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**THE ROLE OF THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD IN 1999,
THE SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEW**

By

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD IN 1999, THE SUPERINTENDENTS' VIEW

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Purpose

The researcher's purpose was to describe and explain the role of the Michigan public school board. The historical account of school boards demonstrates that two factors primarily account for their altered role. They are progressive legislation and professional administrators. The researcher's investigation sought to determine the role of the school board in 1999, the relationship between the superintendent and the school board authority and the effects of the education reforms on the role of a Michigan public school board. By blending these three areas of questions together, the researcher was able to describe and explain what a public school board does and to understand its central role in the governance of its school district.

Sample and Method

The sample consisted of 25 superintendents that met the researcher's criteria of being a superintendent in a Michigan public school district since 1989. The technique of theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was used to determine the role of the school board. The method was interview. All superintendent interviews were taped and transcribed. Subsequently, transcriptions were analyzed and data recorded. The researcher used the data to make assertions about the role of school boards in these

experienced superintendents' school districts and supported these assertions with the evidence he obtained from the respondents.

Findings

Using Thompson's framework of open-system organizations as a referent, the data provided by the experienced superintendents suggested the role of the school board is to buffer the public school organization from the "uncertainties of its environment." The school board buffers by hiring the superintendent, by legitimizing policy, by serving as change agents, by representing its constituents and by negotiating with its employees. The school board also serves as a "check and balance" on the professional administration by providing oversight of personnel, finance, and curriculum. The evidence supports the assertion that the superintendent was responsible for running the school district. The experienced superintendent initiates and writes policy, communicates with the stakeholders and makes recommendations. Michigan's 1990s' education reforms have had a minimal effect on the role of its school boards. The reforms affected school boards indirectly.

Recommendations

Similar studies using a less-successful sample of superintendents or interviewing school board members may provide very different results.

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2000

DEDICATION

To My Three Sons,
Brett, Keefer and Cole

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the role of Michigan public school boards in 1999. The researcher argued that during the past 160 years, progressive educational reforms in the organization and administration of Michigan's local schools have continually altered the school board's role. By progressive educational reforms, the researcher means those actions that increase: (a) financial equity between school districts, (b) the amount of district resources coming from the state, (c) the surveillance by the state over matters formerly left to the local districts, (d) the administrative and bureaucratic efforts necessary to comply with state and federal mandates. The progressive nature of educational reforms and the growth of administrative bureaucracy continued in the 1990s and therefore the school board's role may have changed. Thus, an up-to-date assessment of the school board's present role was both desirable and important. This study undertook that assessment.

Chapter One begins with an overview of the study and follows with the historical description of how the organization and administration of public schools evolved nationally and specifically in Michigan. This account demonstrates how the roles of school boards in public education have changed through the years. Chapter One continues with an overview of the open systems theory that posits that subsystems change as inputs from the environment change. This chapter concludes with a summary of how the role of the school board has evolved during the past two centuries.

CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM/HISTORY OF SCHOOL BOARDS

Background

The school board is the legal entity that governs the local public school district. **As** such, school boards have become an important part of American tradition, if not an **important** part of our democracy. It is the unit of government that people feel closer to **than** any other, perhaps because the board member may be the next door neighbor. State **government** is more distant. Additionally, the fact that lay people are in charge of **professional** educators is very comforting to many. Historically, there has been an **inherent** mistrust of professional educators. The sense of "local control" makes school **boards** so attractive that Finn (p. 21) says..."to suggest that it (local control) may be **obsolete** or harmful is like hinting that Mom's apple pie is laced with arsenic." Yet, as **important** as local control of the school district is for so many, its role in education has **changed** from its earlier beginnings over 200 years ago.

While many factors have contributed to the changing role of school boards, **perhaps** the two factors that have most affected local control are state reform efforts and **the** professionalism of administrators. By definition, the former was often progressive in **nature**. The following chronological record describes and explains the important events **that** initially authorized local control. It describes the two major events Callahan (1975) **argues** redefined school board authority and altered the role of school boards. Further, the **Chronology** explains how an ideological shift in the U.S. from its grass roots and "rugged **individual**" beginnings toward the social movement called Progressivism affected all **aspects** of life.

A natural outgrowth of Progressivism was the development of bureaucracy, an **organizational** structure Weber described as, “a parallel phenomena to democracy” (p. 225). The representative democratic nature of school boards is no exception. Weber **con**tinued by explaining that “the characteristic principle of bureaucracy is the abstract **regu**larity of the execution of authority.” Alternately, democracy is a way of providing a “**che**ck” on the authority or governing body, but does not ensure the standardization of **adm**inistrative authority. Existing social, material, or honorific preferences and rank are **conn**ected to office-holder functions and duties. Weber believed that bureaucracy **acco**mpanies modern mass democracy (pp. 224-225). Thus, a natural tension evolved **betw**een the democratic tendencies of the school board and the bureaucratic organization of **the** superintendent to run the day to day operations of public schools. The result was **the** role of the school board was forever altered. In fact, Zeigler and Jennings went so far as **con**cluding in their work of 1974 that “that administrative staffs typically rule school districts.” Not every researcher agreed with their account, however (NSBA Research Report, p. 11).

This study continues with an account of three educational reform packages signed **into** law in Michigan since 1990. A description of Michigan’s new policies and an **analysis** of the possible impact each has had on the role(s) of Michigan public school **boards** are also included. The open systems theory discussion suggests why the school **board's** role is likely to be affected by the education reforms. The role of the public **sch**ool board in Thompson’s theoretical model of an open systems organization is **Presented**. This model helps to explain how the school board brings rationality to a public **sch**ool organization. Recent studies of the role of school boards are reviewed. A pilot

study using school board minutes to determine role change is discussed. The chapter is concluded with a presentation of this study's theoretical framework.

The Birth of Local Control (1647-1785)

School boards trace their origin back to the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1647) and its Old Deluder Law. This colonial statute, passed on behalf of the prevalent Calvinist heritage, forced every township (town) to establish a school in order for children to learn to read the Bible, and thus guard themselves against Satan (the old Deluder). Towns, out of compliance with this law, were to be fined. First and Walberg (1992) report that "while this law was not strictly complied with ... it is an important law because it introduced the principle that education is a function of local government (p. 4)." Early common schools reflected their localities and were autonomous. A law passed in the colony in 1693 further strengthened the sovereignty of local control when it decreed that schools were to be maintained through local taxation. The "school business" was transacted at town meetings (the early school boards) where the role of the public input and decision making administered, maintained, and controlled everything related to the local school (Goldhammer 1964). Like the early colonial society, local control was grassroots. Until the end of the Revolutionary War, however, churches ran most of the schools. These schools were oriented toward classical learning and preparing their students to become ministers or lawyers (Miron and Wimpelberg, pp. 154-155).

Authorization of Local Control (1785-1827)

As the U.S. expanded westward, the New England system of control of the schools followed. Goldhammer declares, "It (New England style of control) appealed to them (the pioneers) as consistent with their spirit of independence and desire to manage their own affairs apart from the dictates of a central government authority" (p. 3). There

was also the growing recognition of the need for an educated citizenry if the new republic was to survive (Campbell, Cunningham, et al and Miron and Wimpelberg, p. 155-56). Two salutary, education-related, congressional acts defined local control. One called for the locals to support schools and the second later delegated it to state control.

The first, the Northwest Land Ordinance of 1785, set aside one section of land (number sixteen) in each township of the old Northwest Territory (the land north and west of the Ohio River). The money raised by the sale or use of this section went directly to the township and was to be used to support the local school(s). According to Tyack, James and Benavot (1987), the Northwest Land Ordinance was the beginning of the federal government's involvement in promoting public schools. This ideological position was further stated two years later in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 that included the clause, "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." (Tyack, James and Benavot, p. 47).

The second piece of legislation was the 10th amendment of the Constitution (1791) which says "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." (Reutter and Hamilton, p. 2) With it, the federal government effectively removed itself from the direct control of public education. Since public education was not an expressly reserved power under the provisions of the Constitution, it became a function of the state under this amendment. This does not preclude federal involvement in education, however. Later, it will be described how the federal government expanded its role in

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public education in the second half of the twentieth century. This increased federal role continues and subsequently impacts the roles of school boards today.

Over time and in keeping with this amendment, each state delegated "administrative authority to local school boards...(Russo, p. 6). This is not to say that the states relinquished complete control to local school districts. Russo adds, "A local school board and the district in its charge are creatures of the state; they may be created and abolished by the will of the legislature. Concomitantly, state legislatures exercise plenary power over education through statutory enactments and law." Thus, absolute local control was tenuous from its very beginning.

The Growth of Bureaucracy (1827-1890)

As towns grew, their way of governing schools had to change since the communities were too big to meet in a town meeting forum. The task of running each school went to a committee of citizens appointed by the town's public officials to whom the committeemen owed their allegiance. The roles of the school committees were to hire teachers, to provide school buildings and to obtain supplies (Callahan, 1975; Bendiner, 1969; First and Walberg, 1992). The promoters of the common school movement "believed that a common school controlled and financed largely by local trustees and public taxation was essential to the realization of a millennial vision of a righteous republic (Tyack, Kirst, and Hansot p. 255).

As the early American society grew and more schools were begun, the absence of a coordinated school system was felt. The Boston school system is an example of the effect the decentralization of school committees had on educational efforts. Primary schools (elementary-type) were established in 1818 as feeder schools for the grammar schools (secondary). The number of primary schools, each governed by separate boards

of selectmen, were seemingly out of control. Tyack (1974) tells how these primary school trustees, nominated and under the control of the main Boston committeemen, "were largely an independent, self-nominating, and self-perpetuating body; by the 1850's their number reached 190, and they supervised that many schools" (p. 33). As a result, Boston's public schools were rife with an "ambiguity of authority and diffusion of control (p. 34)". Tyack attributed this to the system of governance (local control) that had grown from its grass roots beginnings (1647) and still appealed to many of the state's citizens. The result was the absence of an efficient, coordinated educational system. The decentralization brought on by grass roots local control was blamed.

In 1837, the Massachusetts legislature created the first state board of education. Horace Mann was its first secretary. He was very concerned about the decentralization of instruction present in the traditional New England school boards (NASB Research Report, 1975). Mann was influenced by the Cousins Report, a report describing the educational organization of Prussian schools. Mann recommended Prussia's bureaucratic educational system after he visited Prussia and studied the education system there. He liked the idea of having one "school commissioner or inspector" for each school district. This bureaucratic position fit what Weber describes as, "the principles of office hierarchy and of levels of graded authority..." (p. 197). Mann felt this was desirable for Boston so he encouraged like-minded supporters to run for a seat on the Boston School Committee. It was these reform candidates who eventually recommended that one person (superintendent) be put in charge of its public school system. It wasn't until 1851, fourteen years later, that Boston Committee hired its first superintendent, however.

