggest that managing ego was necessary because ego did not exist, at least in Dr. Escobedo’s case. In fact, one board member 7 suggested he may be “just the kind of person that doesn’t have an ego,” while board member 5 said, “From my perspective, he doesn’t have a big ego.” Dr. Escobedo said,

There is the balance of ego and not ego. ‘Cause you have to show that you are in command, you know. So you can’t live without that ego, in a way . . . command presence. You’ve got to have that. So when I’m out on the dais, or I’m in front of principals, hey, I run the show. . . . You have to have that air of confidence. So it’s almost a double-edged sword. And how you’re able to use that double-edged sword, as a weapon of defense and of offense, is critical.

Along the same lines, Mr. Kowba said, regarding whether ego affects a superintendent, “Yeah, it can. I think it can. I’m of the opinion that ego can hurt or hinder an individual.”

Recognizing ego is critical, but how one manages it is more critical. Dr. Escobedo suggested change is necessary, particularly when a school board changes. When the board’s composition and context change, a superintendent has to change, “and if you don’t, it will kill you.” Dr. Escobedo’s comment further suggests the importance of figuratively staying alive. Dr. Escobedo said, he believes the number one challenge that he sees for many superintendents is their inability to change when a new board is elected. “They allow their ego to destroy them,” and the entire relationship can “blow up.”

Dr. Escobedo detailed how he builds and maintains relationships with school board members through managing his ego by describing a time of fiscal conservation, salary negotiations, increased health care, and consistent political processes while the union simultaneously wanted significant raises, 10% at the time. The district proposed 7%, understanding that health benefits were increased in favor of the employees. However, he noted, during negotiations, “People’s feelings get hurt, especially at board meetings.” Some teachers said some derogatory things, either to a board member or to him directly. He recognized that these criticisms could be damaging to one’s ego:

I had to put my own [ego] aside and make sure the board was at a place where they can think rationally. They were getting so angry at the teachers. Not all; just a few. And I said, “Look, this is just a game that they play.” I even shared with them [the California Teachers Association’s] rule book, of what they do, and how they do it. The first thing they try to do is attack the integrity of the board. They question them, and they . . . you know, they just try to split people.

By understanding the group and in his ability to educate the board members on the strategy of the union, he was able to get the board to a place of functioning. His ability to manage his ego in the face of adversity was critical to the vision:

You have to make sure that you’re able to think in a rational and caring way. Because when ego gets involved, it’s fight or flight. Because you get angry, because how dare they? Or I’m tired of this; I don’t want to even spend time with being a board member. Whatever the case may be. So during those times of great trials [there are] are times you really have to work on ego.

In order to support his metacognition and in the process of managing his ego, Dr.

Escobedo gives board members talking points. He shares the way he will communicate and provides suggestions for how he believes they, as board members, need to respond.

Another critical strategy to managing ego is in what each superintendent chooses to do outside of the role of superintendent. Each agreed that work/life balance is difficult, but both made sure to spend time away from the role, maintaining a level of groundedness. Mr. Kowba spent time with family, where he is a father, a husband, and a gardener. Dr. Escobedo is also a husband and a father, and he spends time doing charitable work. These two men demonstrate a strategy that has proven valuable to their success in building and maintaining relationships with school board members: Know oneself, understand and manage one’s ego, and have interests that sustain one’s humility and provide space to let go.

### **Educate the Board of Education**

Both superintendents agreed that one way to strategically build and maintain relationships with a school board is through education. As board members come into the public sector, they need to grow their own knowledge of systems, leadership, and how education works. Board member 8 commented that it is important to educate the board, realizing most board members do not have an education background and “board members are not there every single day. We don’t know the day-to-day operations.”

Considering time on task for school board members helps demonstrate the importance of education for school board members. The typical time on task for educators is approximately 40 hours per week for approximately 38 weeks, totaling approximately 1,500 hours of work focused on education. Extending this algorithm to administrators, including superintendents, the total number of hours increases to approximately 2,500 hours focused on education-related topics per year. But school board members, who attend one or two board meetings per month (averaging 10 to 20 meetings a year at an average of 4 hours), perhaps a few community meetings (averaging 10 formal visits at 2 hours), and perhaps some site visits (averaging 20 at 2 hours each), may accumulate only 100 to 180 hours of focus on education topics in formal settings per year. Understanding this disparity provides great reasoning behind the strategy of educating school board members to build and maintain relationships.

Mr. Kowba believes group relationships become stronger when they have accurate and adequate information to process and develop achievable outcomes. While individual opportunities provide structure to relationship building, Mr. Kowba found that his ability to provide a clear path for decisions was an important aspect of the success of

policy development by the school board. He indicated that there must be a reasonable level of understanding in order to achieve productive conversations that eventually lead to productive outcomes. His strategy included maintaining a high level of information, based on aspects that board members needed to know versus detailing every aspect of the work. This provides the board members with talking points, if they are questioned on the dais or in public. According to Mr. Kowba,

If they understand the big picture and they can connect the dots, then they'll be informed decision makers. . . . I think a productive board, an efficient board, is one that doesn't go off on a detour or on a tangent. I think a mature and effective board won't allow itself to be trapped in minutia. So high level, big picture, global thinking is where you want them to be.

Mr. Kowba referred to his role as the senior leader: If the school board trusts his information and believes he is supporting them, the relationship becomes stronger. A superintendent must validate topics, align the discussion with the mission, and provide key information to board members that is relevant to the topics being discussed. Some board members in this study said they believe educating the board is essential to building and maintaining relationships, suggesting that superintendents who come forward with their own ideology and ways of operating are often viewed as intimidating and inflexible. Such an attitude and behavior can jeopardize any existing relationships. The board members may feel as though the superintendent is pushing against them instead of working with them. Additionally, if board members do not have specific background knowledge, they may need additional information in order to have good discussions and make sound decisions.

Board member 6 was supportive of Dr. Escobedo's strategy in this regard:

Even when ideas are questioned he'll explain this is . . . how we've done it, for five or six years he's been there. And then we might say well, we want to change that. But at least it explains why something's happening a certain way.

Again, Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba were clear that they must educate the board, share their knowledge beliefs and views, and provide all of the available information to the board members, but in the end, they will carry out and lead in the direction of the vote.

Both superintendents indicated that professional development is critical.

Opportunities for professional development allow superintendents and school boards to develop values and beliefs in order to have one vision, one voice, and ultimately synergy around the school district's mission. Dr. Escobedo, for instance, found two specific opportunities to educate school board members. First, he uses the California School Boards Association (CSBA). Second, he uses his school district attorney. School district attorneys, often known as general counsels, serve the school boards as well: "My attorney Peter Fagen has done a lot of work educating boards in the area of roles and responsibilities, the area of the Brown Act, and, of course, in the area of . . . Form 700." Form 700 is the document that school board members and district executive staff must complete establishing the process for receiving gifts. With regard to CSBA, Dr. Escobedo indicated it has opportunities for boardsmanship, budget sessions, human resources, and particularly the roles and responsibilities of school board members: "So I've used CSBA strategically . . . to bring my board together, to be part of a class so we could all professionally grow together."

But such strategies are not particularly successful unless school board members agree to participate. In this study, an overwhelming number of the respondents indicated that education, professional development, and informing the school board members were

valuable. Board member 5, in the CVESD, recalled, “I came on in February. By March, I was automatically enrolled in the CSBA . . . And it was done in such a way I thought oh, that’s just what everyone does.” He quickly realized this was not what everyone does.

Board member 6, who is relatively new, indicated that the mandate has become much more of an opportunity:

I think all of us have attended the [CSBA] new board member orientation. . . . [The annual CSBA conference is] another way that Dr. Escobedo has fostered the relationship with the board members. . . . He always makes sure that he’s there at the conference as well.

Mr. Kowba did the same for the SDUSD governing board. Newly elected board members were invited to the CSBA conference, and Mr. Kowba would regularly ask board members what help they needed, what aspects of the work were still confusing, and what aspects of the business and academics still remained in question.

In addition to educating the board on policy, procedures, roles, and responsibilities, Dr. Escobedo described individual growth and collective development as essential: “What we do is we have book studies. And we really try to learn together. Typically, the books aren’t about educational leadership, but leadership in general. And so we are always trying to learn more.” This approach embodies learning and makes it clear that the core mission of the district is focused on learning.

Dr. Escobedo said that in order for him to educate and develop others, he too must take on professional growth and learning. Therefore, he has sought out Chula Vista organizational psychologist Dr. Ernie Mendes as a personal coach. According to Dr. Escobedo, Dr. Mendes helps him think about how to build effective teams and work through managing challenging personalities. Dr. Escobedo attributed much of his ability to educate, coach, and study with his board to the influence of his personal coach.

Mr. Kowba indicated educating board members was a major task for him, especially during the Great Recession, when much of the talk was about finances. Board members would often come in thinking all reduction of finances were the same. Mr. Kowba found board members to be genuine and well intentioned but often uninformed, so he would often provide learning opportunities for the school board, including a series of presentations. Board members would receive notebooks and have opportunities to sit with district staff to review, for example, the budget. This was a difficult time, and board members in the SDUSD needed to learn so much before they could make informed decisions. Thus, professional learning was an ongoing process. Mr. Kowba often found himself and Phil Stover, the chief business officer, sitting down and talking with each board member about facilities, construction bonds, food service, and transportation in an attempt to get them to understand the complexities.

Board members from both the SDUSD and the CVESD indicated that Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo would go to whatever source they needed to in order to provide the information being requested by school board members. This suggests there are other modalities to educate the board beyond the larger professional development contexts. One board member said, “We should always be thinking that the superintendent makes sure the board is informed, and they know that they can reach out to him and talk with him.” Ongoing learning strategies connect to other strategies, such as board workshops, that will be discussed in a later section.

### **Communication: Interactions With the Board Members**

Despite the fact that the professional development opportunities help shape the collective’s views, vision, and mission, there remains the need to maintain the energy that

was created in professional learning settings. School boards have formal meetings at least once per month, but in addition superintendents must utilize other strategies to maintain the individual and collective voices. This has presented each superintendent in this study the opportunity to build group relationships that are essential to the overall relationships they work to maintain with their trustees.

Both Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba expressed the importance of their communication as well as the communication between their executive cabinet members and the school board members. Board member 8 agreed, suggesting he would have initiated even more communication in the beginning of his board tenure had he known how important communication is. According to Dr. Escobedo, these communication pathways are not forms of one-directional communication but are two-way and they provide opportunities to assist him with his accuracy when communicating with the school board members. He suggested that communication must be honest, forthright, and ever growing. He said he often says to his cabinet, “Hey, you guys. I never want you to be a ‘yes’ person. I think I screwed this up. What did I do wrong, and where do we go from here, to mitigate the damage?” This is an example of using communication to develop coherence for the school board members and among his executive cabinet.

Another strategy Dr. Escobedo uses to build and maintain relationships with school board members is honoring the process of communication. Dr. Escobedo continuously reflects and is willing to revise something if the process was not followed and the vision was not aligned. For example, one case involved a Project Labor Agreement (PLA). A PLA is a prenegotiated collective bargaining contract that sets uniform rules about pay and health care, typically for a specific project. Unfortunately,

Dr. Escobedo submitted the board item as an action item for approval. The problem was he had not communicated before attempting to move forward. The board did not like that and did not support the item. So Dr. Escobedo reflected, communicated his haste, made sure the community was involved, and did due diligence the second time, and when the PLA came forward again, the item passed.

For Dr. Escobedo, communication is not only necessary but a very calculated strategy that he thinks through constantly: “Communication and preparing your board is critical. Board members do not like surprises. Not only do you talk to your cabinet, but you talk to each board member as well.” In order to fulfill this strategy, he communicates with his cabinet on board items that may create some passionate discourse from the public and then informs each board member of the topic and his thoughts on what may occur. Finally, he gives each board member talking points that they may choose to use.

Board member 7 emphasized Dr. Escobedo’s commitment to communicating strategically with board members:

I think part of it is his willingness to meet with people, and talk to people and get involved. Not only through the board updates, but if there was something that needed to be communicated right away, he’d definitely make sure to call us, or text message us.

Similar to Dr. Escobedo, Mr. Kowba said, “I have to do all I can to communicate effectively and work effectively with all the members of the board as individuals, but even more importantly, with them as a collective decision-making body.” He said he spent much of his time communicating with board members or with senior staff preparing for communication with board members:

As the superintendent, [one] must understand the perspectives of the individuals and also the shared or working common perspective of the governing board, and keeping them informed, and they keeping him informed, and working through a

very manageable routine of data-collection-review decision making that flows across the school year, not only this one but in the ones that follow.

Board member 1 said that for Mr. Kowba, “Those first few years there were an inordinate amount of meetings, and workshops and crisis meetings and budget planning, to kind of get through that all,” in addition to “lots of other conversations on the phone and in person, on the weekend and that type of thing.” Board member 2 said that Mr.

Kowba would conduct

Regular one-on-ones with board members. . . . The board at this time was pretty divided. . . . Very strong personalities, all five of us. So Bill put in the time. There were never any surprises. During the tough decisions especially, Bill spent a lot of time working with us one on one to prepare us, to at least understand the decisions we had to make.