[illegible]

During this period, Michigan was an early leader in promoting education for all. The territory's leaders felt public education for everyone was important. As it prepared for statehood in 1827, the Legislative Council of the Michigan Territory passed a law that provided for a system of common schools. Dain (1968) calls it the "beginning of educational consciousness in Michigan." It placed the onus of educating the children of the new territory on the inhabitants of the townships in which they lived. While this law was shortly thereafter abandoned, this act and the one that followed in 1829, were really the models from which Michigan's local control can be traced. In Education in the Wilderness, Dane writes:

...Both the acts of 1827 and 1829 asserted the authority of the territory to legislate common schools into existence; but they placed the control and administration of the schools largely in the hands of local officials subject to the will of the electorate. So strong was the belief that education was a matter of community interest that, in all probability, those who wrote the Act of 1829 would have been content to allow school control and administration to remain completely under local authority had not circumstances forced them to provide for a degree of territorial supervision. (p. 139)

The circumstances mentioned, however, greatly increased the State's role in public education. These factors included providing incentives for the inhabitants of the scattered townships to begin common schools and collecting revenue from the reserved school lands, section sixteen, as provided by the Northwest Ordinance (Dane, 1968). The historical record is clear that even while Michigan was still a territory, progressive actions seeking equity in resources between the local schools increased the State's control. The funding acts of the legislative council, Michigan's early legislature, meant a change in the role of the local school board from the earlier ones in the New England grass roots traditions. Miron and Wimpelberg (p. 157) quote Cubberly and his

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recognition of what the impact of receiving money from the state means to local control.

Cubberly noted: “The acceptance of state aid inevitably meant a small but a gradually increasing state control. The first step was the establishment of some form of state aid, the next was the imposing of conditions necessary to secure this state aid.”

Isaac Crary and John Pierce wrote much of the educational language for the State's Constitution (Dunbar and May 1995). Michigan's first Constitution had an article drafted and adopted with respect to education that had never been used before in any state constitution. It read:

The Governor shall nominate, and by and with the consent of the Legislature, in joint vote, shall appoint a superintendent of Public Instruction, who shall hold office for two years, and whose duties shall be prescribed by law (Jackson, p. 25.)

The duties of Superintendent of Public Instruction were intentionally designed with John Pierce in mind. Since Pierce was the man selected for this position, many of his ideas about centralizing Michigan's education system prevailed (Dane 1968). Section 3 of the duties of the appointed superintendent was to “prepare and digest a system for the organization and establishment of free, common schools” (Jackson, p. 26). John Pierce believed that all children needed an education, not just the elite. He also felt that the only way to ensure this was by having it included in the state's policy and to provide the support for it. Pierce's organization of the school system resembled the Prussian system described by Cousins and favored by Mann. The state superintendent played a central role (Pierce 1877, Hoyt and Ford 1905, Dain 1968, Dunbar and May 1995). Hoyt and Ford write:

It was Mr. Pierce's idea that, while the schools were always to be kept as an organized unitary system under the control of a central authority (the state), much

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power should be retained and exercised by the people, and the will of the majority in the unit should always prevail, so long as the will did not conflict with the will of the great majority (the state). (p. 117)

Issac Crary and John Pierce felt the State should control the money raised by the sale of section sixteen lands to ensure equity between school districts and to ensure the money would go for education. The implication is that Crary and Pierce knew the value of the sixteenth section in each township would vary and they didn't feel all of the townships would value public support of education as they did. Pierce (1877) writes, "Hence it was deemed of essential importance to us that these sixteenth sections reserved from sale should be given in trust to the State, and not to the surveyed townships (p. 40)."

Since Michigan was not yet a state, Crary, the state's unofficial representative to Washington, submitted Michigan's ordinance of admission language to Congress in 1835 that omitted an important clause in the education article that allowed the State to control the money coming from the reserved section (sixteen). Congress naively accepted it.

Crary's proposal read:

That Section numbered sixteen in every township of the public lands, and where such section has been sold or otherwise disposed of, other lands equivalent thereto, and as contiguous as may be, shall be granted to the State for the use of schools.

According to the Land Ordinance of 1785, it should have read:

That Section numbered sixteen in every township of the public lands, and where such section has been sold or otherwise disposed of, other lands equivalent thereto, and as contiguous as may be, shall be granted to the State *for the use of the inhabitants of such township*-for the use of schools.

Crary's action to create funding equity diminished local autonomy since the money raised by the sale of section sixteen lands went to the State to become part of the State school fund, not directly to the township as the Land Ordinance of 1785 had

intended. The interest from this fund was to go to the schools under the auspices of the newly established position of State Superintendent (Dunbar and May, 1995). This act was the first official one in Michigan that sought equity in resources between schools and increased the State's role over matters formerly left to the local schools. As such, it may be described as the new State of Michigan's first progressive educational reform.

Less than two months after Michigan reached statehood in 1837, a new law established primary school districts and a governing board made up of three white, male citizens for each school district. Their positions included Moderator, Assessor, and Director. They each had distinct roles on this board. Interestingly, if a person elected to one of these positions refused or neglected to serve as a Board member, his \$10 fine was paid to the township library. In 1849, the law was changed to allow for a larger school board in districts with more than 100 students between the ages of four and eighteen. With two-thirds vote at the annual school meeting, four trustees could be added. This became the historical prototype of a seven-member Board. (Bruin).

The governance system actually consisted of two parts: the primary school board and the township's Board of School Inspectors. The latter's relationship with the primary schools was similar to the one that exists today between local school districts and Intermediate School Districts (ISDs). The main duties of the primary school boards included levying local school taxes, purchasing or leasing a site to build a schoolhouse, paying the teacher and filling the vacancies on the Board. The township Board of School Inspectors limited the role of the local school boards, however, by the nature and scope of their role. (Bruin).

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The role of the Board of School Inspectors was to establish the school districts, receive the money from the State's primary school fund, visit the various schools in the township at least twice a year and conduct an examination of potential teaching candidates. The Board of School Inspectors had a lot of authority and continued the incremental growth of bureaucracy, a natural outgrowth of expanded state control as districts complied with the state mandates (Cohen, 1982). Thus, the role of the local school boards in Michigan was further limited by a legislatively created bureaucracy as compared to the New England schools where its school boards were responsible for all aspects of education.

Progressivism

Historians typically refer to some time period between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War I as the Progressive Era. Most likely, they will recall the Progressive Era began in the 1890s and continued for the first two decades of the twentieth century. These were turbulent times that caused the citizenry to call on the government for economic and social reforms. Ironically, these reforms required an economic base of tax support. After completing an analysis of historical data, Weber concluded, "a stable system of taxation is the precondition for the permanent existence of bureaucratic administration" (p. 208). Since the U.S. had recently evolved from a subsistence economy (reliance on agriculture) to a money economy (reliance on industry), it had the constant tax base necessary for maintaining a bureaucratic state. A more powerful central government was the result.

A closer look at history, however, suggests the social movement called Progressivism may have been evolving in our country even earlier. Weber wrote, "In the United States, both parties since Jackson's administration have developed

bureaucratically” (p. 225). In The Democratic Wish, Morone adds... The Jacksonians constructed a party state and a rudimentary national bureaucracy.” Further, he argues... “The American democratic moments introduce new bureaucracies.... The irony of the process is that democratic aspirations have been crucial for the development of public administration” (p. 13). In part, it seems bureaucracy resulted from the early efforts by Jackson and his ideology to be “free” of big government.

A newspaperman in the first half of the 19th century suggested a subtle, but very real change in philosophy was occurring throughout our country. It seems that many Americans were looking to government to do things they had formerly done as "rugged individuals." In The One Best System, Tyack quotes newspaper editor Bayrd Still (p. 31) as he described the change in citizens' attitude prevalent in Milwaukee after it was incorporated as a city in 1846. Still wrote that the old custom of volunteer services and self-help was giving way, "to a specialization in urban administration which developments in science and increased wealth encouraged and which the growth of population and its attendant problems made inevitable." As Americans became better off financially and scientific discoveries found better ways of doing things, the role of government was changing, too. Specialization in public services caused an explosion in the growth of government to deal with this phenomenon. An increase in the educational bureaucracy (especially in cities) was consistent with the overall growth of government.

The years following the Civil War were marked by a profound change. The Industrial Revolution had made its way from Europe and was causing a transformation within America. Hofstadter (1965) summarized it when he wrote, “The United States was born in the country and had moved to the city” (p. 23). This not only upset the economic

balance of the former agrarian age, but it also left its mark on the social and moral order of its past. The small landowners and businessmen were losing their holdings to large corporations. Dionne in They Only Look Dead writes, "The shop was being replaced by the factory, craftsmen by factory workers, local elites by national elites" (p. 46). More and more Americans were concerned with how the large corporations and industry were taking the economic fiber away from the farmer and the small business owner. Many of the fast growing cities were rife with political corruptness and nepotism. Finally, there was the beginning of a distinct caste system within our culture that consisted of the "have" and the "have-nots." Many Americans were looking to return to the mythical "Golden Age" of its Jacksonian past. Hofstadter writes, "One of the ironic problems confronting reformers around the turn of the century was that the very activities they pursued in attempting to defend or restore the individualistic values they admired brought them closer to the techniques of organization they feared" (pp. 6-7). He continues, "...the Progressive movement was the complaint of the unorganized against the consequences of the organized" (p. 214). Most often, Americans turned toward centralized government to solve societal problems, especially those of inequality or inequity.

The researcher describes this major ideological change occurring in the U.S. as progressive. By definition (The American Heritage Dictionary, p. 990), progressive implies evolutionary changes by moving forward in steps or by stages. The organization of local schools was not exempt from change. The historical account of education in early Michigan demonstrated how legislative actions sought to increase equity between local schools and how these actions resulted in increased state control. This administrative control by the State created a more bureaucratic public school system. Weber recalls that

bureaucratic organizations have usually developed into power with the intention of, “the leveling of social differences” (p. 226). Indeed, the bureaucratic growth in public schools was no exception. The organization of the local schools, with their grass roots New England beginnings, had been greatly affected. Now, this national trend toward the hierarchical organizational structure, a part of the bureaucratization of government services, brought further change in the administrative role of school boards as professional educators were hired to oversee the daily operation of the schools.

The Superintendent

The role of superintendent was in its infancy in Massachusetts about the time Michigan gained statehood in 1837. The reform candidates of Mann’s era recommended a superintendent be appointed. The superintendent’s job would be “to watch over the schools...to know the exact condition of everyone...This should be his business, his whole business; and he should be adequately paid” (NASB Research Report, p. 3).

Callahan (1975) calls the creation of the office of superintendent of schools the first “significant change” in the school board’s function and role. It was no longer necessary for traditional New England style school boards to handle the instructional supervision and the preparation of curriculum. Many local school boards followed the Boston School Committeemen’s recommendation and hired superintendents, educational experts, to assume this role. Scheerhorn (1995) reports that twenty-seven large cities had district superintendents by 1860. Two of the first were Buffalo and Louisville. The superintendent’s role was to centralize instruction and supervision so that one person was responsible for what was formerly done by the city wards operating independently of each other. This resulted in less fragmented instruction and more consistent curriculum within these cities’ schools.

Further, the development of the role of superintendent made it likely that bureaucratic organization of public schools would continue. Again, Weber asserted that, “precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs-these are raised to the optimum in the strictly bureaucratic administration” (p. 214). Many of these favorable bureaucratic attributes were reasons why Mann believed it was so necessary for the Prussian administrative organization model with one person in charge of the school district to be adopted. A natural tension between the role of the school board and the role of the superintendent emerged as grass roots democracy collided with progressive bureaucracy.

The powers of the superintendents varied from city to city depending upon their individual credibility. Since early superintendents were only authorized to supervise teachers and to prepare the courses of study for the district's students, many of the traditional roles of school boards continued. Visiting schools, overseeing all administrative details and making fiscal decisions were retained by the school boards. The stage was now set for a fundamental change in how urban school systems would be structured and how decisions would be made.

The Administrative Progressives (1890-1940)

When state policymaking began to grow, late in the nineteenth century, government everywhere in the United States was primitive and weak. There was relatively little political organization of any sort, and only modest exercise of power in education. There was, in addition, great suspicion of government. The prevailing political doctrine was a curious blend of Jacksonian and Jeffersonian ideas, which pictured the best government as a modest, neutral umpire in a society dominated and driven by private interests. Government was thought of as evil, or potentially evil, and private interests were regarded as the chief source of political virtue. These ideas were reflected in the fragmented system of education governance (Cohen, p. 476).

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The turn of the twentieth century brought a shift in school board organization. While the number of rural districts continued to grow, it was the urban school boards, with their newly created position of superintendent that first saw the major changes in structure and role (Kirst). In an attempt to diminish the negative impact of multiple boards and committees, many cities chose to move away from large, ward-based school boards toward smaller, central boards voted through district-wide, nonpartisan elections. This movement had the effect of de-politicizing school boards. Despite this change, Tyack (1974) writes "...the school board remained large, ward boards kept substantial powers, and the whole mode of lay management was diffuse, frequently self-contradictory, and prone to conflict" (p.89). Danzberger (1992) suggests this shift in governance structure was the primary goal of the progressive educational reforms of the early twentieth century.

Despite the attempts by states to statutorily govern schools, school reformers were concerned that the education-related laws were having little effect. Progressive education reforms were not having the desired result of a better educational system. It seemed as though practice was prevailing over policy. Many rural, one-room schoolhouses existed in which a weak education was a result of poorly trained teachers, out-of date curriculum, and under funding. Conversely, the urban school systems were described as too political with "... corruption, parochialism, and vestiges of an outmoded village mentality" (Tyack, 1974, p. 127).

School reformers, known as administrative progressives, sought to change the school board practices described by Tyack. These reformers believed the lay people on the school boards had too much power over decision-making. The administrative

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progressives hoped to transfer all control of education in the urban setting to a centralized school board and an expert superintendent under the quasi-corporate model of governance (Tyack, 1974, p. 196). Earlier it was described how the creation of the office of superintendent was the first significant change in the school board's role. Now Callahan's (1975) second significant change in school board authority was about to occur. The issue was whether school boards should turn over their power to the "professional experts." That is, administrative progressives believed school systems should be hierarchical. As such, the professional educators would be "... buffered from the vagaries of locally elected officials" (p. 258 Tyack, Kirst and Hanshot, p. 258).

Administrative progressives sought to make the schools more efficient. Kirst explains, "One of its (progressives) aims was to emancipate the schools from partisan politics and excessive decentralization." They believed Frederick Taylor's scientific model, a rational management theory that separated and defined roles and responsibilities would do this. Danzberger (1992) writes, "They (new school board members) began to depend increasingly on the superintendent, placing their faith in the new theory of scientific management" (p.46). The progressives recommended that school boards be made up of non-partisan, business and professional men who should delegate authority to the superintendent. This meant the representation of the various social classes within a community was most likely diminished, but the efficiency in management was increased. This idea caught on quickly in many states. Many of the states altered their legal framework governing schools to better align themselves with the model suggested by the administrative progressives (Tyack, James and Benavot, 1987).

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Just as the nation was undergoing an ideological shift toward an expanded role of central government and progressive policy, the expanding role of superintendents and their growing bureaucracy challenged the school boards to handle even more potential problems. Cohen writes:

When policy expanded, government tended to add agencies that reflected the sponsoring interests, and that had specific responsibility for the policy or program that had been at issue. Education government at all levels grew by adding specialized sub-units, each of which had responsibility for managing a particular program, policy, or problem, and each of which reflected a particular set of sponsoring private interests. (p. 481)

Ellwood Cubberly was one of the best known administrative progressives. His work greatly affected the new role of school boards. He voiced the opinion that "the function of the school board was to set policy, choose an administrator and school sites and decide financial matters. The job of the superintendent was to operate the schools" (NASB Research Report, 1975). This resulted in the school board adopting a quasi-corporate model as its organizational structure. The new role of the school board was to serve as a buffer between the public and the professional educators and let the superintendent and his staff to determine the majority of the educational decisions. This shift in representation, described by Pitkin (1968) as the trustee model, continued in cities across the US until the 1960s and Danzberger (1992) believes this model is still in existence in many districts

Federal Laws, Court Decisions, Collective Bargaining and More (1940-present)

The next fifty years brought many events that affected the organization and administration of public schools. Some of these include the Brown vs. the Board of Education ruling in 1954, the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the teacher unions gaining the right to bargain collectively in the 1960s, and the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary

Education Acts) of 1965. The Civil Rights movement and the political unrest of the 1960s caused school boards to become more politicized in cities once again as diverse communities within cities sought representation. Further, PL 94-142 and Title IX of the 1970s were examples of social policy efforts, progressive by definition, to provide equity for all. Meyer (1979) writes, “Since World War II, the Federal Government has come to be more involved, but still in a limited way. ... And the authority built up has been legitimated, not as an expansion of general Federal educational control, but rather by very special purposes – most commonly, the restriction of inequalities” (p. 2).

The creation of the U.S. Education Department during the Carter years (1977-1980) made the federal government's role even more prevalent in public education. The increased federal role meant an increase in the states' role as the states were made responsible for implementing and monitoring the federal legislation (Danzberger). Bureaucratic growth was inevitable. Meyer argues that what he calls the “fragmented centralization in American education” has expanded administrative size and “...has become less and less able to respond to the local systems of control – one of the main loci of legitimated educational authority in the country” (p. 25).

In 1996, a local weekly newspaper asked an incumbent board member running for a second term, “What are your top three priorities facing the (school) district and its board over the next five years?” Her response echoed the impact federal and state policies were having on school boards:

Meeting the challenges of educational mandates in the 90s. The federal government is continually vacillating on educational issues. We comply with a regulation, only to have it withdrawn in a year or two or have the funding pulled away. We just went through this with Title I funding. The state is also providing a volatile environment by holding the purse strings for education, giving the end goal (the new proficiency tests) and putting the responsibility into the lap of the

local districts. In other words, telling the districts ‘this is what you must teach the students, this is how much you have to do it with and you had better do it or we will give the money to someone else.’ We see this happening with adult education right now. The state is trying to give most of the proposed dollars that have traditionally gone to adult education to the new Michigan Jobs Commission (Grand Ledge Independent p.20).

In their study of the states’ roles in public education, Kirst and Wirt (1992) write that the states have not avoided policy opportunities. They note that from early in the 20th century until the 1960s, state education policy was left to the professionals and their lay cohorts (school boards) to initiate any policy recommendations. They call this period of time *low-conflict* politics. Beginning in the mid-1960s, due to the political turbulence of that day, states entered a period Kirst and Wirt call *high-conflict* politics. Higher tax rates and purported teaching failures helped make education policy and school board membership more political.

Thus (historically), the state-local clash has been between two major values: equity versus freedom of choice. More recently states have introduced a third value—efficiency—by placing more controls over testing, budgeting, evaluation and the like. The best assessment of this competition is that today, equity and efficiency are stressed more by state action, but choice has been reduced. This is illustrated in the recent dramatic increase of state control in such areas as the state role in education finance, state requirements for accountability, state programs for children with special needs, and the state efforts to increase local academic standards (p. 1269).

Danzberger, Kirst, and Usdan also see the shift of influence on local school boards. They believe the I.E.L.’s report in 1986 illuminated the complex web of educational governance that school boards are forced to operate in today.

The pattern is for state authorities (legislators, governors, etc.) to increase their influence over funding and policy from the top. Simultaneously, employee unions, parents, interest groups, and private agencies (testing and accrediting) have squeezed the discretionary zone of school board control from the bottom. Local central school authorities are sandwiched in by these contending forces. Clearly the zone of policy discretion at the school district level has grown smaller over the past 30 years (p.31).

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It seems progressive policymaking has exacted a toll on the scope of local control. But, why did states start legislating reforms?

The Nation at Risk report released in 1983 was a catalyst for states to take additional legislative actions. This federal government report highlighted how poorly American students were performing on standardized tests in comparison to its global neighbors in competing countries. This report was all that many state legislatures needed to take action. Most often, legislators' educational reform efforts were pointed at improving public education by increasing state curriculum, increasing the hours of instruction students were to receive, and increasing teacher and administrator certification requirements. "The increased role of the states brought more regulations to assure local compliance and inevitably, increased reporting and paperwork" (Danzberger, 1992 p. 53).

An increase in state level legislation can also force school boards to make difficult financial decisions. Mandated programs can exact a burden on school districts. Senator Dianne Byrum of Michigan recently recognized this fact. She stated, "When you put mandates in, you tie the hands of school districts and force them to make budget decisions on how they deliver education to the majority of their students," (Harmon p. 4B). This supports Cohen's findings that, all too often, state mandates were not accompanied by supporting dollars to allow the changes to occur (Cohen p. 491). The lack of funding to sustain state mandates further affects the ability of a school board to enact policy that benefit students in their local district.

The states' actions also sent the message, whether intentional or unintentional, to school boards that school improvement was not likely to be locally driven. This message was supported by a Rand Corporation study that found that, "School boards seldom

invented or motivated the school improvement efforts... In most cities, the board had been a player in someone else's leadership strategy" (p.49). As such, the role of the school boards' policy-making authority was diminished. A recent example of this is the Detroit Public School system. Due in part by the failure of the Board to take definitive actions in improving the failing academic and infrastructure of the district, the Michigan legislature removed the elected Board and replaced it with the state superintendent and members of the business community selected by the mayor. The fact that the State has the power to take over local school districts and remove democratically elected school board members suggests the state legislature/governor do not believe that local school boards have the capacity and/or desire to drive educational reform change.

Campbell, Cunningham et al, (1990) support the fact that some of the control that was once the local district's has been shifted to other levels of government. Perhaps, revenue sources for school finances have caused the biggest shift in control. Due to court decisions regarding the equity of funding formulas and citizen discontent over high property taxes, the shift has meant the states have played a much more supportive role in sustaining their public schools. Yaffe's "The New Golden Rule," tells of the investment Colorado made toward funding public education and the effect it had on local control. In the article, Yaffe quotes two state legislators. The first states, "The minute the state puts in 50% plus one dime more of school funding then I'm going to feel that I will have an obligation to start having some say-so to how that money is spent." Another adds, "The more money we give, the more control we're going to have." Yaffe's summary statement reads, "It seems clear, therefore, that local control of schools, at least in Colorado, is fast being eroded" (pp. 239-240).

Again, the progressive nature of these changes, evolutionary and ongoing, resulted in an increase in bureaucratic specialization to meet the federal and state legislation and the court decisions. All of these have affected the organization and administration of public schools and have resulted in changing roles for the school boards.

Education Reforms in Michigan

Throughout the history of public education, an account of the progressive nature of our State actions and the more recent federal interventions has shown how the organization and administration of local schools have altered the role of local school boards. No longer are school boards directing as many aspects of its school systems. Often, states have centralized much of the authority earlier granted to local school boards for the sake of equity and to help ensure an educated population. A recent study, completed by Scheerhorn (1995), found that education reforms in Michigan from 1969-1994 expanded the role of the superintendent and forced schools to become more bureaucratic. It would be consistent with Scheerhorn's study to find that as the bureaucratic role of superintendent and his professional staff grew, that the role of school boards changed as well. The researcher examined three education reform packages passed in Michigan during the past ten years (1989-1999) that may have affected the role of school boards in Michigan. The brief summary and an analysis of the public acts that follow explain why it was reasonable to expect a change in the role of school boards (See Table 1).