The interviews indicated these superintendents strategically and purposefully worked to communicate and align commonalities between themselves and board members and within board members, making efforts to unify the school board, identify dysfunction, and create a collegial and respectful decision-making board. Not only is the strategy of communication critical, but also how they elect to communicate is essential to building and maintaining relationships with school board members.

**BOE workshops.** These meetings can be somewhat trickier, not because of schedules, but because of policies and procedures set forth by the Brown Act. The Brown Act is the process by which the both the SDUSD and the CVESD boards of education operate. It prevents more than two board members from meeting together, except for official board meetings. The understanding is somewhat based on the idea of needing three members (a quorum) to pass an agenda item, creating a more fair democratic process. Therefore, if the board members wish to meet, they must call to order board workshops, closed session meetings, or open session meetings. Both superintendent used

all forums, but they particularly discussed the advantages of the board workshops in maintaining relationships.

Mr. Kowba said that while he valued each board member and had a deep understanding of their views, intentions, and political perspectives, he also understood the context and political nature of the SDUSD and that each member of the board represented the whole district as well as his or her individual clusters. Therefore, he recognized the need to utilize collective forums as well as individual forums for him to interact with the members of the school board. These forums afforded him the opportunity to further develop relationships through listening and observing how the board members managed and encouraged him to respond to their political agendas. While he utilized multiple collective forums to build relationships, he indicated workshops were a significantly better platform:

When we have a workshop, there are only a small number of topics that require an open-ended conversation, and it can't be done downstairs in an auditorium filled with people. But you may not know what the board's perspective is on an issue so you're giving them a chance to speak up as individuals, but in a group gathering you can see how they validate each other's thoughts and come to some consensus. This is a time . . . to educate the members of the board on the topics and clarify their understanding without the constant barrage of people speaking in a typical board meeting.

Mr. Kowba used these workshops for open-ended conversations that were helpful for him to build and maintain relationships. Dr. Escobedo utilized the same opportunities to approach his relationships differently: "Well, for board workshops, I try to be a listener, a teacher, because either they're there, or they're new board members. I try to question. . . . I take more of a teacher role and a listener." Mr. Kowba also suggested listening is a key strategy. He categorized his relationship with the board as reciprocal,

meaning he shared his views and values with each school board member and connected his views to key points of a discussion.

Mr. Kowba also described the strategy of transparency and suggested this too was an integral part of communicating with board members:

What the school board wants to do is exercise their collective authority and accountability to make good decisions. I have got to have a relationship with each of them to help them become informed decision makers. They must know me as well as I know them. I can't be in there blind guessing at what it is they've put at the top of their agenda or platform, and they can't guess mine.

Mr. Kowba led the SDUSD when it faced, arguably, the most difficult budget crisis in its history. Relationships were a critical part of leading through this difficult time, and Mr. Kowba employed listening and board workshops as strategies to maneuver very difficult waters: "I think the better understanding we have of each other, the better we are prepared to make better decisions, and it's critical that the relationship be open and transparent and honest and credible." Mr. Kowba indicated that his process of listening allowed perspectives to emerge from each board member, saying that sometimes he would not take notes so he could focus on each word and give the members the sense that what they were saying mattered. This also allowed him to hone in on "absolute" wording and views and angles to certain topics. Unfortunately, open board meetings do not have the provisions for this level of interaction as board workshops do, so each superintendent must be strategic and judicial in deploying such strategies within specific contexts.

Board workshops are also different from open session board meetings in that the structure is much more relaxed, there are no action items, and they are certainly more interactive for the public. Although the Brown Act is still followed, board workshops are usually limited in the number of items, and there are no preconceived expectations of

action. According to board member 6, “During those special meetings, we kind of discuss some of the background information- background information that might be important.” A workshop is a forum to provide more information to board members. Both superintendents frequently had workshops on the budget, which is a topic that piques the public’s interest, has school board ramifications, and brings into question a superintendent’s integrity, making it ripe for a board workshop strategy. Additionally, these superintendents utilized board workshops to discuss topics that would not otherwise be on the agenda.

Moreover, workshops typically have been based on board members letting the public know, “This is what we want to know about.” This has provided Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo a platform for strategic planning and informing, engaging board members in a dialogue full of questions and conversations with each other, and with the cabinet, which provides the board members high-level access to the district work that happens daily. Dr. Escobedo said,

I’ve used the power of the special board meeting when we have study sessions where I am able to bring the board together in public forum. We use that time to discuss cultural aspects of the organization, to discuss their thoughts and their perception, so then they can get to understand other board members’ thoughts and thinking. It is a time where we can have open dialogue because there is no action items, it’s all informational. And it’s two-way and they push each other’s thinking. But those special board meetings, those study sessions, have been very, very critical.

Board member 6 described a struggle with understanding some of the aspects of the budget, calling it overwhelming, and recalled how Dr. Escobedo provided time to meet with the finance director and receive answers and clarify the process:

It was just such a large amount of money, first of all. And then, for me, restrictions on how you can use it. I’d look at the budget and I’d be, like, *A thousand dollars for that!* And to [district staff] they’re like, a thousand dollars?

It's like, nothing. But as a teacher, I always think of it as a teacher, and I'd ask, if I had a thousand dollars in my classroom, I could . . . , and yet at the level of the district, a thousand dollars, on its own, was not a big deal.

These sentiments are directly aligned to what the superintendents identified as a serious need for educating board members through workshops and other avenues beyond the school board meetings. Sometimes the complexities of board meetings and in some cases workshops too are not necessarily the best forum. Therefore, an even more intimate forum is necessary. The two superintendents in this study both suggested the importance of holding regular and frequent meetings with board members.

**Weekly updates and one-on-one meetings.** Each superintendent and every school board member discussed the strategy of weekly updates or one-on-one meetings in order for superintendents to build and maintain relationships with school board members. In fact, all but one suggested these were critical. But board member 3 remarked that while one-on-one meetings occurred with Mr. Kowba, these meetings were not productive because there was no follow-through on the superintendent's behalf.

According to Mr. Kowba, individual meetings provided time, support, and direction as board members needed. He offered up to each an opportunity, at their convenience, to sit down and talk one on one,

to allow them a direct, unfiltered interface with me. To get to know them and what their particular concerns, priorities, desires might be. Let's face it, whether it's a governing board of five people or nine people or some number, they've all joined a board of education for some particular purposes, and have a style about them about how they want to achieve these visions or purposes.

Mr. Kowba mentioned that this strategy allowed for "no surprises" in order to build trust, which is another way to build and maintain relationships. Occasionally, these meetings

were more frequent, particularly with two board members who were board officers and facilitated the school board meeting.

Dr. Escobedo immediately identified one-on-one meetings as a priority for him to familiarize himself with each board member: “I meet with [board members] one on one, and those are critical. Every month I talk to them about what we’re going to go over during the board meetings.” He said he makes sure to inquire about any items or ideas he needs to be aware of on their behalf. He also uses a phone call process to touch base with board members at least once a month. He seeks further understanding on issues and asks about any questions they may have on the upcoming agenda. In addition to meeting with each board member one on one monthly, he meets with his board president, who is the leader of the board of education, “almost once a week”: “The president and I . . . we have to be very close.” The information gathered during the one-on-one meetings is used to help build and shape the board agenda items, prepare staff for informational items, and prepare for the possibility of pulling agenda items.... A Board member working with Dr. Escobedo said,

Each month, before a board meeting, and then a week before the board meeting, and sometimes within that week, we’ll meet and he’ll ask if I have any questions about the agenda, anything else coming up? And I think a lot of that, he’s told me, is so that at the board meeting if those questions come up, he’ll have the answers. He’ll know and he can anticipate and have the data for us.

### **Trust and “No Surprises”**

As with most relationships, establishing or extending trust is crucial. But which comes first, relationships or trust? Trust was an aspect these two superintendents attributed to their ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members. While there appears to be afforded trust from board members who hire a superintendent,

school boards in transition pose a challenge. However, the superintendents in this study built trust, and the evidence is in the descriptions from their board members. They described, not only their feelings, but the strategies and actions each superintendent used to build trust. As board member 6 of the Chula Vista Elementary School District said,

I feel like he's honest with me, because when I'm meeting with him and I ask questions, he'll say, *I don't know, and I'll get you the answer*, instead of just making up something, cause he could, and I would believe it, but it's nice to have that feeling of trust.

A response from board member 1 of the same district shows the duality of trust and relationships:

I think it's creating a structure of trust . . . that goes both ways. . . . So in our one-on-ones, the superintendent will share challenges that he or she has, in this case, is having with other school board members. That's something that has to be really trusted to share. So my role is, I want him to be as successful as possible. . . . And then my next thing I would do, without telling him, is I'd plan coffee with that board member. Because it's different, board member to board member. And I would talk to that board member about that problem. . . . That's how we set up boundaries and rules and guidelines around how we were going to engage with each other. It was built around mutual trust and respect, on building the relationship.

Additionally, other board members explained that if a board does not trust the superintendent, the members are always checking to see if the requests from the board actually materialize. These are instances where trust is won or lost. Mr. Kowba said his credibility was enhanced and the relationship he had with the trustees was strengthened when he provided the most current information to the trustees so they could make the best decisions on behalf of the district. Board member 1 agreed: "I think at the schools and out in the community, he had a very high level of credibility." Mr. Kowba recognized he did not always have to have the information firsthand, so he also prepared

his senior leadership team so they could provide valuable information as well. His ability to utilize senior leaders also helped him support his relationships with the trustees.

Relationships and trust are continuous, requiring nurturing, time, and acknowledgment. Dr. Escobedo explained that these two aspects are indeed a process. Board member 6 explained that Dr. Escobedo told the board, “It’s a process. And it still took us a while to agree. And ultimately, I got it. If we don’t trust the people that are doing the work, then it’s not going to work.” Trust for these superintendents is built on accuracy of information, seeking clarity on topics, follow-through, and an ongoing process of interaction. This requires superintendents to be approachable and available for the board, which requires time, dedication, and understanding.

Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo both discussed the importance of diplomacy, in different contexts. While diplomacy as a strategy for building relationships that are grounded in trust may appear nebulous, it has the potential for huge implications. Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo identified one strategy as necessary and in some ways taboo: not measuring their performance against those of their predecessors. Mr. Kowba said he has never and never will compare himself to those who came before him. He said he is committed not to speak ill about people and certainly not his predecessors, nor their leadership strategies and decisions. Dr. Escobedo agreed, simply stating, “I don’t believe in that; I don’t want to talk about my predecessor.”

### **Aspects of Leadership**

What influences the superintendents’ metacognition as they contemplate the approaches they deploy to build and maintain relationships with their school boards?

## **Know Thyself**

Before one can think about how to engage others, it is vital that the individual knows oneself and what is the best way to organize their life to be effectively engaged in their work. Each board member and both superintendents shared the belief that it was important to be grounded and to understand their role in engaging with school board members. Dr. Escobedo acknowledged the importance of gaining knowledge about each board member so he could maneuver with them as they lead the district for students. He said he knows he is all in when it comes to himself and understanding his core values. When asked about knowing himself, he said that he believes in “having an imbalance in life”:

So when I’m at work, it’s 120%, but when I’m home, it’s 120%. So you gotta be imbalanced. I try not to take work at home at all. So if I stayed late, I’ll try to stay late here [in the office] and do what I need to get done. It’ll never get completely done. Obviously, there are crises that may happen, and things may permeate my home, but I try to keep that to a minimum.

While he defines this strategy as imbalance, he certainly knows who he is and what he needs in his life to accomplish his goals. However, he recognizes that working long hours takes a toll on one’s life. Mr. Kowba also indicated that he worked 6 days per week during his tenure with the district. Both superintendents suggested that, as a superintendent, one must find out what one enjoys doing in life. Dr. Escobedo said, “Me, I love being out with nature and doing things with my hands. I have a spiritual side in me as well, where I meditate and pray.” He also said, “Family is crucial.” Board member 5 perceives Dr. Escobedo to be grounded:

I think Dr. Escobedo is a man of faith. And I think he’s very introspective. And I think he’s very attuned to his position as superintendent, and the role and influence he carries with others. So therefore, I think he’s very cautious, but kind. So I think it all comes down to having wisdom.

Dr. Escobedo shared his strategy for self-awareness, describing how he thinks about his goals and what he needs to engage in to create time and space for these matters:

I try to ensure that I am working on those goals. So at my desk I have these goals laid out. And I really begin consciously thinking of what activities am I going to involve myself in so I can get these personal goals done.

This understanding of himself connected to his goals and the district goals in turn supports the idea that school board members develop trust in relationships when there is follow-through. Dr. Escobedo said, “You have to be conscious in life. [Otherwise,] instead of you orchestrating life, life will orchestrate you.”