P. A. 25 of 1990 was enacted to encourage and support school districts in their efforts to make curriculum changes to improve the achievement of all students. As such, its intent may be described as progressive. P. A. 25 meant increasing educational equity

between districts, increasing the amount of district resources and increasing the surveillance by the State over matters formerly left to the local districts. School districts were compelled to comply with this legislative act under threat of a percentage of its state aid being withheld and/or becoming eligible to receive additional school state aid for “quality programs” (Sec 1204a).

P. A. 335/336 of 1993 is described as progressive because it increased equity in school funding, it increased the surveillance of the state in matters formerly left to the local districts and it increased bureaucracy to meet its mandates. Its net effect seemed to limit the role of school boards. No longer could local school boards try to pass individual operating millages to enhance their program offerings as the State now controlled the amount of money going to each school district. Miron and Wimpelberg argue that, “It is through state funding that state control has been historically asserted” (p.159). It is reasonable to believe Michigan’s new state funding policy (Proposal A) expanded the state’s role thereby diminishing the role of its local school boards. Also, MEAP (Michigan Education Assessment Program) testing increased its significance in P. A. 335/336. This had the effect of centralizing curriculum across the state. This, too, extended the State’s purview over the local school districts.

Conversely, the third public act, the Revised School Code (P. A. 289 of 1995), seemed to be the legislature’s nervous reaction to P. A. 335/336’s mandates that centralized funding and with it, much of the local option formerly available to school districts. The Revised School Code was intended to broaden powers (more authority) to the local school boards by granting them “general” instead of “limited” powers to enact

policy. Did the “general” power distinction increase the role and authority of the school board?

What was the net effect of these contrasting reforms on the role of school boards in 1999? A more in depth examination of the three described legislative Public Acts follows Table 1 as well as an assessment of the possible impact each may have on role of the local school boards.

Table 1-The Education Reforms of the 1990s in Michigan

LEGISLATIVE REFORM	REASON FOR STATE POLICY	PROGRESSIVE?	GROWS BUREAUCRACY?	EFFECT ON SCHOOL BOARD ROLE
P. A. 25 of 1990-The Quality Package	Improve student achievement for all students. Mandates include: • Core curriculum • School Improvement Planning Team • Accreditation • Annual Report	Yes. 1. Increased educational equity between districts 2. Increased (or could decrease) the amount of district's resources 3. Increased the state's surveillance over matters formerly left to the district 4. Increased administrative and bureaucratic specialization needed to enforce mandate	Yes. To ensure the mandates of this reform were met, it would mean that more personnel would be required at the state and the local levels. School districts without curriculum directors would most likely hire one. The State would have to increase staff for surveillance overseeing what the districts were doing.	At the risk of forfeiting state aid, school boards were compelled to comply with this policy. While the core curriculum was left up to the school district, the state's model core curriculum outcomes were the ideal. The fact that any variance from these had to be explained in the Annual Report gives evidence that Board authority was diminished.

Table 1-The Education Reforms of the 1990s in Michigan (continued)

LEGISLATIVE REFORM	REASON FOR STATE POLICY	PROGRESSIVE?	GROWS BUREAUCRACY?	EFFECT ON SCHOOL BOARD ROLE
P. A. 335/336 of 1993- Proposal A	Remove reliance on property tax as the prime funding source for education and additional education reforms • Proposal A passed with its heavy reliance on sales tax • Kept most P.A.25 provision • Number of school days/year increased • Mandatory school breakfast program implemented • Increased the significance of MEAP testing • Awarded state endorsed diplomas for students • Must consider adopting SBE's student performance standards	Yes. 1. Increased equity between school districts 2. Increased the amount of district's resources (especially those school districts that were below the state's funding level per student) 3. Increased the state's surveillance over matters formerly left to the district 4. Increased administrative and bureaucratic specialization needed to enforce mandates	Yes. While passing operating millages was no longer a common function, filling out the paperwork necessitated by an additional pupil accounting date grows bureaucracy. Further, the state aid payments plan requires school districts without sufficient fund equity to borrow money 3 times a year to ensure expenses are paid. Each of these loan applications takes a substantial amount of time and expense to complete. Often, more staff is added in the business office to make this happen.	One of the primary functions of pre-1994 school boards in Michigan was to ensure their school district had enough money to provide the programs that their community residents expected. The finances of each district effectively became a function of state control with the passage of this policy. This suggests that the role of the school board has changed.

Table 1 -The Education Reforms of the 1990s in Michigan (continued)

LEGISLATIVE REFORM	REASON FOR STATE POLICY	PROGRESSIVE?	GROWS BUREAUCRACY?	EFFECT ON SCHOOL BOARD ROLE
P. A. 289- The Revised School Code	The state had noticeably increased its role in public K-12 education with the adoption of both P. A. 25 and P. A. 335/336. Before this policy, Michigan was considered a "limited powers" state, that is, for a school board to take an action, it must be able to point to a specific law authorizing it to act. The new policy allowed it to be called a "general powers" state, that is, a school board can take any action except those prohibited by statute. This action served to increase the capacity of the school boards' authority. It required school boards to develop governing by-laws.	No. By definition, it does not appear to be progressive. It repealed many sections of the School Code of 1976. These areas include: • School district classifications • Pupil performance standards • Administration of oaths • Driver education • "Sex education" defined • School administrator certification • Payroll deduction • Care and management of school property • Site-based decision making	Uncertain. The Revised School Code repealed many sections. While some of these sections will not be missed and required no action, there are others the local school district needed to create a new operating policy or standard. These included school board governance by-laws. This could increase the bureaucratic structure within the central administration. Also, legal challenges to locally adopted policies could further cause the growth of bureaucracy.	The intent of the revision was to give more authority for school boards at the local level. Many of the School Code statutes that continue, however, limit the capacity of the local school to act.

P. A. 25 of 1990

Former Governor Jim Blanchard signed P. A. 25, “the Quality Package,” into law in March of 1990. It was a culmination of efforts on the part of the Governor and state legislature to bring school reform to Michigan’s public schools. These efforts were traced back several years to the Hardin-Runkel Committee, a blue-chip team consisting of educators, businessmen and politicians whose product was the skeleton report of P. A. 25. The policy has four distinct parts that if implemented together, should improve achievement for all students. These parts included core curriculum, school improvement planning process, accreditation and an annual school report.

The district process for the development of a core curriculum was intended to focus participants on what all students need to know as a result of their K-12 education. P. A. 25 (Section 1278) required that all school boards, in consultation with teachers and building administrators, determine the instructional program to deliver the core curriculum to all students. This included detailing the courses and programs in which students were expected to master core outcomes. Integration of curriculum across subject areas was encouraged. To assist in this development, the State provided a set of model core curriculum outcomes that school boards could use as a guide when establishing their own core curriculum. While a district’s core curriculum could vary from the State’s model, the district had to explain the difference in their annual report. It was expected that the school board’s core curriculum would frequently be a major strategy within the school improvement process. Finally, all school boards had to have the student outcomes for at least one curricular area in place during the 1991-92 school year, with at least one additional content area each year thereafter.

The school improvement planning process was intended to guide the collaborative process through which staff identified strengths and weaknesses of each school's program and used that information to make positive changes in observable and measurable student outcomes. P. A. 25 (Section 1277) required the school board and each building in the district to have a three to five year plan to improve the school organization's ability to deliver the essential outcomes to all of its students. It was to be updated annually. This process was to be closely linked with the core curriculum development and implementation as demonstrated by the seven elements required by this plan.

1. **Mission statement** - This statement was to describe the fundamental purpose of the school or district and guide decision-making for policy and practices. It should include the idea that schools are primarily a place where all students are expected to learn the essential outcomes.
2. **Improvement goals** - These goals were to reflect learning outcomes in which improvement was needed based on student performance data. The intentional efforts of these goals would result in all students achieving the learning outcomes of the school district.
3. **Curriculum alignment** - To achieve the school improvement goals, it was important for schools to align their curriculum. That is, school personnel were to match their school improvement goals with the desired student outcomes, the teaching methods and course content, and the assessment methods.
4. **Evaluation** - This element of the school improvement process asked the question, "Did we meet our goal?" Schools were required to systematically gather and analyze student data on core outcomes. Further, the evaluation should have looked at whether the strategies used to reach the goals were appropriate. If not, how could it be improved?
5. **Staff development plan** - This plan describes the training and support which was to be provided to those responsible for delivering the improved instruction for schools to reach their improvement goals. This was to include both primary interventions and follow-up to facilitate the transfer of new skills and information from training to practice. This plan was also meant to include an evaluation design and the specific details of scheduling, location, and materials.

6. **Building level decision-making** - It was felt that this component was necessary for implementation of a school improvement plan. While the model could vary from school to school, P. A. 25 required that there be some identifiable decision making model at each building and that this model was clearly communicated to all stake holders.
7. **Stake holders** - P. A. 25 required that school board members, administrators, teachers, other school employees, students, parents and community members be involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the district's school improvement plan.

School accreditation was the third part of P. A. 25 (Section 1280) policy requirements to ensure school reform. It involved the application of a process that verified that the school was improving its ability to deliver the core curriculum to students. This process was intended to foster school improvement by ensuring identifiable progress toward student attainment of core outcomes. As schools entered this process, they were to develop or amend their school improvement plans so they were aligned with P. A. 25 and the Michigan Accreditation Standards. Further, the schools were to show they were implementing the school board's core curriculum, improving the performance for all students and accelerating the performance of lower achieving students. A team of visitors would offer assistance and validate the schools' progress in this effort.

The final piece of P. A. 25 (Section 1204a) was the annual education report. This was the vehicle to communicate to those concerned about how a school district and the individual schools were doing in making sure all students learned. Included in the report was a status update on the other three parts of P. A. 25: core curriculum, the school improvement plan, and accreditation. Also to be included in this report were student achievement data, numbers of students remaining in school versus those who dropped out

and parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Each school's written "report card" was to be available to the public through distribution at an open meeting.

Each section of P. A. 25 began, "The board of a school district that does not want to forfeit a percentage of the school district's state school aid... or that wants to receive and is eligible for additional state school aid must...." Clearly, P. A. 25 increased the state's role in public education as it sought implementation of this policy by controlling the amount of district resources. This alone qualifies it as progressive legislation. Further, the state's surveillance over matters formerly left to the school district was evident as schools were forced to align their core curriculums with the State's. Finally, it increased the administrative and bureaucratic specialization needed to enforce this mandate. It is reasonable to expect the role of the school board may have been altered by this policy.

P. A. 335 and P. A. 336

The state legislature passed P. A. 335/336 in late December of 1993. Through the past few years, these laws have become synonymous with Proposal A. Public Act 335/336 provided for more than just finance reform, however. Besides deciding upon two possible ways to fund public schools forced by Senate Bill One (this action revoked the power-equalized funding formula and eliminated property taxes as the main source of school operating funds), this package of acts included additional language under the premise of education reform.

Among the significant reform-minded components of P. A. 335/336 included the provisions that more time in school equated to more student achievement. Local school districts were expected to begin adding hours and days to the school calendar so that by the year 2009-2010 all public school students would be attending 210 days per year (38O.1284.) The motivation for locals to comply with this qualification was the threatened

withholding of a percentage of state school aid payments. More power was given to the Intermediate School Districts (ISD) to develop a common school calendar for use by schools within their districts (380.1284a). While this was to be done in consultation with its districts, in reality, it may have further diminished local control.

Public Act 335/336 policies addressed many other areas of education. Loosely grouped, these included sustaining P. A. 25 issues, giving the high school diploma increased significance through subject endorsements, extending the student attendance days in the school year, adding new and additional requirements for teachers and administrators and dealing with social issues of the 1990s. Like P. A. 25, P. A. 335 included sections requiring school improvement plans, accreditation standards, annual education reports and a core curriculum for each building within a district. The latter section, 380.1278, further required that all students not earning a “satisfactory” on their Michigan Education Assessment Tests (MEAP) “shall be provided special assistance reasonably expected to enable the pupil to bring his or her reading skills to grade level within 12 months (Michigan 1993, p. 2129). It was up to the school boards to determine how that is to occur, however.

Besides the added emphasis on the MEAP tests, many of its other provisions seemed to mandate student achievement by giving the high school diploma more significance. To meet this goal, local school boards were given more operational guidelines to follow before granting high school credit. The following excerpts are just a few examples of these guidelines.

- 380.1150 - Students receive high school credit for any course taken from a state or community college.

- 380.1279 - Students receive a state-endorsed diploma for receiving satisfactory scores on the High School Proficiency Tests (HSPT).
- 380.1279b - Students receive high school credit if they can earn a C+ on the final exam even though they have never attended the class.
- 380.1279d - Students must have a portfolio of their work retained in a file to demonstrate employability skills to potential employers and/or colleges.
- 380.1279e - Students receive high school credit for demonstrating proficiency in a foreign language without attending a class.
- 380.1502 - Students must have a high school credit in health/PE. Extra-curricular involvement in athletics may be substituted for the class for credit.

P. A. 335/336 also implied that local school boards could not determine the necessary hiring standards for the personnel they employed. Thus, several sections of the policy sought to raise the requirements of those entering or continuing in instruction or administration. Section 380.1526 required new teachers to be assigned a mentor or “master teacher” for their first three years of teaching. In addition, they must attend 15 days of professional development, excluding college coursework, during those same years. In addition, all new teachers had to pass a basic skill exam in their instructional area before they could be certified. Administrative certification was required (380.1246) for all practicing administrators. Later in the Act, 380.1536 required the state board to issue school administrator’s certificates. These certificates enabled non-certified teachers to become school administrators. The law read, “if the requirements of this subsection were not met for the individual’s certificate or endorsement, an individual shall provide evidence satisfactory to the department that he or she has successfully completed postgraduate coursework or training in budgeting and financial management, curriculum and personnel evaluation, as specified by state board rule.” Making sure the professional educators were state certified was an important part of P. A. 335/336.

P. A. 335/336 sought to increase the time students were in school by extending the number of school days so that by the year 2010, “the number of days of school instruction is at least 210.” (Public and Local Acts 1993 p. 2135). In addition, the number of hours would increase to 1,080 for the 1999-2000 school year and each succeeding school year. The school board could determine the length of its school term, but at the risk of forfeiting a percentage of their state school aid payments if it didn’t comply with these guidelines.

P. A. 335/336 also dealt with the social phenomena of the 90s These included the spread of AIDS, sexual harassment issues and increased diversity within Michigan’s population. The following list indicates that policy must drive local school boards to act.

- 380.1147b - Each school district must recognize and meet the educational needs for different learning environments of their diverse student population.
- 380.1169 - All K-12 instructors of HIV must have training.
- 380.1174a - School boards must develop and implement a multi-cultural curriculum.
- 380.1272a - School boards were expected to offer a school breakfast program unless the exception applied (school districts with less than 20% of their students receiving free or reduced lunches did not have to comply).
- 380.1300 - School boards were told to make regulations “relative to anything necessary for the proper establishment, maintenance, management, and the carrying on of the public schools of the district.” These regulations might include a dress code for students.
- 380.1300a- School boards must adopt and implement a written sexual harassment policy.

Additional stipulations were made for "at-risk" students, early elementary initiatives, communicable disease instruction, sex education instruction and student grading.

It is P.A 335/336's finance reform plans, however, that centralized state support of its K-12 public schools more than ever. P. A. 336 was designed for a choice of two school funding methods from which voters were to choose. (During the past two decades, there had been eleven ballot proposals put before the state's citizens and each time they were turned down. This time "no" was not an option.) Regardless of the funding option chosen, foundation grants for each student would become the basis of each school district's operating budget. The State would become the main financial contributor. Since the majority of the educational dollars would no longer come from local property tax-generated revenue, the local school board would no longer be forced to hold millage elections. On the other side, the only possible ways for a local school district to generate additional revenue would be to increase millage rates through an ISD-wide school enhancement election or by increasing the number of students in their district. P. A. 336 allowed for a statewide election to determine which of two funding sources would be used by the state as a financial basis for the foundation grants. The one plan would rely primarily on a sales tax increase from 4% to 6% and the other would depend on an income tax increase as its main funding source.

Faced with a choice between an increase in sales tax or one on income tax, Michigan voters approved the Ballot Plan on March 15, 1994. This constitutional amendment allowed for a maximum six-mill levy on homestead property (primary residences) and eighteen mills on non-homestead (business) properties. The heavy reliance on locally voted tax revenue was over.

Since the money raised through sales tax goes to the State's coffers, most of the general operating revenue spent in a district now comes from the State. In effect, the

former fiduciary responsibility of local school boards now became a function of the state legislature. This new revenue reliance upon the State is reflected in the fact that Boards received 34 percent of their funding from the state in 1993-94, the year before Proposal A. State funding increased to 80 percent in 1994-95, the first year that Proposal A was in effect. The question was, "What effect did this school funding source change have on the role of school boards?"

Upon close examination of P. A. 335/336, these acts have increased the state's role in public education in the name of increased financial equity between the school districts in the Michigan. Further, the researcher described these reforms as progressive since they increased the State's surveillance of its local districts. Finally, compliance with the mandates resulting from these acts has often meant more administrative and bureaucratic specialization. It should follow that the role of the local school boards has been altered.

P. A. 289 (Michigan Revised School Code)

Early in 1995, Governor Engler targeted the School Code of 1976 for amendment if not outright repeal. His intent was to "...untie their (the local school boards) hands and to put control at the local level where it belongs" (Borokowski). Later that year, a study by this researcher found that 96% of the school board members responding to his survey believed the School Code of 1976 should be amended (slightly or substantially) or repealed. The School Code provided for the organization, regulation and maintenance of local school district authority to reside with a school district's board of education, elected local representatives whose role was governing the district. The school board's duties included making district policy, listening responsively to citizen concerns, seeing that federal and state mandates were met, and providing for the levy and collection of taxes.

(The latter, however, had been greatly diminished since the passage of Proposal A, with school bond elections being the only substantive tax levying power left to the local board).

Until the School Code was revised in 1995, Michigan was considered a "limited powers" state. Ballard (1995) said this meant, "For a board to take some action it must be able to point to a specific authorization in law". This is no longer the case. Under P. A. 289, Michigan became a "general powers" state. This means that the State can prohibit certain actions, require others and give the local school board authority to take any action except those specifically prohibited by statute. General powers was the main provision of the Revised School Code. This required school boards to adopt new governing by-laws. Before the revision, school board actions were limited to what the school code provisions said it could do. With P. A. 289, it seemed school board authority was expanded.

P. A.289's stated intent was to do just that. That is, give the local school board more authority. Some of the general powers include: educating students, providing for the safety and welfare of students, acquiring and disposing of school property, matters relating to contractors and staff, issues pertaining to the financial obligations of the district, and agreements with private and public entities (Michigan Department of Education).

Besides changing Michigan to a general power's state, the school code revision repealed some of its earlier mandates of P. A. 25 and P. A. 335/336. For example, language suggesting that all decisions made at the building level be made in participatory process was removed. What remained, however, is that issues surrounding school improvement must continue to be made at the building level with a recommended group

of stakeholders being invited to participate. Prior to the change, school districts were to submit three to five year school improvement plans to the State Department of Education. Now they needed only to be made available. The Revised School Code removed language that referred to the State moving to a mandated core academic curriculum in 1996. P. A. 289 asked the State Board to develop recommended core academic curriculum content standards. (These 'recommended' standards are the framework of MEAP testing). The P. A. 335/336 portfolio requirement was repealed when it became evident that it was an inefficient way to keep student records. The School Code revisions seemingly expanded the role of local school boards by extending school board authority to take action unless required by or expressly prohibited by statute.

Summary

It is clear that P. A. 25, P. A. 335/336 and P. A. 289 were intended to affect change in the local school districts. The impact on the local governance structure (school boards) and the role school boards have in 1999 as a result of these reforms was not so clear. Recently, in discussing the past eight years of the Engler reign, the editors of the Lansing State Journal wrote...“he (Gov. Engler) has at least handed Michigan a vision of change that is essentially progressive...” (Crosby p.8A).

Given the policy adoptions of this decade and the more active role of the state government, inputs from the environment have changed, i.e., Proposal A. Scheerhorn's study cited former State Superintendent Robert Schiller as saying (p.77), “... local boards will not be eliminated, although the role of the local board will presumably change significantly.” A state senator from Colorado reinforced Schiller's theory regarding the future role of school boards. He asserted, “Gradually, imperceptibly, if one looks ahead 50 years, I daresay local control will probably be a shadow of what it is today. It won't

disappear, but it will gradually be eroded. Not in one fell swoop, but bit by bit” (Yaffe, p. 240).

Open Systems Theory

To better describe and explain the role of school boards in Michigan Public Schools, the researcher believed it was essential to use a theoretical model that best described the public school organization. After a review of literature, the researcher determined that the open systems theory is one such model.

To gain a deeper understanding of the open systems theory, it is necessary to define “organization.” Organization has been described as... a number of people united for some purpose or work (The American Heritage Dictionary, p. 876),... a form of human association for the attainment of a common purpose (Northcraft and Neale, p. 701)...a network of systems (Hodge, p. 6), ...and a social device for accomplishing through group means some stated purpose (Katz and Kahn, p. 19). Getzels adds that an organization is not only a structure of relations, but also a system in action. Given these descriptions of an organization, this researcher believed local school districts qualify as organizations. If this is true, then the tenets of the open systems theory should be applicable to them.

Often, synonymous with an organization is the term social system. In fact, the two are frequently used interchangeably. Systems are viewed as unitary wholes composed of subsystems or parts (Cummings and Worley, p. 695). The organization serves to integrate these parts into a functioning unit. Von Bertalanffy initially introduced the General Systems Theory because he was concerned that too much of science was becoming compartmentalized. He and his associates argued that certain general ideas held over a broad spectrum of disciplines (Scott). Von Bertalanffy later suggested its application to

social systems. Parsons is credited with providing the specific conceptual tools by naming the various subsystems in a society and their functions. Katz and Kahn developed the open systems theory to better explain the behavior of the members of an organization. Northcraft and Neale suggest the framework of this theory rely on two assumptions (pp. 51-52).

- Organizations are social systems. Changes in one part of the organization are reflected in changes in the other parts. Failure of a system (or subsystem) perturbs the system, forcing a reaction, but rarely stopping the organization. The system adjusts to accommodate the failure and continues to work, though probably not the same way.
- Organizations are systems open to the influence of the environment.