Another strategy that both superintendents are keenly aware of while working to develop relationships with school board members is the practice of reflection. Board members suggested each superintendent is very self-reflective. Both have an ongoing practice of checking in with themselves as actions unfold and dynamics shift. Dr. Escobedo suggested,

I have to be very self-reflective because sometimes, when you’re a superintendent, you feel that you can’t make mistakes, or you’re free from making mistakes. And that’s ‘cause everyone tries to rationalize why certain things happen a certain way. That’s where humility comes in. *What did I do, where did I screw up?* So what I try to do is really be reflective of why something happened. Almost go back in time, to see *what—what step did I miss?*

Mr. Kowba submitted this as a form of metacognition:

I think you can do a couple things. One, we can let it play itself out, and hear out, completely, what’s going on. And maybe close that meeting out and say we didn’t get where we wanted to be. I think that we need to do some homework. Maybe I do, maybe you do, maybe all of us need to do—and regroup. I remember, also, The Pause. Let’s take a break now. It was okay to stop a meeting if it wasn’t productive. Or if it was going in a direction where we did not have information, or the right people in the room, or something. And I think sometimes that’s hard to do. But I think you have to have the courage to do it.

Superintendents must be able to identify, for themselves, where they screwed up, share that they have screwed up, push the pause button, and ask for assistance on improving the particular matter. It may be difficult, as Mr. Kowba submitted, but it is a necessary strategy to build and further maintain relationships with others.

### **Understand Your Role**

Micromanagement is a topic of discussion in many circles regarding superintendent and school board relationships, and this study was no different.

Superintendents and school board members agreed that micromanagement is possible due to the lack of experience of board members, lack of leadership in superintendents, and a combination of pressure, agendas, inconsistency, limited communication, and ignorance.

They also agreed that there are clearly defined roles that must be followed, nurtured, and at times dealt with directly. Board member 2 indicated that board members, who for the most part have to have other jobs, should not be trying to micromanage the district.

Thus, the need to delineate the roles and responsibilities, understand, and adhere to them, is a key component of maintaining relationships between school boards and superintendents. An Escobedo board member stated,

Superintendents, I believe, leave because the board micromanages the superintendent's every step, that's one. . . . If you want to push a superintendent out, that's one way to do it. The second thing, I believe, is that the board is instructing the superintendent to go in a direction the superintendent doesn't want to go into, or to implement an idea that really will bring harm and damage to students, long term. I think those are the two central components.

Each participant described similar roles and responsibilities for school board members and superintendents, and offered suggestions for the two working in tandem.

Unfortunately, when these roles and responsibilities are not followed, relationships are affected.

Participants described the board of education as a governing body within a school district that sets policy. In addition, the school board has the responsibility to make sure the policies and procedures that are established by the school board are carried out and executed correctly by the superintendent. When asked about his role, Mr. Kowba responded,

I think the superintendent is the senior professional who ensures that the day-to-day operations of the school district are properly followed in accordance with state education codes. . . . I think a second chunk of his time is managing relationships with the board, and decision making. I've had some superintendents tell me their first job was managing the board. I kind of viewed it as a dual path: day-to-day operations, getting the staff and all that's involved with that focused properly. And I think the other piece is dealing with the board. And dealing with the board is educating, informing, and trying to focus them on the things that we need to do at the highest executive level.

An Escobedo school board member shared that the board of education creates the vision and the superintendent carries out the vision, as the superintendent works for the board of education. Dr. Escobedo also said he believes his role and responsibilities are clear. First and foremost, he “serves the board.” He connected this to what he believes the roles and responsibilities are for the school board: “I execute the vision of the school board. They set the mission for me.” Board member 8 suggested the role of the superintendent is to be the captain of the ship, and to ensure that each department runs smoothly. The superintendent must handle issues swiftly and develop relationships with district departments and the employee unions. Board member 1 said Mr. Kowba understood that “he takes direction from the board. And what the board decides is what he will implement.”

The superintendents and board members suggested the superintendent must understand the roles and responsibilities, recognize group dynamics, have difficult

conversations with board members, ensure the board has all of the updated information in order to make informed decisions, include board members in conversations that may escalate in a public forum, maintain the organization's inner workings, and lead the instructional improvement process of the school district. One board member serving with Dr. Escobedo said,

I think the superintendent's role is to oversee the school district. And to be the manager, not the micromanager. When I say "oversee," he's definitely the boss, and he's in control. But at the same time he allows his cabinet or any superintendent should allow the executive director or the assistant superintendent to fulfill their role. But he has to make sure that everything that's being done is being done the right way. . . . And I think part of his role is to step in if there are situations, for example, between a teacher and a principal, and to make sure that the right thing is always being done.

Other board members said they believe the role of the superintendent is to be a communicator, politician, instructional leader, mediator, human capital manager, financial planner, and school district ambassador.

Dr. Escobedo shared two key aspects that distinguish his role. First, he sees the importance of board stewardship. He said he understands the importance of being able to support the board's vision when there are challenges among the group, realizing he must facilitate the group, particularly when board members move away from their roles and responsibilities: "Board members may try to influence your cabinet to do their bidding. And when you have fragmentation of roles and responsibilities that can be very unhealthy for the organization." Therefore, Dr. Escobedo often reverts to another practical strategy that he uses early and often: professional development. In other situations, he suggested, his role is more of an ambassador, one who sets the stage for the board members to showcase. For example, "When I do press conferences, I am more of an ambassador for

the district and try to provide the time to set the stage for board members to be showcased.”

Showcasing is a vital aspect of superintendent leadership and can certainly assist superintendents in building and maintaining relationships. A necessary component to showcasing and setting the stage for superintendent and school board relationships are site visits. Dr. Escobedo explained that although he recognizes he is an ambassador, he is keenly aware that one aspect of his role is supervision. He insists on making sure that students and staff have the best learning environments. He also strategically uses site visits to connect with teachers to find out how to best serve them. This is very strategic, as many board members in the CVESD have been supported by the teachers’ union. Dr. Escobedo said, “I do take different angles, depending on the setting, depending on my purpose, really.” This was an aspect that Mr. Kowba did not address, but board member 1 did: “He [Mr. Kowba] would regularly visit the schools and see what they were doing. I was very impressed even though he wasn’t an academic person. He was impressed by what they were doing, and very much supportive of what was going on.”

### **Alignment and Alliance**

The topic of Alignment and alliance was a difficult one to pinpoint as this theme was cross thematic in ideas and data. Perhaps defining roles and responsibilities of superintendents and school board members is complex, interconnected, multifaceted, and dependent on context and human frameworks. While the superintendents in this study suggested that there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities, it was clear that they must be masterful in negotiating their roles in order to support the building and

maintaining of relationships with school board members through alignment and alliance.

Board member 6 who worked with Dr. Escobedo said,

I do think that it's a team effort. I think you could make an argument for saying the board [runs the district], because they're setting the policy. But the day-to-day, and making sure everything is running is the superintendent. You need both of those for it to run smoothly.

Board member 7 could not agree more:

I think it should be cohesive. If [it is] not, then I think that's where problems develop, and maybe there isn't a lot of movement. I guess, to me, the way that [superintendents and school boards] interact most is, the board is setting the policy, the direction that they want to see the school board go in, and then the superintendent's role, from my perspective, is to . . . make that happen. And the board isn't going to say, "This is how it has to get done." But the board, in my mind and in my experience, says, "This is what we'd like to see happen. And, superintendent, you figure out how you can get that; how you can do that." . . . If the superintendent thinks that what the board wants to do is kind of way out there, then I think that would make it very difficult for the board members and the superintendent to get along.

Understanding the need for coherence, both superintendents utilized strategies to construct alignment and alliance. These strategies assisted them in building and maintaining relationships. This is certainly a metacognitive process for both.

Another strategy used within alignment and alliance is the evaluation process, which if used strategically, can be a masterful lubricant for a tenuous machine. Dr. Escobedo said, "As a board, they decide, you know, what the goals are. And that's pretty much the vision and the mission of the school, of the district. So that evaluation process is critical." The evaluation process is so critical that Dr. Escobedo uses the evaluation reports as a strategy to communicate with the school board:

Every month at our board meeting we have a report that focuses on how we're progressing on those goals. It's not something they're going to get at the end of the year. They've been getting a little bit of dose every board meeting, on an informational line item or a presentation on how these goals are being accomplished. It could be at a board meeting, or I also send weekly updates to

my board. And within, there'll be phrases on how and where are we standing on these goals.

His board members agreed with him, suggesting the evaluation process is a strategy to determine how he needs to maintain relationships and how he uses the evaluation process as a strategy to develop cohesiveness, which in turn helps build relationships. On a yearly basis, the board completes the superintendent's evaluation. Dr. Escobedo said, "If you know what your relationship is with your board members, . . . they have trust in you and you have trust in them, then I think that there's nothing much to worry about when that evaluation time period comes up." This is such a strategic process for Dr. Escobedo that even his cabinet members are encouraged and in some cases required to align their cabinet goals to the superintendent's evaluation. This strategy is what Dr. Escobedo referred to as "cohesiveness." He suggested that, after developing a vision, goals, policies, and procedures, there is still one metacognitive strategy that superintendents must maintain: "Don't be afraid to lose your job." He said he believes that when superintendents are working to maintain their jobs, they may lose themselves and begin to make poor decisions that are not in alignment with the vision and mission.

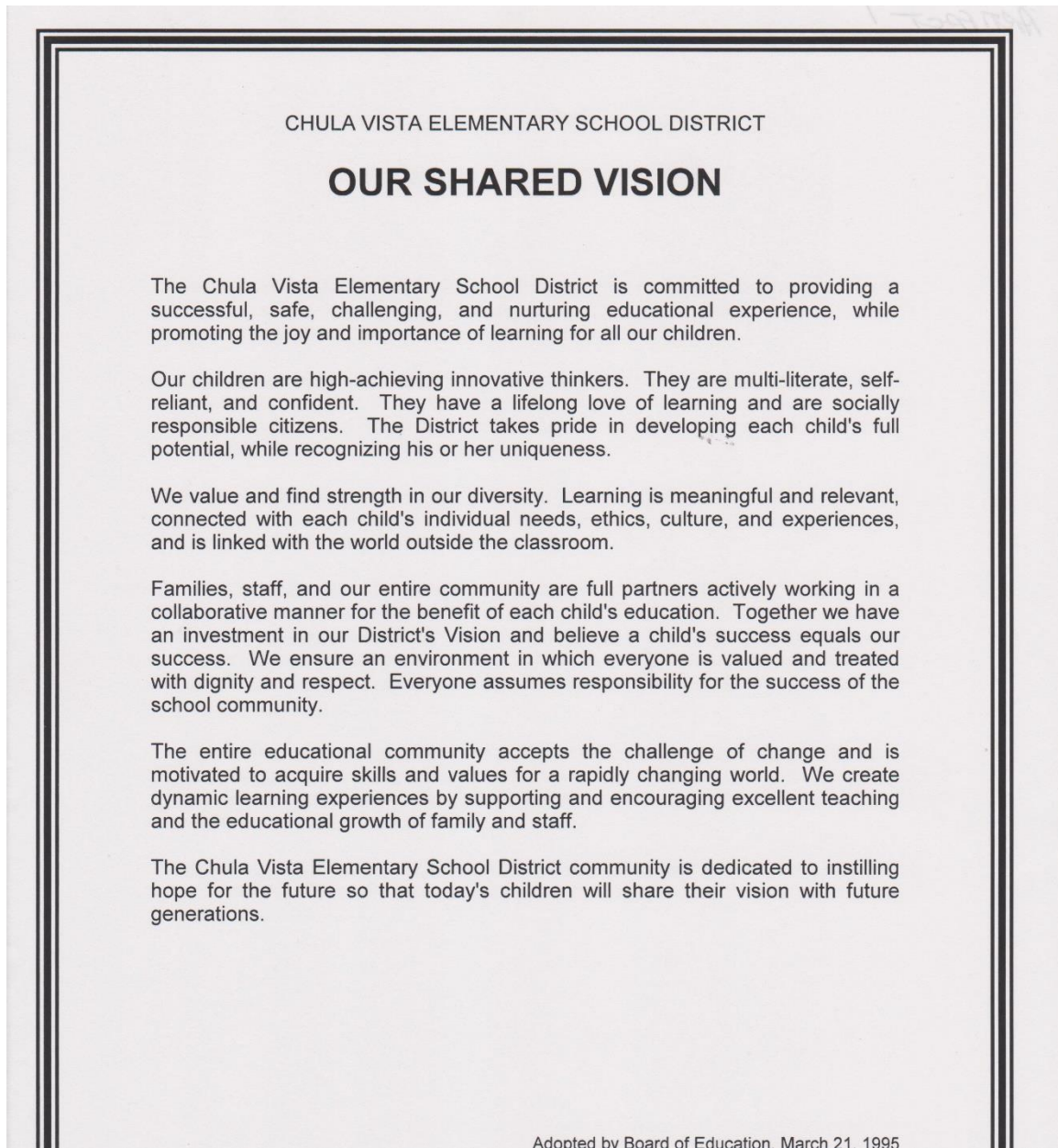
While Mr. Kowba did not discuss the use of the evaluation process as a strategy for alignment and alliance, he did discuss the role that the senior leader played in aligning with the school board members:

A school district properly . . . runs in concert when there is a solid, stable relationship between the governing board that's playing its role properly, staying in its swim lane, in concert with the superintendent and his or her staff. And all of those on the board, superintendent, staff members are, in fact, serving the community.

Mr. Kowba shared a strategy for alignment that the SDUSD implemented during his tenure. Senior staff were required to present monthly board updates to the board of

education, including staff updates and status, budgetary implications, updates to the current business practices, and an overall update on the impact of the specific departments in the district. While Mr. Kowba acknowledged these updates to be laborious, he saw the benefit of aligning the board members to the district work and creating alliances: “I tried to manage through these things by dealing with them as individuals and as a collective. But the reality was that while I would work to avoid any meddling on many items, I didn’t always on others.”

**Shared vision.** Peter Senge (1990) wrote, “Shared vision is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning” (p. 206). While some organizations maintain a vision, it may be a vision that has been passed down from leader to leader or perhaps from past leaders’ ideology. For Dr. Escobedo, the shared vision is not only necessary to building and maintaining relationships, but critical. One of Dr. Escobedo’s board members agreed that a vision is essential: “It’s important not to have two visions, one from the superintendent and one from the school board.” Dr. Escobedo indicated that the shared vision is something that is adopted by the school board, which works with the superintendent to set the vision (Figure 1). It is therefore an important strategy Dr. Escobedo uses; when the board members move in misalignment or a board member tries to be a renegade, Dr. Escobedo can use the shared vision to bring that board member back: “If they . . . want to do something against the vision, I go back to that document and say, ‘Look, you know, you may have this point of view, but . . . this is what the board stands for.’” The superintendent is now in an objective position, from which the misalignment is not between him and the board member but between the board member and the pre-established shared vision.



*Figure 1.* Chula Vista Elementary School District shared vision.

Similarly, Mr. Kowba said he had to leverage the district vision as a strategic way of maintaining synergy between himself and the school board members. He acknowledged that from time to time individual agendas could cloud the views and it was his responsibility to stay the course but guide the board along the way. Establishing a vision with the board allowed Mr. Kowba to be thoughtful and strategic and refocus

board members on the collective vision without embarrassing them in public. He found his ability to support the school board members in this manner supported relationships. Both superintendents' approach of utilizing the vision is consistent with their core values and their desire to provide opportunities to build and maintain relationships.

**Focus on district and student success.** The CVESD is a Title I Distinguished school district. Dr. Escobedo's rate of achievement in regards to the subgroup of English learners has steadily increased. Additionally, other school districts visit the CVESD, which creates a special bond with the board members. Dr. Escobedo said he believes his ability to lead a system that focuses on students, particularly language learners, Hispanic students, closing the achievement gap, arts education, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning, is primary. Focusing on student achievement and district success allows him to develop stronger relationships with board members, as student success connected to the district goals and vision, in the end, is the mission. Dr. Escobedo said this strategy is something he considers every day and that has contributed to his success in building relationships with board members.

Dr. Escobedo never hesitates to invite school board members to various events. During Dr. Escobedo's tenure, the CVESD has decreased obesity while raising student achievement levels and was recognized by the San Diego County Office of Education as one of the first *Live Well* districts in the county. Additionally, Dr. Escobedo was honored at the White House for his leadership and the students' success. Dr. Escobedo was focused not on the accolades but rather on recognizing the board members: "I do care that student achievement improves, but I don't care about the accolades. But nonetheless they are important, because the board begins to see value in what we are doing."

**Take action.** Board members consistently mentioned the openness and availability of Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba. It is obvious that both superintendents in this study made a concerted effort to listen, question, and seek to understand. They both were praised for their ability to be collaborative, and each shared their understanding of their role and the expectation that they carry out the direction of the school board. Each of the participating superintendents admitted that they do not always have the answers. But what is evident is that they would seek out answers and were responsive to their board members. Board member 1 said Mr. Kowba “followed up almost to a fault, on every little detail, in terms of making sure things were taken care of.” Dr. Escobedo’s board member described him as being “very open, very flexible, very willing to answer any questions” and especially follow up on comments from members of the public during board meetings, “so that . . . they feel heard, and they feel that something is being done.”

### **Preparation and Learning**

How do formal education and previous experiences shape and affect a superintendent’s ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members?

#### **Education and Experience**

Education and a short time serving as a police officer influenced what Dr. Escobedo leads, why he leads, and how he leads. Mr. Kowba considered both the military and his master’s in business administration foundations as the foundation for his career. Dr. Escobedo said he must engage in a process of ongoing growth and development and that this helps him think strategically about how to build and maintain relationships with school board members: “Through my doctoral studies, we had a Dr. Daly who talked a lot about social networking and ego. So that was a huge assistance for

me.” He said Dr. Janet Crispeels was a great influence as well and indicated that he was very fortunate that so many good people assisted him. He cited a letter he once read from a superintendent to his son as being particularly influential:

I was really intrigued because he laid it out, pretty much how it was. . . . You have this ideological viewpoint, where politics should never be part of this whole system. Well, this author just threw that out of the window. “Hey, man, wake up. This is reality.”

When asked about his formalized leadership training, Mr. Kowba said,

I would say in the Navy, at various points in your career, you get leadership management training. LMT, they would call it. And you’d go off for a couple of days, or even a day, and they would talk about how you form a team, at the lowest basic level. And we’d come back to that on an occasional basis. And you talk about how do you relate to people, how do you counsel an individual, how do you bring diverse people together?

In addition to the education that laid the foundation for Dr. Escobedo and the military education for Mr. Kowba, both superintendents identified their experiences on the job as a place of learning. Mr. Kowba had significant work experiences in the Navy that contributed to his breadth of management and what he calls leadership training:

It’s an up-or-out organization. As a lieutenant, you oversaw the department of so many duties and people. As a commander, I remember going through a supply center in Norfolk. As a lieutenant commander, coming back 10 years later and commanding that supply center. I had gained a decade of additional training.

These particular work experiences enabled Mr. Kowba to develop in the area of executive management. He studied with corporate leaders from The Swiss Bank, Frito-Lay, and Chrysler.

Dr. Escobedo recalled moments when he had made mistakes and had to reflect, review, and redo his action in order to align himself with the vision. He said he learns from experiencing mistakes, acknowledging them, and making different decisions the next time: “See, that’s a big step right there. I screwed up. And then you ask others to

help you find out what caused that screw-up.” This is a strategy that serves him well when building and maintaining relationships.

### **There Is No “I” in Team**

Mr. Kowba was hired as a superintendent after serving as the chief logistics officer and chief financial officer for the SDUSD. His background included 30 years in the military, where he was a rear admiral orchestrating the Navy’s supply corps. To suggest he was an unconventional superintendent is an understatement. However, Mr. Kowba developed a team approach to leading the second-largest school district in California. His expertise in business administration and finance meant he was very knowledgeable and savvy when leading a nearly \$2 billion budget. Mr. Kowba explained his team-building strategy:

The senior staff was a very important part of the positive relationship with the governing board, from informing, and educating, and advising. I was not hesitant to have senior staff either brief them as a collective or as individuals on an issue. Allow them to ask maybe more technical or detailed questions that I couldn’t field. . . . The senior staff could be viewed as part of the team-building, the glue that keeps us together. And it shows the board members that hey, the superintendent is not the Wizard of Oz behind the curtain there, doing things. He’s got all these thoughtful, trained, creative people working for him, and they should get to know those people.

While Dr. Escobedo is considered a more traditional superintendent, having been a teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent, he too knows he cannot do this work alone. Dr. Escobedo leads them but also provides a framework for operating. He hires his cabinet members based on the team member’s ability to examine data and perform based on the vision, goals, and expectations of the board and of him:

Every quarter, every department head comes up, and we’ve created a strategic plan on what needs to be done, and where are you on those areas. . . . It’s really critical, as a superintendent . . . to create cohesion among your cabinet. It says you are working together on common goals. And the goals are clear and laid out,

and executable. And so you have to set time to meet with every member, and see where you're at, to make sure that those goals will be met by the end of the year.

To assist him in creating a strong cabinet, able to discuss matters with school board members and prepare for board presentations, Dr. Escobedo has each cabinet member read *Getting Things Done*. Board members said they believe his strategy of using his cabinet has helped him as a superintendent. Dr. Escobedo's ability to allow his cabinet to engage the board members, they said, helps build stronger relationships.

### **Understand the Politics**

How does the political and/or social context of a district affect superintendents and the relationships they build and maintain with school board members?

#### **Politics**

Superintendents may not enter education from a political context, nor understand the depth of the political platform when they apply for the position, but through interactions with board members, community members, business leaders, and district personnel, they become indoctrinated rather quickly. During this study, the topic of politics was high on the participants' list of how a superintendent builds and maintains relationships. A superintendent's ability to navigate his or her naiveté and begin to orchestrate this newly discovered context can sometimes determine his or her ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members.

First, a superintendent must understand the position of board members and politics. Dr. Escobedo said,

Interest groups are very powerful in the public education arena. And many times the school board position is used as a stepping stone to a higher position. Whether it be city council, assemblyperson, et cetera, it is seen as a stepping stone. So that makes the school board position very susceptible. Susceptible for

special interest groups to influence and to easily sway school board members, unfortunately. But it's reality.

One of his board members agreed. He stated that maintaining politics is essential for superintendents, who must understand the politics of not only school board members but also stakeholder groups: "Obviously, the candidate and newly elected will tend to support the people that or the organizations that supported him or her. In theory, that's how it works." Mr. Kowba entered the role under political challenges and recognized early on that perhaps even being hired for the position of superintendent was political:

I suspect part of my hiring had to do with the board knowing who I was on a more day-to-day basis than other candidates, having been the interim before, having done it for a second time, and moved the district in an acceptable way for the board. And my financial background. I think, faced with the reality that we were going to deal with a period of troubling financial challenge for a number of years, perhaps a superintendent would be best served with a financial resource to get us through this period.

The period was 2008–2012, during what he called "the Great Depression" in the history of the SDUSD. As a superintendent, Mr. Kowba led through a financial crisis that warranted the reduction of 2,000 full-time and part-time employees. He spoke about political challenges in relation to having to navigate board members, stakeholders, and employee bargaining groups:

Whether it's a governing board of five people or nine people or some number, they've all joined a board of education for some particular purposes, and have a style about them about how they want to achieve these visions or purposes.

During times of great political pressure, he would engage in a specific manner:

I would also talk to the individuals and say we need to do this or that, to support a program. And I would encourage board members to tell me if they've got issues with a program. . . . And then we would, based on the complexity of the program, float out information papers, or give them first and second reads, or something that would allow the board member to be comfortable with an issue on our way to a public setting where there was going to be open discussion and a vote. And I think that the reason why it was sticky is we worked in a political environment.

And it was a reality that some board members would take advantage of a public podium to voice differing interests from the superintendent, or from the staff, or from other members of the board. So we had to deal with politics, in the sense that they may have a different position now.

Board members from the SDUSD who participated in this study agreed. Board member 3 concluded that politics were the reason for his hiring and thus had loyalty to particular board members. Board member 1 said of politics,

Well, it's huge in the sense of board members being pressured by constituents, in saying we want this or that, and it may not be in the best long-term interest of the students or the district or whatever. But this particular group is leaning very heavily on a board member. And that plays a big role.

Although Mr. Kowba said he never tried to count votes, he did have to deal with the circumstances, the politics, and the reality. One board member disagreed. He said that superintendents are experts at counting votes. In addition, he would often extend ideas for discussion, consideration, and re-consideration before an actual vote. He indicated he experienced politics regularly because during financial struggles the work became a "political sideshow." Mr. Kowba's term as superintendent was filled with the reality that he needed to find the path to completion of board items, and this took time: "Political sensitivities sometimes took you to Point B from Point A around the block two or three times. That's my honest assessment of what politics can do, especially in a large urban school district." In order to counter this, he used the strategy of "check-in." He would talk to the members of the board at different points in the school year and ask specific questions such as "What are you thinking? How can I help you or how can the staff help you understand an issue? What can you do to help us, the staff, and myself?"

One of his board members suggested politics were so deep in the SDUSD that board members were actually running the district; they would meet with Mr. Kowba and

strategize a plan, and then Mr. Kowba would present it. However, no other board members corroborated this sentiment. He was viewed as being strategic, keeping board members involved, collaborating, and leaving “no stone unturned.”

Dr. Escobedo said he attempts to connect the board members as a strategy for maneuvering through the reality of politics. He said he watches how board members react or what they say in a board meeting or individual meetings. He is prepared to respond and recognizes some influences are stronger than his:

In ideology or maybe not ideology, but stances. Or maybe not doing the right thing for kids because there are political influences. And because it's seen as a transient position. But there are some members that will do whatever it takes to appease a political party, so that they're guaranteed political backing, whether it is financial or whether it is affirmation from the party, to go on to that next position.