Further, Thompson reviewed the work of earlier organizational theorists in building the model he presents in Organizations in Action (1967). Following the work of Gouldner (1959), Thompson described two fundamental models of organizations: closed and open systems. The former is most closely aligned with manufacturing or other similar type organizations where there is a finite set of variables, there is control of the variables and their relationships with each other, and there are predictable outside forces (p. 4). Most often, economic efficiency is the goal of the closed system organization. Planning and controlling are the most important concepts in allowing closed systems to operate optimally.

Unlike the closed system, the open system has an indefinite amount of variables and relationships which can not be controlled and which are subject to unpredictable outside forces. In addition, homeostasis or stability describes how the open system continues to operate despite disturbances in the environment. The basic goal of the open system is survival (pp. 6-7). A synopsis of the open system model concludes that “organizations are not autonomous entities; instead, the best-laid plans of managers have

unintended consequences and are conditioned or upset by other social units- other complex organizations or publics- on whom the organization is dependent” (p. 7). Given this description, it is evident that the open system model is an appropriate organizational model to describe and explain the complexities of the public school system.

The open systems theory demonstrates how organizations such as school systems are susceptible to influence from the environment. Due to P. A. 335/336, the Michigan public schools are now more resource-dependent on the State than ever before. The State’s local school systems now rely upon state government for the majority of its financial resources (80% or more). Resource dependence suggests that open system organizations, such as Michigan’s public schools, must adapt to its environment to survive. Since school boards are the sub-system at the top of the educational hierarchy, their role should have adapted to meet the new requirements of the recent reforms.

Thompson’s Model as it Describes and Explains a Public School System

To better describe and explain the role of school boards in the public school system, it is essential that a common definition of the levels within this complex organization be established. The researcher used the organizational model described by Thompson in Organizations in Action (1967) as the theoretical basis for describing public school systems.

Crediting the earlier work of Parsons, Thompson labeled three distinct levels of responsibility and control in an open organizational system. These levels are (1) technical, (2) management, and (3) institutional. These three have a very good alignment with the distinct levels within a public school system. The technical level is the teaching staff and the building principal. This is the level where the service (instruction) or the production (learning) occurs. Thompson leads one to believe that the technical level

constitutes the core of the educational organization, but that it is an incomplete representation of what a school district must do to accomplish its desired goal. By itself, the technical level would not be able to provide organizational rationality because it is incapable of “acquiring the inputs that are taken for granted by the technology, and dispensing the outputs, that are again outside the scope of the core technology” (p.19). That is, the instructional staff/building principal are unable to further define and implement state policy, to collect and distribute state school aid and to buffer the school from its publics.

The second level in a school system, managerial services, includes the superintendent and other “central office” administrators. This level mediates between the service providers, the teachers and principals, and the consumers, the students, the parents and the general public. The people within this organizational level acquire the necessary resources (inputs) for the technical core to carry out its function, that is, teaching students. As such, it negotiates the cost of the technical core services to the school district. Managerial services also make sense out of state/federal policy and its impact on the technical core.

The institutional level in a public school system is the school board. It is the source of what Parsons calls the “meaning.” That is, the school board legitimizes the goals of the public school organization and provides the higher-level support which makes the implementation of the school district’s mission possible” (Thompson, p.11). Most often, the articulation of the school district’s operational beliefs and values are viewed through the lens of school board policy. The school board’s authority, articulated

in its policies, allows the teachers/principals to dispense their students into the market upon completion of the school district's requirements.

Organizational Rationality in a Public School System

While Thompson suggests the goal of the open system is most often survival, Michigan public school systems in 1999 are subject to the criteria of rationality. More specifically, the organizational rationality in Michigan's public schools is measured by the goals of student literacy and economic efficiency. Thus, Michigan's public schools need to be determinate and indisputable, not just surviving. The increased significance of the MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) tests has established a benchmark of acceptable student performance for the state's school districts. Further, since 1994, the state's funding mechanism, the foundation grant, requires the public school system to accomplish acceptable student performance in the most economically efficient way it can. The inputs are determined by the State in the two areas of MEAP and foundation grant allotments. The State judges school districts on these two criteria. Hence, the State has a measure of how well its public school organizations are performing.

It is the researcher's argument that Thompson's theoretical model of organizational rationality best describes and explains the levels within the complex organization of a public school system. It is this third level, the institutional one, that the researcher described and explained in terms of what the school board does for the Michigan public school systems in 1999.

Several of Thompson's propositions for organizational rationality are germane to describing and explaining what school boards do for their school district. These propositions are referred to many times in Chapter Three to describe and explain how the

school board removes uncertainty and allows the public school organization to operate in an open system. These include:

- Proposition 2.1: Under norms of rationality, organizations seek to seal off their core technologies from environmental influences.
- Proposition 2.2: Under norms of rationality, organizations seek to buffer environmental influences by surrounding their technical cores with input and output components.
- Proposition 2.3: Under norms of rationality, organizations seek to smooth out input and output transactions.
- Proposition 2.4: Under norms of rationality, organizations seek to anticipate and adapt to environmental changes which cannot be buffered or leveled.
- Proposition 2.5: When buffering, leveling, and forecasting do not protect their technical cores from environmental fluctuations, organizations under the norms of rationality resort to rationing.

The researcher used these propositions of organizational rationality to describe and explain the role of school boards in Michigan in 1999. The analysis includes what school boards do, what the superintendent does relative to the school board, and how these roles may have changed due to the education reforms of the 1990s.

Summary

"Membership on a board of education has been called the most ill-defined position in local government" (Egleston 1993, p.30). Generally, there is confusion about the actual role of a school board. Some of this confusion may be attributed to the changes that occurred in the organization and administration of public schools since their grass roots beginnings when school boards tended to have an administrative role. Early in the twentieth century, progressive education reforms saw the school boards taking on more of a policy or legislative role as part of the trustee style of boardsmanship. This section

reviews how the school board role changed due to progressive education reforms and the growth of administrative bureaucracy.

The role of the school board has evolved over the past 200 years. In its earliest days the annual town meeting was responsible for everything related to the local district. The first state board of education was established by Massachusetts in 1837. The superintendent position was established to oversee the schools, the first major change affecting the school board's role. Much of the powers of the board remained with the school boards, but it varied depending upon the personal power of the superintendent. Gradually, superintendents and their bureaucracies took over some of the role that its grass roots tradition had left with the school boards.

The second major change in the role of school boards was caused by decentralization and the wide spread inefficiencies found in many school boards. The Administrative Progressives redefined the concept of democracy. Led by Cubberly, the Progressives recommended that school boards should act as a legislative body and turn all of the executive functions over to the superintendent. State legislatures generally followed this recommendation. Since that time, court decisions in the name of equity, the growth of collective bargaining for school employees and a number of federal and state initiatives have further diminished the role of the local school board. The purpose of this study was to determine what the role of the Michigan public school board is in 1999.

Recent School Board Roles

Keith Goldhammer was one of the first researchers studying school boards after the Administrative Progressives were successful in gaining more control of schools from the lay polity. In his book, The School Board, Goldhammer (1964) found that school

board members generally agreed they perform four different roles in relationship to the community (pp. 16-20). The school serves as:

- A pulse of the community - Board determines policies that maintain positive school-community relations. This is accomplished by listening to individual and group concerns or using their own best judgment as a representative of the community.
- A court of higher appeals - Board reviews administrative decisions in which community members or employees feel aggrieved.
- Conservator of finances - Board reviews financial decisions of the superintendent, thereby protecting the public interest.
- Promoters of the educational function - Board seeks to improve the quality of education while helping educators understand the desires of the community

A landmark study of public school boards across the U.S was completed by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in 1986. This study reported continuous strong support for maintaining the role of the school board as interpreter of the community and the protector against the excesses of professional educators. It produced findings and conclusions that had implications regarding the role of school boards late in the 20th century. The IEL's study found that:

- There was strong support for maintaining the basic institutional role of the school board as interpreter of the community and protector against the excesses of public educators.
- Board members were increasingly perceived as representing special interests, and the trusteeship notion of service in which board members represented the whole community were no longer dominant.
- Boards, particularly in urban areas, were more representative of the diversity in their communities and often included leaders from disparate constituencies within the larger communities.
- Local boards and their members had only sporadic interactions with general government and tended to be isolated from main stream political structures.
- Board members were seriously concerned about the growing intrusiveness of the states as the reform movement revolved.

- Board members continued to grapple with tensions over the gray areas between a board's policymaking and the superintendent's administrative responsibilities.
- The need for school board individual training was recognized generally, but too often training was merely informational and episodic.
- Urban, suburban, rural and small-town boards alike found more commonalties than differences among the challenges to their effectiveness. These included public apathy, lack of public understanding of the role of boards, poor relationships with state policymakers, a lack of strategies to evaluate board performance and an intrinsic inability to focus on education issues such as improving teaching in the framework of collective bargaining (Danzberger p. 47-48).

These findings suggested that the public felt local control was desirable, but school board members were unclear what role they should have in the educational arena. The authority of school boards was challenged as the states and federal roles increased, as the court decisions offered were against them, as the role of the professional educators (educational bureaucrats) expanded and as the teacher unions increased their demands. The lack of role clarity left school boards vulnerable to the various stakeholders competing for the limited resources controlled by the school boards.

A recent study completed by Luecker (1992) derived six major properties of role from her conversational interviews with fifteen (15) suburban and rural school board members from northern Illinois. The properties Luecker described and explained are similar to Goldhammer's and the IEL's in that the Board made up of lay people is expected to serve as a "check and balance" on the professional experts and make policy that reflects the traditions of the community. The six properties of role described by Luecker's respondents included: (a) oversight; (b) policy; (c) sounding board; (d) communications; (e) decision making; (f) change agents. Board members emphasized: oversight of district finances, programs, and personnel; taking responsibility of the "bigger picture," describing a proactive responsibility for communications with the

public. The school board roles described by Goldhammer, the IEL Report, and Luecker informed the researcher of various properties of role of which to ask his respondents. The three studies were merged together to create an outline of the school board's role. This interview outline was used as a framework to learn what the role of the Michigan public school board is, what the relationship between the superintendent and his school board authority is and what part of the school board's role(s) has changed due to the three described education reforms (see Appendix B).

Pilot Study

A document study is one methodology the researcher used to determine whether the role of the school board had been altered due to the education reforms of the 1990s. To complete this, the researcher sought to analyze and quantify the school board minutes of Michigan public schools. Since these are legal, historical accounts of school board's activity did at their public meetings, the researcher believed that through careful analysis he would be able to recognize changes in school boards' roles.

The researcher gained access to the records from a mid-Michigan school district's school board meetings for the 1987-88 school year and the 1997-98 school year. The results of the analytical study suggested the school board in that school district had not changed its role based on the board minutes for the two years quantified. The researcher found the school board minutes to be very limited in recording any discussion and gave very little insight into what the school board and its members actually did. Thus, the researcher believed he had to study school boards from a different perspective to answer his questions regarding the role of the school board in the public school organization. The pilot study and its findings are included Appendix A.

Theoretical Framework

Research progresses logically when the theory that provides its conceptual framework is closely and naturally related to the purpose of the study. The researcher's purpose in this study was to describe and explain the role of Michigan public school boards in 1999, to explore the relationship between the superintendent and school board authority and to determine if the three Michigan education reform packages of the 1990s have affected what school boards do. To better understand the role of the school board today, the researcher believed it was necessary to understand the development and the changes to school board role throughout the years. The historical description in Chapter One traced the evolution of school boards from its earliest beginnings in the U.S. and specifically, in Michigan. While many factors have contributed to this changing role, perhaps the two most responsible are the progressive state reform efforts and the professionalism of administrators, specifically the superintendent. The historical evidence presented supports this assertion. The researcher has laid out a trajectory that demonstrated an increased role for the state and the professional superintendent, but a diminished role for school boards. Thus, the researcher sought to learn if the trajectory was continuous.