Dr. Escobedo is keenly aware of the politics at play and offers a strategy to counter the political occurrences. When an issue or a board item may be politically charged, he prepares intensely, even consulting friends outside of education with different political points of view to discuss their perspectives. He also makes sure he prepares his cabinet. Board members said they believe this is beneficial and identified one of his political strategies as being amenable to changes. A board member substantiated this strategy commenting that Dr. Escobedo takes opportunities to maintain a neutral disposition in public. To counter political propaganda, Dr. Escobedo does not engage public comments, but he does notice board member responses and reactions. Board member 7 said, “His strategy is to say, we'll take it back, and we'll provide a full analysis to the board.” This political strategy indicates a superintendent who does not want his board or himself to look bad in public. Nevertheless, he will use his position, evaluation, and directness to deliver powerful messages when necessary. For example, if he believes

his principles are not connecting with the principles of the board, he will have a courageous conversation:

You know, guys, this is where I stand. “Help me understand where you stand, because I’m seeing a disconnect. And, respectfully, if we can’t come to agreement, I’m fine. I will bow down; give me a year, whatever the case may be, and we’ll part ways. But, you know, I will always serve you; in public, I will always support you.”

Dr. Escobedo said he realizes that board members and dynamics do change. He said he is constantly aware of the political landscape within education and that he realizes a superintendent may meet one board’s expectations but may not meet the expectations of a new board if the collective group changes its dynamic.

This has been the reality for Dr. Escobedo during the 2015 school year, when three new school board members were elected. This changed the dynamic and created necessary changes for Dr. Escobedo. Board member 7, who was a returning member, said Dr. Escobedo indicated the shift in seats would not “be a problem. We’re all going to be able to do it together, and we’re all going to work together and do what’s best for the children.” Dr. Escobedo is strategic during election periods, often meeting with candidates and answering questions about the district. He discusses the current realities and critical issues so candidates are aware of the work that is ahead of them. Dr. Escobedo is conscious about why and how he approaches this strategy. According to board member 7,

Prior to the election of the three new board members, he had kind of an open-door policy, always willing and ready to help everybody. And once they were elected, I know that he continues to meet with them, just like he does with me, at least [he meets with] two of the new board members.

Political agendas extend to the employee unions who can also construct agendas that superintendents must lead through. Dr. Escobedo said he realizes that his board

members were supported by the teachers' union. Dr. Escobedo not only has recognized the shift but also has had to make changes. A new board member and former teacher recognized Dr. Escobedo's strategy to shift and adjust his old practices to build relationships with union officers in order to build and maintain relationships with school board members. A board member who was supported by the teachers' union during the campaign commented:

I don't know with the board, but I know there's been a change with the relationship between the superintendent and the union officers. Things would come up, like the union would say, well they [district representatives] didn't consult with us. So the board wouldn't vote on it. They'd say, NO, go back and talk to the union first. . . . But they [district representatives] didn't consult. And we said No; you need to consult with the union. So they [district representatives] went back. And so after three or four times, now, they [district staff] have a monthly meeting with the presidents of both unions. So there's a much better relationship with district people and the union. And so I think that has helped a lot because you eliminate that element of conflict.

While politics can undermine relationships between superintendents and school board members Dr. Escobedo described how he has utilized political agendas to build and maintain relationships with school board members. In response to a board member seeking to increase social justice in the district, he led the CVESD to create partnerships with hospitals, hire social workers, and focus on reducing obesity:

It [understanding political agendas] helped us make some transformational changes, as a result of me being able to listen to her, as a result of me saying, you know, your passion is real important. . . . So that has helped me to see it gives them, as a board member, worth. I am doing something that—not only was I elected to be this, but it's something I feel passionate about.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided relevant information and detailed accounts by two superintendents and seven school board members who agreed to participate in this study. These data were examined from interviews conducted with the superintendents and the

school board members. Based on participants' comments, I analyzed, coded, and developed themes and created relevant thematic descriptions based on the overall study's purpose and interview questions.

The findings identified relationships, ego, educating the school board, communication, alignment and alliance, knowledge of self, political awareness, and superintendent backgrounds as overarching concepts for superintendents as they work to build and maintain relationships. These themes were also found in the literature and what the study was designed to extract.

The following chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the findings, along with implications for superintendents and learning organizations who seek ways to improve learning, development, and leadership in K-12 education. The next chapter will also discuss limitations to this study as well as recommendations for future studies.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study examined how two superintendents identified and utilized particular leadership strategies to effectively build their relationships with their board members. More specifically, this study examined how the leadership disposition of both superintendents has been affected by the social and political contexts of their respective districts and how they evaluated situations and analyzed the conditions, participants, and issues to develop a working relationship with school board members. In order to understand and evaluate the superintendents' methods, the following research questions were employed:

1. In what ways do superintendents' interactions with school board members influence the building, strengthening, and/or maintaining of their relationship?
  - a. What are the complexities, factors, and/or supports that either impede or progress relationships with school board members?
2. What influences the superintendents' metacognition as they contemplate the approaches they deploy to build and maintain relationships with their school boards?
3. How does a superintendent's formal education and previous experiences shape and affect a superintendent's ability to build and maintain relationships with school board members?
4. How does the political and/or social context of a district affect superintendents and the relationships they build and maintain with school board members?

The findings in Chapter 4 were based on interviews conducted with nine participants. Two participants were the key informants: Mr. Bill Kowba, former superintendent for the San Diego Unified School District, and Dr. Francisco Escobedo, current superintendent for the Chula Vista Elementary School District. Other participants included three school board members who worked with Mr. Kowba and four board members who worked with Dr. Escobedo. In order to provide anonymity, board members were identified as board members 1, 2, and 3 for the San Diego Unified School District and board members 5, 6, 7, and 8 for Chula Vista Elementary. While both superintendents arrived at the superintendent position from different trajectories with different backgrounds and experiences, and each board member has different views, experiences, and political affiliations, the findings show an integration of perspectives, values, and ultimately ideology regarding how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members in the political and social context of their district.

### **Statement of Problem**

Superintendents face incredible difficulties as they search for reform efforts while working to align resources to bring about financial stability to a district and ensuring that the needs of communities, individuals, and the school board are met within an ever-changing educational landscape. And while all of these aspects bring the most seasoned superintendents to scratch their heads for answers, K-12 superintendents, themselves, according to Glass (2010) have identified their relationship with boards as the single most common reason for departing from the position. Therefore, there is reason to suggest superintendents make building relationships with school boards a priority and invest the

time up front in developing lines of communication in order to determine and adapt to the often-fluctuating expectations and needs of the board.

Many research studies have focused on the need for superintendents to build and maintain relationships with their school board members in order to ensure reform efforts are realized. In fact, Rueter (2009) went so far as to suggest relationships as the greatest single factor for superintendent success. Based on the findings from this study, there seems to be no one single factor that contributes to a superintendent's success, but superintendent leadership must encompass a myriad of strategies and components of leadership that aim to increase a superintendent's ability to improve relationships, build a viable executive team, and address both technical and adaptive challenges to achieve a longer tenure than the national average of 24–36 months (Glass, 2010) and to enhance the ability to realize educational reform efforts.

Glass (2010), Rueter (2009), and Byrd et al. (2006) provided relevant research on what superintendents must do to strengthen relationships with school board members and other educational constituents. For example, they identified strategies such as opening lines of communication, developing skilled management strategies, and investing time in establishing relationships with board members. What is increasingly clear from my research findings is that while building and maintaining relationships is a focal point of the work of a superintendent, there are other interactions at play that superintendents must pay attention to, such as the political interplay between board members within a district, the specific district context, historical aspects and current district practices, global social elements that affect subgroups of students, and employee agendas. In fact, as superintendents work to build and maintain relationships, they are also developing a

sustainable organization, which increases their ability to improve their relations with school board members.

Castallo (2003) recognized that the relationship of a superintendent and the school board members can be difficult to build and maintain, especially when superintendents and school boards do not see eye to eye on the day-to-day aspects of the school district or understand the interplay of their roles and responsibilities or the primary functions of the school board and superintendent. It is therefore increasingly important to examine not only the “what” and “why” behind a superintendent’s disposition, but also precisely *how* superintendents think about the actions they take to build and maintain relationships with school board members.

The contribution of this dissertation is to provide an examination of *how* two superintendents were able to increase their tenure as district leaders, in the context of social and political issues that typically challenge sustainability. This study makes clear how they executed strategies of communication, planned and invested their time, navigated interactions with board members, and developed their management skills. The superintendents in this study used specific strategies to communicate with their boards. They considered particular aspects of an organizational reform when deciding what strategies to engage with in the political landscape of the organization. Their comments made evident the interconnectedness of individuals, groups, and the particular contexts that were in motion while they led their school districts.

In this chapter I analyze the data collected in this study within the context of the nine participants and provide the discoveries through the lens of technical and adaptive challenge leadership, transactional and transformational leadership, and interaction-based

and interconnected models. I conclude with recommendations for future leadership studies, political awareness, and contextualizing interactions to meet the needs of organizational systems.

### **Analysis of Findings**

Cultures that are organizational tend to be linear, for example in this study information provided from the superintendent to board members *is* the end versus a means to an end: “Founders often create an organizational culture from their preconceptions about an effective organization. The founders’ and successors’ leadership shape a culture of shared values and assumptions, guided and constrained by their personal views” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 200). The critical aspects of linear systems are that they are very closed and open only to the thoughts, values, and interpretations of the leaders. Heifetz (1990) suggested that leadership can take on two aspects of challenges. One he suggested is technical: “Leaders not only influence followers but are under their influence as well. A leader earns influence by adjusting to the expectations of the followers” (p. 17). The second he suggested is adaptive: “Socially useful goals not only meet the needs of the followers, they also should elevate followers to a higher moral level” (p. 21).

When I analyze the findings from the participants and their experiences through the interviews, the constant pattern of information, communication, and the education of board members emerges.

## **Strategies Superintendents Used to Enhance Their Relationships With School Board Members**

The overarching themes that emerged from the data pertain to how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members, specifically, managing relationships, their ego, communicating, educating the board members, and politics. Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo spoke to these themes but did not explicitly address them within the contextual landscape of their experiences. They also emphasized the importance of context, but context was not a central focus for these superintendents as they interacted with board members and vice versa. This certainly raises the question of whether politics in context and context in general matters. Based on previous literature, according to Houston (2010), politics within context and context in general does matter. So why weren't the themes in this study discussed in relation to the political nature of education and the specific contexts during the tenures of these superintendents?

While the themes of relationships, managing ego, communication, educating the board, and politics emerged and the focus was on *how* these two superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members, the reality was that these superintendents intimated they also need to focus on student achievement and the overarching respective district visions and missions.

**Relationships.** *Relationships* was the first theme identified, and perhaps it is reflective of the initial questions posed to all participants. The participating superintendents were asked to share their experiences as a superintendent as they built and maintained relationships with school board members. Additionally, board members

were asked to discuss how they thought their superintendents built and maintained relationships with them. The superintendents identified the strategies of “getting to know” board members. The superintendents both indicated that getting to know board members’ views, values, and political stances was important. In addition to the board members’ views, the superintendents wanted to know about their families and interests.

Both superintendents believed the information gathered would serve them as a way to connect with the board members. These particular relationships were focused on the one-on-one relationship with board members. Although the superintendents mentioned the need to build relationships with individual board members, they also recognized the need to cultivate relationships with the collective board. Both superintendents believed the one-on-one meetings assisted in developing collective board relationships. Meetings were usually built around the board members’ schedules and locations. Board members agreed that these one-on-one meetings helped superintendents build and maintain relationships.

The exchanges within the relationships suggest these relationships and the interactions between superintendents and board members were mostly informational with some relational qualities about the individual’s core values, beliefs, and desires. They were primarily one directional, from the superintendent to the board members, but sporadically the relational exchanges were from board members to superintendents. For example, one San Diego Unified School District board member said,

We sat down the night before this board vote in 2011 and I pushed Bill in every way that I could, what about this possibility, what about that possibility, you know I told him Bill, I can’t do this, I can’t vote for pink slips. It goes against everything I believe in. And he listened, and again we had been working through this for months, but then he just said to me, look, this is going to be my recommendation and it’s the only thing that I think that we can do at this point.

And I would say if Bill hadn't worked to build that relationship where I completely trusted him, and where I trusted the information he was presenting, and if we hadn't had that conversation the night before the meeting, I don't think I would have voted to issue pink slips. But when it came time to do it I made that vote and there were consequences for that vote. But I knew it was right. And I knew it was right, again, because of the relationship that Bill had built. So I would say in terms of structurally regular scheduled communication, but I think more importantly the time that he would put in to work with board members, bring very clear information. None of us ever had the excuse that we didn't know what was going on. And Bill would, every request that we would make of him to look for options or consider different strategies, he would exhaust.

The trust that Mr. Kowba had built and the time he took to engage in a dialogue with the board helped to mask the reality of the challenging financial problems of the district. In this case, relationships were created for the purpose of information exchange rather than deepening the individuals' leadership and organizational development. What is clear, however, is that both Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo remained savvy about cultivating relationships that served to sustain their tenure in their respective districts.

**Ego.** *Ego* was another theme that emerged from the data. *Ego* emerged as the superintendents discussed what influences their thinking when they contemplate strategies to build and maintain relationships. Both superintendents recognized and shared the importance of managing their egos when interacting with board members. What emerged quickly is that both Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba remained very humble during their tenure in their districts. Board members confirmed that these superintendents were men of honor, integrity, trust, and service. Individually, both acknowledged that they needed to keep their egos in check, agreeing that during difficult times they lose themselves and must find a way back to their core values. In order to accomplish maintaining his ego, Mr. Kowba said turning to his wife allowed him to be reminded of who he is. Both superintendents were keenly aware that ego could get in the

way of their work, relationships, and ways of communicating with board members. Each superintendent worked to rein in his ego to value others and allow disagreements to occur without jeopardizing the decisions.

Each superintendent acknowledged ego as it related to him in the role of the superintendent, and the ideas of self-worth and self-importance were seen by others as they related to the position, not to the superintendents personally. Each superintendent discussed the importance of understanding his role within the educational structure that aligns the superintendent and the board of education, rather than taking individual aspects of the superintendency personally. Both expressed the need to limit their views of their own ego so they could ultimately lead the way of the board's direction.

While data suggested these two superintendents were humble and honorable, many of the board members in this study recognized that superintendents sometimes need ego to assure the community and the board that they are in charge. Dr. Escobedo suggested ego could be "a double-edged sword," recognizing that "ego can hurt or hinder an individual." A critical aspect of ego management was the superintendent's ability to "let go" when board transition occurs. Bill Kowba estimated he worked with 13 different board members. Both superintendents expressed sentiments of remaining in the role and "staying alive" figuratively. Both superintendents recognized that relationships can become very hostile and unmanageable if ego is in the way of change when board turnover occurs.

Just as both superintendents identified holding and losing one's ego in times of change, there were other concepts concerning ego that they had in common: the strategy of gaining understanding and managing ego during adverse times, the ability to use self-

talk and rationalize situations that can be somewhat irrational, and maintaining balance. Both superintendents discussed the need to have outside interests to maintain the fact that the role of the superintendency did not define them. They needed to let go.

The topic of ego management remained focused on the superintendents in this study. During the interviews, there was no discussion of ego related to board members directly, although ego is not limited to only some individuals. Unfortunately, in this study the data revealed only how the superintendents managed their egos in interacting with board members, and no direct evidence declared board members' egos were in play during the interactions with superintendents. Ego existed within individual superintendents, and while the individual superintendents experienced learning within the theme of ego, they did not indicate that the organization itself progressed based on their ego management and their interactions with board members. Recognizing that though all individuals possess ego and yet ego was not discussed for all individuals or within the political and contextual aspects of the organization, it suggests more learning about ego needs to occur for both superintendents and board members.

**Communication.** *Communication* was key to the successful efforts of relationships with school board members. Similar to relationships, communication was a widespread topic of conversation among superintendents and board members. A superintendent's ability to communicate relies on trust and his/her ability to respond to requests. Again, a point mentioned throughout the interviews with all participants was the ability of superintendents to communicate with board members in individual meetings and group meetings. Most communication by these superintendents was to inform and update school board members on the districts' efforts, budgetary components related to

district education direction, and employee relational components. The superintendents' intention was to have communication work as a two-way method of information, ideas, and perspectives. Additionally, communication was dependent on honest and forthright exchanges that grew over time. Similarly, the communication was intended, at least from the superintendent's perspective, to be aimed at making the vision of the school district clear to board members.

Communication data identified a few opportunities dealing with board updates, new information, and the ever-changing work within a school district. The superintendents utilized communication to share information, clarify information, or provide board members further information on potential board items. Superintendents regularly used communication as a strategy for aligning commonalities between their beliefs and the individual board members' beliefs to the collective board's beliefs. This was in an effort to unify the school board.

The data identified interaction components of communication as well as structure for communication. Structure included board workshops, weekly meetings, phone calls, text messages, and emails. Within these structures, superintendents and board members were keenly aware of the Brown Act, the law that governs operating school boards and indicates that no board majority shall meet except for official meetings. The benefit of board workshops was to provide information, educate, and receive questions from board members in a non-agenda-item forum, but the superintendents in this study saw these as opportunities to have open dialogues about district matters, reform efforts, and other topics relating to the district. Superintendents indicated that during these forums they utilize listening as a major component of communication.

Another structure for communication that was revealed was one-on-one meetings. As discussed previously and indicated quite frequently in the interview data, one-on-one meetings were very important to board members and superintendents alike. These were opportunities for superintendents to communicate with board members and often for board members to communicate with superintendents in an intimate, less formal setting. This was said to be a very strategic approach for the superintendents. This time was for information, support, questions, board member agendas, and, as Mr. Kowba suggested, “unfiltered interface.” These meetings were not only recommended but probably one of the more common strategies for superintendents in building and developing relationships with school board members.

As with relationships and ego, communication focused more on the exchange of information, updates, and clarity of topics for board members than it did on learning, context, and political interplay. The exchange of information between superintendents and board members suggests there is a one-way path to communication. The information is provided in a linear modality, and although questions and interchange occur, the outcome is very transactional for board members, who need information, and superintendents, who need board members to know information, as voting is the final outcome.

The data did suggest, however, that the superintendents in this study desired to have dialogic interfacing. The data also suggested that perhaps the thinking exists but the structures need to change. There is great possibility here, as the data revealed that current board workshops are in fact open structures that encourage more dialogic interfacing that is “unfiltered.” Superintendents and board members will need to figure out how to

develop more open structures that promote dialogic thinking between themselves and board members. This suggests that superintendents would need to establish the conditions for more dialogic interactions to occur.

**Educating.** Recognizing that board members are lay people, in some cases with very little understanding of the inner workings of board governance processes and procedures, along with board policies, educating board members was also a key aspect of these two superintendents' strategies of building and maintaining relationships with them. There remains, however, according to board members and superintendents, a need to further develop board members' understanding of systems and leadership.

While individual meetings provided opportunities to communicate, they were also opportunities to educate board members. Professional development, particularly the California School Boards Association, was a venue for professional growth. Additionally, board workshops and individual board members' sessions were constant strategies for Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo and were data points found in board member interviews as well. Although board members needed specific learning opportunities, educating the board for these two superintendents was typically in the form of high-level talking points. The data clearly identified that board members in particular appreciated the opportunities to learn from professional development opportunities, including conferences, workshops, and senior member conversations. Senior leaders were instrumental during these learning opportunities, as these sessions provided opportunities for them to build relationships with board members as well. Both Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba suggested these sessions to educate the board members were used to assist them in leading.

Educating the board is a major undertaking by the superintendent. Many hours are set aside, and money is earmarked for specific school board member education. However, most topics for educating board members are focused on processes of the interactions (roles and responsibilities) of the board members and superintendents, procedures and how the board is to act and function (the Brown Act and Form 700), and structures and systems that tell board members about the organization (presentations by district staff on finance, human capital, and physical plant operations). The data suggested the absence of the student voice and the focus of relationships as a means to accomplish an ultimate vision of raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The information exchange between the two superintendents and their school boards in this study was directed at the board members on specific topics with very little substantive learning regarding educational matters (common core standards, technology integration, formative and summative assessment, pedagogy, context of the district politics in and around the district, or learning). These data also suggested very little if any direct opportunities to learn about politics or politics in the context of the specific school district, the specific political landscape of the employee unions, federal and state politics, school district demographics and implications for the organization, constituent group relations, and so on. Additionally, the data indicated little if any learning focused on the interconnectedness of board items, district practices, and the impact on the organization. Likewise, opportunities for board member learning showed no opportunities for cross-role (superintendent and school board member) learning. This suggests that superintendent and board member learning opportunities are limited and the topics of politics, context, and deep learning are not available. Similar to other themes,

interactions were one directional, transactional, and interpersonal. Interestingly enough, the topics discussed, reviewed, and acted on are technical challenges, while the work involves adaptive leadership and learning. Dr. Escobedo gave this example that proves this point:

I want my board to always be above par. So I could create the opportunity for my board to have the . . . relevant information, you know, as much as possible and the California School Board Association has amazing opportunities for boardmanship. They have great professional development sessions on budget. It's huge. On HR. On the role and responsibilities of boards.

The data did suggest interest from these two superintendents and the board members who participated to engage in learning and transformational development that would lead to adaptive work engagement. These data were corroborated by the intentional work by superintendents to engage board members in opportunities to enhance their knowledge of roles, structures, and decision making. Dr. Escobedo did not discuss why it was important for board members to be “above par,” nor the impact on the organization if they were above par after the learning experiences.

**Politics.** Politics played into the interactions between superintendents and school board members and needed to be considered when building and maintaining relationships. Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo, as well as board members, indicated superintendents needed to understand the political positions of each board member. Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba found that some board members were using their current role as board member as a stepping stone and understood the impact these political players made within individual relationships and the collective work of their respective school boards.

All participants acknowledged the impact of special interest groups and employee unions within the school district. The participants discussed at length the need for superintendents to manage this reality. Both Dr. Escobedo and Bill Kowba identified strategies of watching board members in board meetings on certain topics, preparing for agenda items based on the political agendas of board members, and making sure they met prior to, during, and after specific board items based on the political constructs. Similarly, the interviews revealed these superintendents also prepared their senior leaders for potential political viewpoints that they supported and that would be raised during board meetings.

In addition, political propaganda (from employee unions, constituent groups, and board member comments) was a constant influence that had to be contended with. Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba made sure they understood the political positions of board members before attending board meetings and when speaking in public. Both superintendents would allow comments, express their understanding within comments, and strategically identify their need to gather more information for the board and a timeline for updating the board. They were politically savvy as to how to navigate disagreements and managed these political aspects well. They rarely engaged in public comment or dialogue in public or in board meetings. While both superintendents identified aspects of their positions as critical to leading the district, they were clear that they worked for the school boards. Role identification and understanding their position as being connected to the board members was part of identifying political understanding as a strategy for how they built and maintained relationships.

The data within the discussion of politics suggested that the two superintendents understand aspects of political positions that are constantly in motion and that board members are in positions associated with politics. The data also identified that superintendents understand that some board members use their positions to provide them access to larger political positions. However, what was not discussed with board members directly or as a group was the impact of politics on the organization. Furthermore, it is obvious, especially in regards to employee unions, that groups have special interests and that board members, either during political campaigning or once seated in the position, are tapped to advocate for one group or another. But none of this appeared to be discussed collectively in terms of its impact on the organization and on interactions, specifically decision making. Nor was there evidence that individual discussions between superintendents and board members related to how politics affect individual learning and group learning or organizational learning itself.

### **Summary**

Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba used common leadership strategies of relationships, management of ego, communication, educating the board, and politics to build and maintain relationships with school board members. The school board members who participated in this study supported this assertion and also identified these specific strategies deployed by these two superintendents in this study. The fact that the data were limited to the specific strategies described, with the absence of nuances that relate to these particular strategies relative to the positions of the participants, suggests limited, more unconscious consideration for the overall context of education, the political context, and the context of the interactions between superintendents and board members.

Dr. Escobedo's and Mr. Kowba's leadership was able to enhance their interactions with school board members and inevitably improved relationships, increased opportunities to meet with board members, provided accurate and immediate information that was useful and relevant for board members, and ultimately understood individual political positions of board members to increase their tenure in their respective districts during very difficult financial and political times. The strategies they deployed were actions that were identified as necessities for the 21<sup>st</sup>-century superintendent (Casserly et al., 2008/2009; Rueter, 2009; Glass, 2010). Unfortunately, understanding the financial times and political climate was not directly connected to how they leveraged their strategies and what they considered as they built and maintained relationships with board members.

The research suggests the superintendents in this study not only were mindful, thoughtful, and strategic, but they also managed to incorporate theoretical practices of leadership that allowed their superintendent tenure to be greater than the national averages. The research suggests their ability to focus on relationships and their commitment to maintaining relationships was critical to their overall success. However, what was not discussed or mentioned specifically was how these two superintendents and their board members considered contextual nuances and political aspects of their roles and the overall aspects of their school districts as they both employed the strategies to build and maintain relationships with school board members. This creates the possibility that contexts and political dimensions of superintendent/board members in general were not considered. The fact that context and political aspects of their roles and responsibilities were not directly discussed within the strategies deployed suggests a

linear (one-directional), technical, and interpersonal connection between these superintendents' leadership and their board members.

### **Actions to Consider for Building and Maintaining Relationships for Current and Prospective Superintendents**

What is increasingly evident is that Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba were able to build and maintain relationships with their school board members, and their strategies were consistent, evident, and coherent. They both were knowledgeable and specific within their leadership practices. Their strategies are consistent with the recommendations suggested by Hubbard et al. (2006): "Respect, relationships, and deep-seated cultural beliefs are all fundamentally important aspects" (p. 242).

Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba suggested superintendents must create a focus on relationships, specifically relationships with school board members. The individual relationships are a critical aspect of developing relationships with the collective school board. Additionally, the relationships must be built on trust that both superintendents developed as they sought to know the school board members not only professionally, but also personally. Furthermore, the relationships must be built by providing time and space to communicate with the school board members individually and collectively. Finally, superintendents must be expert listeners. They must hear what the school board needs and follow through on board members' requests.