Educational reforms continued in Michigan in the 1990s. At least two of these have been described as progressive. P. A. 25 and P. A. 335/336 were intended to increase equity between school districts, to increase the state's surveillance over matters formerly left to the local school district, and to increase the administrative and bureaucratic specialization that has to be devoted to enforcing state and federal mandates.

Further, the professionalism of educators has meant a continual growth of bureaucracy to the degree that it challenges the authority of the school board. Weber (p.

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232) argues that “under normal conditions, the power position of a fully developed bureaucracy is overtowering.” (The researcher has included public school referents to assist in explaining Weber).

The political master (the school board) finds himself in the position of the dilettante (lay school board members) who stands opposite the expert (administrative professionals), facing the trained official who stands within the management of administration. This holds whether the master whom the bureaucracy serves is a people equipped with the weapons of legislative initiative, the referendum, and the right to remove officials, or a parliament, elected on a more aristocratic or more democratic basis and equipped with the right to vote a lack of confidence, or with the actual authority to vote it.

Just as the absolute monarch is powerless opposite the superior knowledge of the bureaucratic expert, so the school board is put in a tenuous position, often trusting its superintendent to give it the information necessary to make informed decisions. Additionally, a natural tension is harbored between the school board (democracy) and the professional expert (bureaucracy). The dependency of the school board on the administrative bureaucracy has affected the role of the school board.

Lastly, the open systems theory asserts that organizations are susceptible to the changes of inputs to its environments. For Michigan’s public school boards, the recent progressive education reforms, the revisions to the school code, and the continued administrative bureaucratic growth have affected these inputs. Thus, it was likely that there has been a change in the role of school boards as well. The researcher investigated this potential by interviewing those most familiar with the role of school boards, that is, experienced school superintendents.

Restatement of Purpose

The researcher has argued that the role of the school board has continually evolved over the past two hundred years. Several examples have supported these

changes. Among these are the growth in size and importance of the educational endeavor, the continued march of progressive reforms, the transfer of power and authority from the lay boards to the administrative professionals and the adoption of the quasi-corporate model of school board organization early in the twentieth century. Given these reasons and the fact that progressive education reforms were continuing and perhaps accelerating as the 21st century approached, the purpose of this study was to describe and explain the role of Michigan's public school boards in 1999, the role of the superintendent relative to the school board's authority and the effects the education reforms of the 1990s have had on the role of school boards.

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology employed in the study. The sampling strategy is described and the method of interviewing discussed. The reader is made aware of the make up of the sample and how this study became the experienced superintendents' view of the school board. The three exploratory questions that guided this study are presented. A narrative of actual field procedures is provided. The method of analyzing the data and the process of generating and revising tentative conclusions are explained. The reliability, validity and limitations of this study are discussed. A brief summary ends this chapter.

Methodology

The task of the method was to gather information that the researcher could use to answer the exploratory questions. The researcher faced the dilemma of accurately comparing and contrasting the role of Michigan public school boards in 1989 with those in 1999. Since the evidence of the 1989 school board role didn't exist and it could not be recreated, observation type fieldwork was impossible. Thus, the researcher considered three methodologies to assist with his study. A brief discussion of each methodology and the reasons for selecting the interview methodology follows.

Initially, the researcher believed an analysis of document methodology would provide the necessary data he would need to answer his questions. The researcher determined a comparison between the school board minutes of 1989 and 1999 would suggest changes in what school boards did then and what they do now. As discussed under the Pilot Study section, he discovered the school board minutes to include very

little discussion and gave very little evidence of what the school board did. The actions as recorded in the minutes were more perfunctory than informative. Also, the researcher found it would be invalid to attribute any specific changes he discovered in school board role to P. A. 25, P. A. 335/336 or P. A. 289. The school board minutes did not include this information. So, this methodology was rejected.

The researcher also considered doing a questionnaire survey of school board members from Michigan whose tenure on their school district's board transcended the ten-year period of 1989-1999. The random survey asking board members to recall what they did ten years ago was rejected since he didn't believe it could provide the data necessary to create an accurate description of school boards' activity. Further, the possible variance in responses could leave the researcher with very little explanation and description of what school boards did in 1989 or what they do 1999.

The third methodology considered was the personal interview. While interviews have their limitations in comparison to survey questionnaires (limited set of respondents, limitations on making general statements, etc.), the interviews provided a richness and personal touch unattainable with other data collection methods. Gorden (1969) identified five advantages of the interview over the survey questionnaire.

1. The interview provides more opportunity to motivate the respondent to supply accurate and complete information immediately.
2. The interview provides more opportunity to guide the respondents in his interpretation of the questions.
3. The interview allows a greater flexibility in questioning the respondent.
4. The interview allows greater control over the interview situation.
5. The interview provides a greater opportunity to evaluate the validity of the information by observing the respondent's non-verbal manifestation of his attitude toward supplying the information.

Based on these advantages and the type of information sought, interviewing was selected as the methodology to complete this study. The possible respondent options were narrowed to school board members and/or superintendents. These two represent the educational governance system in Michigan public schools. They would be the possible informants with the information the researcher was seeking. Again, interviewing school board members about what they did ten years ago may not provide the description the researcher needed, or there may be too much variance between board member responses to get a clear description and explanation of the role of school boards. Further, the researcher was concerned whether the school board members could answer questions in an informed manner relative to the three education reforms (P. A. 25, P. A. 335/336, and P. A. 289). These potential limitations influenced the researcher's decision against using school board members as respondents.

After discussion with his advisor and personal reflection on the merits and the feasibility of interviewing, the researcher believed the experienced superintendent could provide a more accurate and logical perspective of school boards and the changes that occurred as a result of the education reforms of the 1990s. For purposes of this study, to qualify as an experienced superintendent, one's tenure as a superintendent must have transcended the ten-year period in question (1989-1999).

It is important to note, however, these superintendents' perspectives represent the educational bureaucracy, not necessarily the school boards' perspective. While this may initially appear to be a disadvantage of the study, interviewing experienced superintendents actually became an advantage. According to the study's conceptual framework, the researcher has documented how the history of school boards is bound up

with the record of the public school's expanding bureaucracy. The superintendent represents that bureaucracy. In questioning superintendents about the role of school boards, the researcher was exploring that role from the view of the person most representative of the bureaucracy, and the one person with whom the school board has the most direct contact. In effect, the researcher was filling one perspective of the school board's role. That is, the experienced superintendent's view of the role of school boards and its relationship with the school bureaucracy as represented by the superintendent.

Therefore, this study of school board role is an attempt to describe and explain the delicate balance between what school boards and superintendents do in the public school organization. Further, this study described and explained how these experienced superintendents managed their school boards. Thus, by interviewing the experienced superintendents, the researcher has a more coherent, and perhaps, more intelligible view of the school boards' role in today's public education organization. Also, the researcher was able to find out what the experienced superintendent does relative to the school board authority and what changes have occurred in the school board role in the past decade.

Sampling

Once the researcher had decided on the characteristics of his informants (length of tenure, superintendent in Michigan public schools), the best way to use the superintendents' perspectives to describe and explain what the school board did was determined. Indeed, this study was a search to explain what school boards do in Michigan public school organizations. The researcher believed the experienced superintendent had the information he was interested in learning. This required a sampling technique that allowed for the explanation to emerge as evidence was gathered. Theoretical sampling was used for this purpose.

“Theoretical sampling is a method researchers use to discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory” (Denzin, p. 106). The researcher used theoretical sampling because it allowed him to develop the concept of school board role as a category, with the various functions of the school board as the properties of the school board role. He believed the data gained from the use of this survey methodology would explain the role of school board in Michigan in 1999 and how it may have changed in the past ten years. Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) explain as:

... the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges....The initial decisions for theoretical collection of data are based on a general sociological perspective and on a general subject or problem area.... The initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework (p. 105).

An important and underlying principle of theoretical sampling is how the collection of data, the coding of data and the data analysis occurs simultaneously. As the researcher collected, coded and analyzed the data, he was able to determine the role of school boards today, the school board role relative to the superintendent and possible changes in the school board role in the past ten years. The researcher continued the study to the saturation point, a place where the superintendents being interviewed were telling the same story of their school boards’ role and its properties.

The concept of role was described as a variable that has various values so that one can tell from interviews what value the variable had in a specific case. Most often the values of the variables were defined by common sense. As such, the researcher used the values of school board role given to him by society (Stinchcombe p.41). Specifically, the researcher used the values or elements of role that Luecker found in her 1992 study as the framework for measuring possible changes in school board role in Michigan in the past

decade. These six values were school board oversight of district finances, programs and personnel, policy making, sounding board, communications, decision-making and change agents. The researcher measured the values of the school boards' roles as described and explained by the superintendent respondents. The events occurred naturally at school board meetings and in interactions with the superintendent. Stinchcombe (p. 41) would describe the measurement of school board role as "scientific theory in action for a specific purpose."

The explanation of why theoretical sampling was used would not be complete without mentioning the reasons for rejecting random sampling. First, since there was no theory to be tested, it was illogical to assume that random sampling superintendents would prove helpful in ascertaining whether the role of the Michigan public school board had changed over the past the years. Secondly, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that random sampling is not necessary given that theoretical sampling sets forth categories and properties. "These relationships are suggested as hypothesis pertinent to direction of relationship, not tested as descriptions of both direction and magnitude" (p. 106).

Method of Data Collection

Interviewing

Interviewing experienced superintendents was selected as the methodology to provide the qualitative data for this study. The purpose of the interview was to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. Patton explains this reason by saying, "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made specific" (p. 278). The researcher believed the experienced respondents' perspectives regarding their school boards would be meaningful, knowable and specific. The researcher also knew that his sample was mostly

a select group of experienced superintendents that might be described as “successful” given their tenure in their current school district. The knowledge-type questions the superintendents were asked were within the scope of their job/responsibility. Most of the questions in the interview were open-ended. It was the researcher’s task to ask questions so the superintendent being interviewed could bring the researcher into the respondent’s world of public school boards.

Patton describes four different variations in interview instruments for open-ended question interviewing. These are 1) the informational interview; 2) the interview guide approach; 3) the standardized open-ended interview; 4) the closed, fixed response interview. Having a structured, but yet flexible format was important to the researcher. After examining the strengths and weaknesses of each interview instrument, the researcher used the second type, the interview guide approach (p. 280).

The characteristics of the interview guide approach require the topics and issues to be specified in advance in outline form. The researcher decides sequence and wording of the questions during the course of the interview. Strengths of interview guide approach are the outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes the data collection from each respondent somewhat systematic. Further, gaps in data can be anticipated and closed by asking clarifying questions. Finally, the interviews remain fairly conversational and situational. The interview outline used in this study is included in Appendix B.

There are two weaknesses noted for this interviewing methodology. The first is that important and salient topics may be unintentionally omitted. While the researcher was very conscious of the possibility of this occurring, the fact is that it did happen a few times. The second liability is the flexibility of the interviewer in sequencing and wording

may result in very different responses. This could make comparing and categorizing responses more difficult. Since the questions in the outline may be asked at different times in each interview, locating the specific question in the transcripts did take more time than if all of the questions were asked in the same order. Generally, the flexibility in sequencing allowed by the interview guide approach, did not present a problem for the researcher in this study.