In order to ensure authentic relationships, these two superintendents argued, ego management must be at the forefront of all interactions. Superintendents must know who they are beyond their position, understand they work for the school board, and not lose sight of their own leadership to effectively lead their school district. To assist them in

managing their egos, superintendents may consider having someone who can remind them of who they are in difficult situations. These reminders will assist superintendents during challenging times, when the potential for “losing one’s self” in the job is possible. Likewise, having a sense of self-worth beyond the role of superintendent is critical, and Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba suggested maintaining life outside of the job is valuable.

Both superintendents and board member participants recognized the importance of learning their roles and responsibilities through education and increasing their knowledge. Learning must focus on understanding how educational systems, specifically school boards, function and operate. Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba suggested the importance of truthful information from district staff to support the relationships between superintendents and school board members.

While this research showed these two superintendents’ abilities to build and maintain relationships using the strategies of focusing on relationships, managing their own egos, creating opportunities for communication and educating the board, and considering the political positions, there remain questions about how these two superintendents considered context and the political aspects of these relationships as they deployed the aforementioned strategies. This study then suggests the need for superintendents to consider context and the political landscapes within their districts as they utilize the strategies used by Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba.

The data from this current study and the Hubbard et al. (2006) study clearly indicated that organizations, school districts, superintendents, and school board members vary and are complex and nuanced, given the fact that schools are beyond systems, structures, and processes, all of which are identified as technical workings. Therefore,

within the professional learning of relationships, ego, communication, education, and politics as content components, this study provides the possibility to engage in professional learning and communication that involves leadership development for superintendents and board members.

Leadership has been defined by many. Schein (1985) suggested leadership is about the development of cultures, Fullan (2001) suggested the use of various leadership strategies, and Rost (1993) indicated leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes. Antonakis et al. (2004) showed that leadership moved organizational groups toward strategic objectives. Senge (2006) concluded that leaders are a collection of many different roles and responsibilities and are ultimately responsible for learning and creating energy and investing in experiences that matter deeply. Covey (2004a), along the same lines as Senge, specifically identified eight habits of effective leaders and defined leadership as communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they are inspired to see it in themselves. Bass and Riggio (2006) focused on stimulating and inspiring followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. However, Bass and Riggio (2006) suggested more research is needed beyond leader and individual awareness, metacognition, and the culmination of experiences to arrive at a higher place of being. More research is needed to extend to the relationship and interconnectedness of oneself to others, within context, considering political landscapes and environments. Therefore, one particular leadership model that I believe superintendents might consider as a way of leading the interconnectedness of their work of building relationships and communication, in connection to the strategies

that Dr. Escobedo and Mr. Kowba offer, and understanding the need to consider the context and political aspects of an organization, is Heifetz's model of leadership. This model considers not only the individual and the follower but also the interrelations and the nested nature of leadership as a model to replicate when considering how superintendents build and maintain relationships. Through opportunities to engage in professional development and highlighting the leadership practices presented by Heifetz, superintendents may be able to apply the leadership strategies offered in this study, while considering contexts and political aspects of their work, not only to improve their relationships with school board members and their tenure, but also to be able to help themselves and board members as they attempt to increase student achievement for all students. However, other researchers must make this possibility a focal point of future research.

### **Recommendations for the Future**

The first recommendation is to have superintendent education programs for all potential superintendents. These superintendent programs would develop standards and curricula focused on leadership practices specifically tied to the importance of relationships and communication. The curriculum would also focus on relationships and communication within the context of specific districts. Perhaps case studies would be the medium to study these elements. Standards for these programs and superintendent development would focus on leadership and group dynamics within the role of the superintendency.

The second recommendation is to develop training programs for potential school board members prior to board candidates submitting applications to vie for school board

seats. The trainings would incorporate understanding roles and responsibilities as they influence the building and maintaining of relationships with superintendents. As with superintendent development, prospective board members would receive training on relationships and communication within the role of a board member. This learning would focus prospective board members on relationships beyond the interpersonal interactions and technical aspects of board memberships using models such as transactional/transformational and technical/adaptive theories.

Additionally, these trainings would incorporate a group dynamics component and a component focused on the interconnectedness of an education system. Board members would need to engage in learning, including the impact on their individual learning within specific contexts and within the political aspects of their potential work as a board member. They too would engage in case study learning that would provide real context with the content of the district they may serve in.

The third recommendation would include a mandatory retreat process for superintendents and school board members every 6 months. These retreats would incorporate the superintendent leadership training component and aspects of the school board preparation and training. A collaborative approach would be utilized. Participants would include superintendents, school board members, district staff, advisory groups, unions, and advocacy groups to collectively develop a systems thinking plan and aspects of implementation. In addition, all members of this team would develop their relationships, learn how to manage their egos, utilize individual communication strategies that support the group and the system, and focus on how politics influence education. The retreat would also focus on leadership strategies such as technical/adaptive and

transactional/transformational theories that develop individuals, the group, and the specific school district.

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

As with all research, limitations are inherent within the process, and research studies such as this one certainly do not exist without certain limitations. This study is an example of the limitations of scientific generalizability for several reasons. A study focused on two superintendents in large urban school district settings does not create a replicable context for all superintendents. After all, context does matter, especially when studying education, where the actors and the circumstances change daily and the external and internal forces create an ever-changing environment. Therefore, it should not be suggested that the ideas that are shared in this study be applied in other districts under different contexts. However, the practices appear general enough to consider and informative enough to be replicated within specific contexts that resemble the cases in this study.

Although this study was well intended, focused, and created with the understanding that the case study size of two superintendents was limiting, my intention was to seek an in-depth understanding of the ways in which these two superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members. As previously indicated, while the two superintendents selected served in two of the largest school districts in California, the fact that the cases were limited to one part of the United States and one part of California certainly posed a limitation and affects the overall generalizability of this study and studies of this magnitude.

While the seven school board member participants, from two school districts, increased the sample size, the reality is that this was a small research study. While all participants understood the attempt at anonymity, with the small sample size, the specific aspects of educational backgrounds, teaching history, and number of years on the board made it difficult to maintain anonymity; consequently, participants may not have disclosed more intimate district information about their relationships with superintendents, knowing information shared might be directly linked back to them personally.

While the selection of school board members was an attempt to create some randomness and limit the favorability of board members, there was definitely an understanding of who was participating, particularly in the Chula Vista Elementary School District, as Dr. Escobedo informed the school board that he would be recommending them to participate in the study. This may have limited the openness of school board members, understanding that their superintendent was knowledgeable of their potential participation, and also limited the scope of board participation, as only a few board members who worked with the two superintendents were afforded the opportunity to participate in this study. Likewise, using a current sitting superintendent and current seated school board members might have created a context for reservation in data being shared to the public that could potentially do harm to both superintendent and school board members. Thus, the nature of the selection process for this study might have created limitations.

While this study attempted to have a random sample of participants and a cross section of board members, the fact remains that this study was limited by the very

makeup of school board participants within the selected districts. Two of the seven board members interviewed were in their first or second year, one school board member served one term with his or her respective superintendent, two school board members maintained some format of educational leadership training, and only two board members had served more than two terms. The experience of the school board participants was understood, and the knowledge of superintendent leadership strategies in many cases was limited, although some of the critical components of leadership were triangulated. Similarly to the realities of a small case study mentioned earlier, the makeup of school board participants does not resemble school boards across the nation, either ethnically, by gender, by number, or by construct, and it limits the generalizability of school board member data, but certainly the data should be considered given the size of each district, the political contexts, and the student populations each district supports.

The most personal limitation is my role as a researcher and my current and previous roles in the education system. I am serving my third year as an Area 2 Superintendent in the San Diego Unified School District. I served 3 years as the chief human resource officer under former Superintendent Kowba and studied with one of the former board members in this district at the University of San Diego. My current educational experience within leadership studies at the University of San Diego, experiences within the executive cabinet, and frequent interactions with board members and Superintendent Kowba present a limitation, as my experiences may have interfered with the findings reported in this study. I have particular views on leadership that I needed to pay attention to. Additionally, the participants were informed of my background and perhaps made assumptions about my knowledge of their reality because

we encountered one another in my working role in the SDUSD. This then created a limitation in that information may not have been shared based on these assumptions. Likewise, I may have filled in the gaps during the sharing of findings when information was not delivered but assumed on my part. However, while limitations exist, my role may have provided me access to information, trust in the face of wonder, and credibility when discussing critical topics. Additionally, my level of expertise provided the ability to probe in specific instances based on my own intimate knowledge of school board members or particular interaction examples I may have experienced. Furthermore, data regarding the development of superintendent/school board member relationships in relation to teacher tenure, student achievement, and increasing the overall quality of the educational system may have been absent in this study as a result of my over-adherence to the interview protocol. I did this to avoid leading questions as an administrator familiar with the two school districts involved in the research. Thus, the absence of data focused on students and educational outcomes may be related to the way I phrased the questions.

### **Implications for K-12 Education**

K-12 school superintendents have continued to lead public education through the various changes in their roles and responsibilities. The position was designed to employ a variety of different actions in business operations, including finance, human capital, physical plant, and business development. Unfortunately, few programs exist to prepare superintendents to incorporate organizational leadership and learning into their wide variety of responsibilities. This has placed a strain on the superintendents and ultimately creates high turnover rates and instability within K-12 public education.

With the increase in accountability due to the shifting public school educational perspective in the 1980s and following the launching of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 and the recent signing of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 by U.S. President Barack Obama, which ensures that all guidelines of the NCLB Act are met but provides greater oversight of graduation rates for students regardless of race and ethnicity, home language, income, or identified disability, there comes the potential increase of educational accountability levels of advocacy and levels of representation for teachers and site administrators. These increases in accountability, advocacy, and collective bargaining have placed a burden on K-12 education superintendents to extend their roles and responsibilities, requiring more leadership than management.

Due to the implications of the changes in K-12 public education, particularly for the superintendent, development and training must change. Leadership is not management alone, and it requires understanding and collective engagement of technical and adaptive challenges, learning and leadership application, transactional and transformational leadership within and by leaders, and extending the possibilities of leadership within individuals and groups to a potential space that is created by individuals and by groups. As education is no longer linear and the world in which we exist has created a need for more encompassing leadership, superintendent learning must change as well.

Given the nature of this study and the data from the participant interviews, it appears as though some of the strategies used by Mr. Kowba and Dr. Escobedo, while subtle, were transactional in nature, although having the appearance of a linear relationship between them and their board members. Given this subtle yet critical nuance

in leadership, I suggest that there is a need for more leadership development integrating transactional/technical leadership to more connected leadership practices, therefore providing space for linear relationships that clearly are necessary and were substantiated in this study while at the same time extending collective efforts through transformational/adaptive leadership.

This study focused on how superintendents build and maintain relationships with school board members and discovered the need for different leadership skills, strategies, and awareness. If leadership training does not prepare superintendents for leading K-12 education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this study suggests there will be challenges for both superintendents and governing board members. We will not be waiting for superman; we will need all of the superheroes. We need new ways to prepare superintendents and advocates, collectively, in order to see the change we desire in an increasingly complex and demanding educational system.

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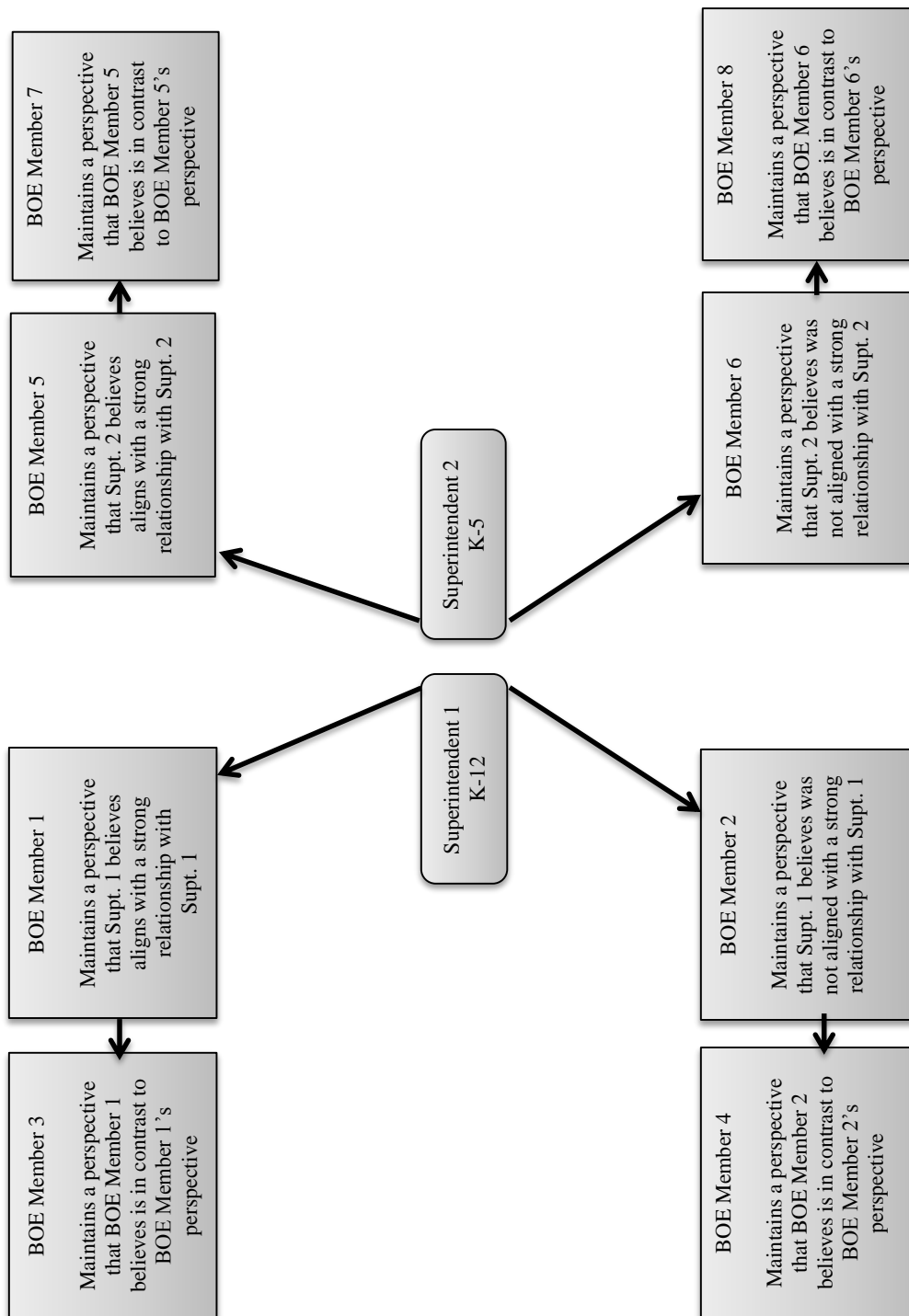
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## **Appendix A**

### **Case Study Interview Process and Snowball Sampling**

## Appendix A

### Case Study Interview Process and Snowball Sampling

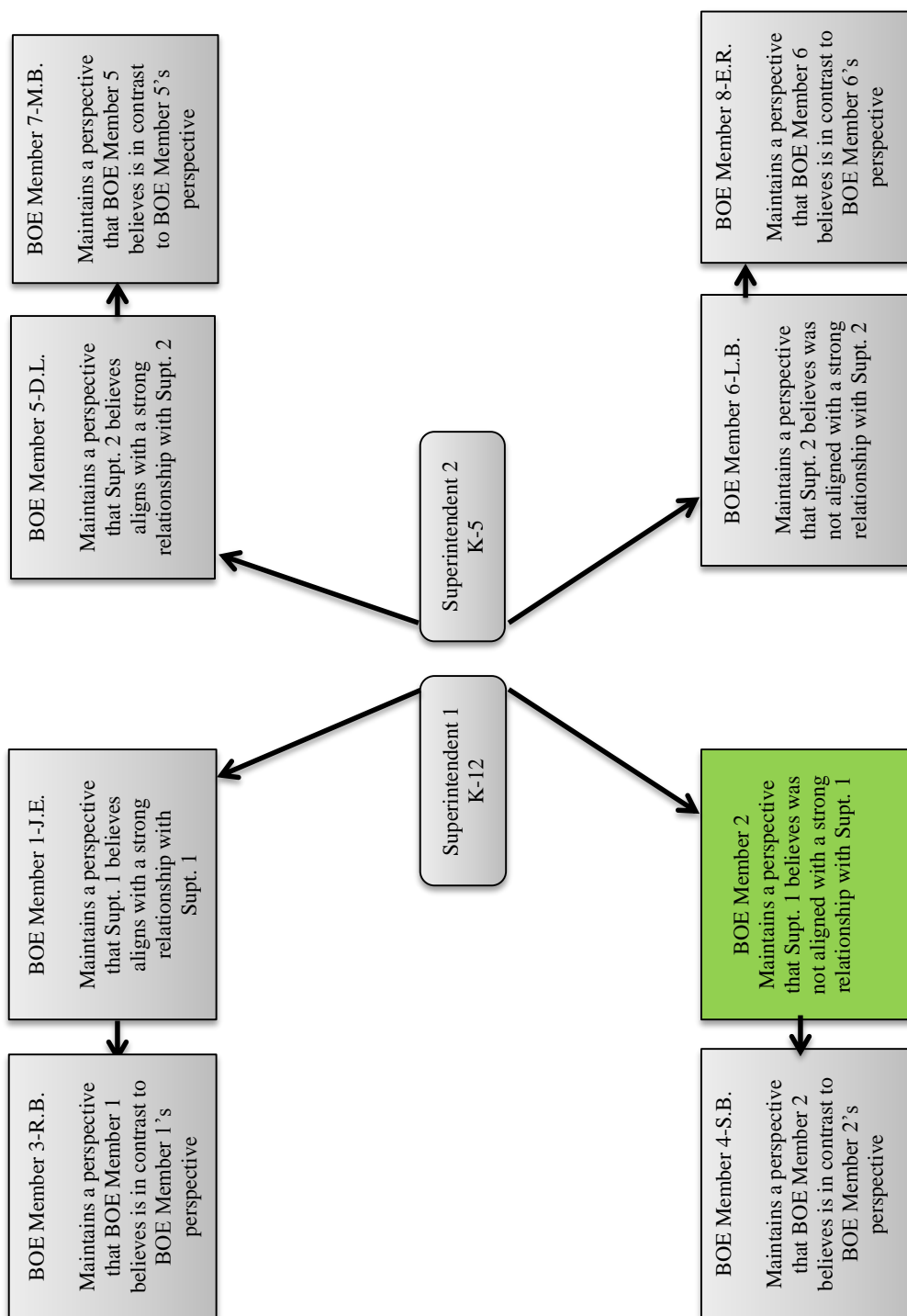


## **Appendix B**

### **Case Study Interview Process and Snowball Sampling**

## Appendix B

### Case Study Interview Process and Snowball Sampling



**\*Green signifies participant recommendation did not respond to participation invitation**

## **Appendix C**

### **General Interview Guide for Key Informant Participants**

## Appendix C

### General Interview Guide for Key Informant Participants

#### **Guidelines for the Interview**

The interview guide will be just that, a guide. The purpose of this interview guide is to establish baseline data, through an overview question, and to gather information on general ideas focused on the topic I am covering in this study. Each question maintains a set of sub-questions to be used if the key informant does not address these specific topics during their response to the overview question. Based on the responses from the informants supplementary topics, questions, and ideas will be explored. I will begin interviews with a “grand tour”. This question will seek to gain insight into the general context in which the remaining interview will reside. In the event that the interview questions are covered during the interviewer’s “grand tour” response, I will make a determination whether or not to follow up or proceed to additional questions.

Prior to each interview I will inform each participant that I will be taping the interview and that the information will be used for the purpose of my dissertation study of superintendent leadership: how they build and maintain relationships with school board members. I will also share on the record that *...Per their previous consent, the interview will be recorded for transcription purposes and I will confirm consent.*

#### **Grand tour question:**

*Please share your experience as a superintendent as you build and maintain relationships with your school board members.*

**The following questions will be asked accordingly after the grand tour question. In some cases sub questions are prepared as needed:**

1. Background: Personal information including
  - a. influences from family of origin including during youth, high school and college,
  - b. adult personal relationships and children
2. Decision to become a superintendent?
3. Were there significant experiences that supported you in making this decision?
4. What beliefs did you have about yourself, your work, and your leadership that impacted your decision?
5. How important is building relationships with school board members?
6. How do you approach the relationships with school board members?
  - a. What do you believe your role to be as a superintendent?
  - b. Describe how you see your role and how you interact with the school board.
  - c. Who is responsible for leading the school district?
    - i. (Depending on response) Why is it this the structure you find most significant?

- ii. How does this structure impact reform efforts?
  - iii. How does this structure impact how you build relationships with school board members?
- 7. What strategies do you use to build relationships with school board?
  - i. Where did you learn these strategies?
  - ii. What do you do when your strategies do not work for your anticipated outcomes?
  - iii. Give me some specific examples when specific strategies worked and the results that followed. When did these strategies not work and how did you respond?
  - iv. Did you employ any strategies or tactics, either conscious or unconscious?
  - v. Were there any organizational or situational factors that served favorable?
- 8. Describe the metacognitive process you engage in while building relationships with school board members?
  - a. What thoughts run through your head when you see the school board change their stances based on political pressures?
  - b. How do you maintain relationships with trustees when their political views outweigh the interest of children?
  - c.
- 9. Provide some timeline of key relationship decisions that you made throughout your tenure that have impacted your relationship with the school board?
  - a. Walk through key decisions for the BOE; budget cuts, staffing changes, layoffs, reform measures
    - i. Does this work impact your relationships?
      - 1. How do you manage through this work?
      - 2. Why do you respond or not respond when the trustees move away from reform efforts, layoffs, staffing changes?
- 10. What prepared you to understand how to build relationships with school board members or superintendents?
  - a. What formal training prepared you on how to build relationships with school board members?
    - i. What courses have you taken?
    - ii. Are there specific seminars that you have taken that help you with the process of building relationships?
    - iii. Have you ever been through group dynamics training?
  - b. What informal experiences have impacted your decisions on building relationships?
  - c. Do you have mentors who you speak with and what suggestions do they provide?
- 11. Why do you approach your decisions in a particular way?
  - a. Do you take up your role in different contexts?
  - b. How do you take up your role in different contexts?
    - i. Individual meetings?

- ii. Board workshops?
- iii. Closed sessions?
- iv. Open sessions?
- v. Public forums?
- vi. Media forums?

12. Is there anything that you would like to add that have not been addressed?

*Note: Member checking will also be infused in this process during subsequent interviews in order to create a level of validity within these data.*

## **Appendix D**

### **General Interview Guide for Informant Participants**

## Appendix D

### General Interview Guide for Informant Participants

#### **Guidelines for the Interview**

The interview guide will be just that, a guide. The purpose of this interview guide is to establish baseline data and to gather information on general ideas focused on the topic I am covering in this study. Based on the responses from the informants supplementary topics, questions, and ideas will be explored. I will begin interviews with a “grand tour”. This question will seek to gain insight into the general context in which the remaining interview will reside. In the event that the interview questions are covered during the interviewer’s “grand tour” response, I will make a determination whether or not to follow up or proceed to additional questions.

**Prior to each interview I will inform each participant that I will be taping the interview and that the information will be used for the purpose of my dissertation study of superintendent leadership: how they build and maintain relationships with school board members. I will also share on the record that *Per their previous consent, the interview will be recorded for transcription purposes and I will confirm consent.***

#### **Grand tour question:**

*Please tell me how you know superintendent XXX and what factors or qualities you perceive their leadership in building and maintaining relationships with school board members?*

#### **If informants do not mention in responding to the grand tour question, ask about:**

1. Background: Personal information including
  - a. Education background and experiences in public education
2. Decision to become a school board member?
3. How did you approach building a relationship with the superintendent?
4. Can you identify any characteristics that proved beneficial for the superintendent’s approach to building relationships with school board members?
5. Can you identify any effective behaviors that they employed?
6. Did they employ any strategies or tactics, either conscious or unconscious?
7. Were there any organizational or situational factors that impacted these strategies?
8. Decision to become a board member?
9. How important is building relationships between superintendents and school board members?
10. What factors make these relationships challenging?
11. What do you believe the role and responsibilities are as a board member?
12. What do you believe the role and responsibilities are as a superintendent?
13. Describe how you see these roles and responsibilities interacting.
14. Who is responsible for leading the school district?

- a. (Depending on response) Why is this structure you find most significant?
- b. How did this structure impact reform effort?
- c. How did this structure impact how superintendents interact with school board members?

15. Is there anything that you would like to add that have not been addressed?

*Note: Member checking will also be infused in this process during subsequent interviews in order to create a level of validity within these data.*



## Institutional Review Board Project Action Summary

**Action Date:** June 22, 2015

*Note: Approval expires one year after this date.*

**Type:** ☐ New Full Review ☐ New Expedited Review ☒ Continuation Review ☐ Exempt Review  
☒ Modification

**Action:** ☒ Approved ☐ Approved Pending Modification ☐ Not Approved

**Project Number:** 2011-03-094

**Researcher(s):** Lamont A. Jackson Grad SOLES  
Dr. Frank Kemmerer Fac SOLES

**Project Title:** Building and Maintaining Relationships Between Superintendents and School Board  
Members: The Approach of two Public School Superintendents

*Note: We send IRB correspondence regarding student research to the faculty advisor, who bears the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research. We request that the faculty advisor share this correspondence with the student researcher.*

### Modifications Required or Reasons for Non-Approval

None

The next deadline for submitting project proposals to the Provost's Office for full review is N/A. You may submit a project proposal for expedited review at any time.

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