The specific interview method selected for the study was the tape-recorded interview. A cassette tape recorder was used during all of the interviews. "Tape recorders do not 'tune out' conversations, change what has been said because of interpretation (whether conscious or unconscious), or record words more slowly than they are spoken" (Patton, p. 348). All tapes were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. The tape-recorded interviews allowed the researcher to interact face-to-face with the respondents without being concerned with writing every word down. Recording the interview also enabled the researcher to focus on the answers, not on the next question of the outline. Given the possible range of answers from open-ended questioning, tape-recording also encouraged the researcher to ask follow-up and clarifying questions and/or for the respondent to give an example of what they were saying. These opportunities enriched the data set. A further benefit of this type of interview came from having the whole conversation available to read after transcription. Comments overlooked during the course of the interview often added to the researcher's understanding of the data.

One of the primary disadvantages of using a tape recorder was the soft-spoken word of the respondent that made transcription difficult. This meant that a complete record of the conversation and the subsequent loss of exact wordings for citation. This

occurred during two interviews (3 and 16). The researcher transcribed these two interviews using his recall and the context of the interview conversation to interpret the respondents' words. Another disadvantage was the potential failing of the batteries in the recorder. This kept the researcher continuously checking the tape recorder during the interview. The frequent checking proved to be distracting to the respondent at times. The inexperience of the researcher in field methods was still another potential weakness of the tape-recorded interview. The researcher believed the benefits of the tape-recorded interview outweighed the limitations, however. The researcher was able to listen more carefully, be more attentive, maintain greater eye contact, and observe the respondent more closely. Further, the transcripts created from the taping of the interviews were essential in completing this study.

The researcher gained the necessary factual information he was seeking about school boards from the experienced superintendent interviews. The informants' responses were possibly circumspect in what they said, but the respondents did their best to answer the questions openly as they felt comfortable. The internal consistency of the interviews suggests the respondents were telling the truth. That is, "truth meaning reasonably accurate and believable data rather than data that are true in an absolute sense" (Weiss and Bucuvalas). Often, the respondents added an example or told a story to illustrate a point. This added to the researcher's understanding. The experienced superintendent's responses were easily categorized and liberally used to describe and explain the assertions the researcher made regarding what their school boards do.

Exploratory Research Questions

The researcher believed it was necessary and desirable to know the role of the Michigan public school board in 1999. More specifically, the research used three basic

exploratory questions to guide his study, and as the framework for his investigation.

These were:

- What is the role of the Michigan public school board in 1999?
- What does the superintendent do relative to the school board's authority?
- Has this role changed in the last ten years due to the education reforms?

The three areas of questioning, organized in outline form, guided the interviews.

The interview began with a series of questions that were meant to determine the role of the school board. Once the researcher got a sense of what the school board did, a conversation was begun to learn what the superintendent did in relationship to the school board. During the last part of the interview, the researcher returned to the school board's role by asking the superintendents if their school board did anything differently as a result of the three education reforms of the 1990s. Each of the three education reforms was discussed individually. The product of this qualitative research is a narrative that used the findings of the field research interviews to make assertions about what school boards do. Thus, a theoretical model of the role of Michigan school boards in 1999 emerged. The assertions are supported by the data. Respondents are quoted extensively throughout Chapter Three, using the superintendents' words and stories to describe and explain the school board role.

Field Procedures

In this section, the field procedures are explained; preparations for entering the field are presented. First, since all field work conducted at Michigan State University requires approval of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS), the researcher had to fully clarify his purpose, outline his procedures and

assess the risks and benefits of the study. Copies of the approved application and consent form appear in Appendix C.

Second, the researcher had to determine who met his qualifications as an experienced superintendent. He contacted MASA (Michigan Association of School Administrators) and described the scope of his endeavor and the reason for the request. A list of approximately 60 superintendents was provided. Of these 60, seven were superintendents of Intermediate School Districts so they were not eligible for participation in the study. The researcher pared the potential list down by dismissing those more than two hours away from his home. Undecided about how many interviews he would do or the receptivity of his request to the superintendents, the researcher sent a letter of introduction and intent (see Appendix D) to 31 superintendents explaining the scope of the study and his intention to contact them within the next month. A copy of their February's (1999) school board minutes was also requested. This record of specific board actions would be referred to during the actual interviews to prompt the respondents' recall of specific events. The letters were sent out in early June 1999. Within a week, one of the letters was returned from a superintendent with a brief note stating that he was not interested in participating. That was the only negative response. Generally, the researcher found the letter of introduction and intent to be very helpful in securing the interview times with the superintendents. Several times the interviewees acknowledged the letter when the initial telephone contact was made. Additionally, the researcher observed the introduction letter in close proximity to several respondents during their interviews.

Telephone contacts began the third week of June. The researcher was pleasantly surprised by the favorable response received from the potential interviewees. Scheduling interview times, however, was somewhat difficult with the schedule demands of those involved. Times and dates were scheduled for 22 interviews initially. Three more interviews were done to ensure that the categories of school board role were saturated. In total, 25 tape-recorded interviews were completed and transcribed. A letter (see Appendix E) thanking each superintendent for participating in the study was sent within a few days of the interview. With one exception, all of the interviews took place between June 23 and August 10, 1999. (The first interview was in late April 1999). All but three of the interviews were held in the superintendents' offices. Two of the interviewees came to the researcher's office and the third was done at an ISD.

Respondent Characteristics

Twenty-four of the superintendents were male. (For confidentiality purposes, all respondents are referred to as 'he.')

Two of the superintendents were minorities. All sizes and types of school districts were represented. These included Michigan public school districts within all four athletic class categories (A, B, C and D), as determined by the number of students in the 9-12 building(s). The respondents' school districts could be described as rural, urban, and suburban. The school district locations stretched across the state from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron. The size of their school districts varied from one with more than 18,000 to one with 850 students. Eighteen of the school districts were classified as "in-formula" according to the pre-Proposal A state aid funding guidelines.

Interview Meeting

The researcher generally arrived at the interview appointment earlier than scheduled. He used this time to secure and review the board minutes of the school

district's February meeting (if they hadn't been mailed) so he could ask the superintendent to explain what his school board was doing in certain events. The board minutes generally did not provide the stimulus for much discussion, however.

With few exceptions, the interviews started on time or even earlier in several instances. Only once did the researcher have to reschedule the interview due to an unexpected conflict. This was rescheduled for the next week. The researcher knew three of the interviewees from his previous or current employment.

The meeting began with an introduction and a minimal amount of conversation. Most of the conversation consisted of explaining the scope of the endeavor and having the respondent sign the required consent form (see Appendix F). Each of the interviews began with the open-ended question asking the superintendent to explain what the school board did for public education in his/her community. The interview guide approach methodology was used for each interview. The interviewer regularly asked follow-up questions to clarify and to give examples of statements the superintendents made. The flexibility of this open-ended questioning methodology resulted in no identical interviews, but they did provide a similar body of evidence for analysis as they were completed.

Each interview lasted about 45 minutes. The shortest one was 35 minutes and the longest one about an hour and a half. Transcribed into text, the length of the interview varied between 3000 and 11,000 words.

The taped interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews. The researcher transcribed eight of them with the balance (17) completed by paid transcribers. While the tape recording is referred to as a primary document, the completed

set of transcripts became the primary document the researcher used to inform this study since the tapes were not referred to after the interviews were transcribed (Ives). As such, the interview transcripts served as the data set analyzed by the researcher and his advisor. A copy of the transcripts was given to the researcher's advisor. The two read and then they talked. This researcher wrote and then he and the advisor talked. As pieces of the analysis were completed, the advisor read and gave comments about its development. The text data was used simultaneously to analyze similarities and differences between responses. The text data was used to support the description and the explanation of the researcher's analytic assertions regarding what school boards do, what the superintendent does, and how the education reforms possibly changed the school board's role over the past ten years.

Reliability and Validity of the Study

The researcher found that describing and explaining the reliability of this study was impractical to do without simultaneously examining its validity. Reliability and validity are inexorably linked. According to Gorden (1975), reliability refers to the probability that an observation could be replicated with similar results. Alternately, "Validity refers to the extent to which the data conform to the fact." (p. 6). Further, Gorden argues that just because observations are reliable, it does not ensure that the observations are valid. It is the task of the researcher to ensure validity through analysis and presentation of the data.

Given the respondents and the topic being studied, the researcher believes this study could be repeated with very similar responses. Also, there is a high degree of internal consistency. That is, the experienced superintendents were saying similar things about their school boards. The reliability of the study increased each time the

superintendents offered like responses. Exceptions to the norm were always included to further increase the reliability of the data presentation.

Meanwhile, validity is more of an abstract measure of the data presentation. Kvale writes, “ A main conclusion is that there is no validity of the interview (qualitative) methods as such; it is the results of an interview (qualitative) study which must be validated in a concrete situation” (p. 484). Therefore, it is the researcher’s task to validate the study by describing and explaining the evidence in a manner that the intended audience can see new relations and answer new but relevant questions about the relationship between the educational professionals and the school board. Validity for the study was increased as the researcher accumulated the evidence from the interviews that made his assertions about the role of the school board plausible.

The presentation of the data suggested internal consistency and was designed to describe and explain the role of school boards in 1999. For example, in the data presentation the researcher asserted that school boards buffer the educational organization of public schools through representation. The evidence garnered from the respondents included the following citations. “Basically, I assume our board is pretty much like every other board. They have been successful representing the community.” “They do come with their favorite interests so that gives everyone in the community a sounding board.” “They are very good at sensing the general tenor of what parents are like in our district. They are very, very representative of the attitudes of the big group.” “The board provides me with a lot of integrity because they represent the community, but they are also my go-between with the community.” “They understand their role is to represent the community, for the education of the children in the community.” “Our board really reflects the vision,

the mission and the purpose of the community.” “They’re there to make judgments for the community.” “It (the school board) still maintains that connection between the public and the district’s employees. I used to have a real good handle on the community and what the people were thinking about the school. I think the board has that.” “... We have board members that represent the best interest of the kids and they represent the interests of the community.” “... What this school board, and school boards in general do, is provide a check and balance, so to speak, representing their constituents. The function of the school board allows community input and community direction... I view ours as representing parents, the non-parents of the community, the business sector...” After reading these descriptions of the school boards’ representative nature, the audience should recognize the consistency of the superintendent responses and better understand the school boards’ representation relative to their communities.

Additionally, exceptions to the norm were frequently included in the researcher’s discussion. The exceptions to the norm added to the study’s reliability and its validity. For example, the impact of P. A. 289 on the role of their school board was asked of all 25 superintendents. Twenty-four of the respondents believed their school board had been relatively unaffected by the Revised School Code. This suggested the methodology was reliable. The one exception, however, described and explained the capacity of this legislation to affect the role of local governance. Thus, the presentation of the data in Chapter Three helped ensure the reliability of the respondents’ answers. It is the reader of the study, however, that ultimately determines the validity of the study’s findings.

Limitations of the Study

The most apparent limitation of this study is that the experienced respondents may well be assumed to be “successful” superintendents as indicated by the length of their

career. That is, maybe these individuals have learned to “manage” their school boards and “paint a rosier picture” of what school boards do for their school districts than other superintendents might. As such, this study is one of longevity. That is, the study’s data presentation describes and explains how experienced and/or successful superintendents have learned to manage and work with their school board. From this perspective, the study tells what the school board does and what the experienced superintendent does in these school districts. It does not necessarily generalize to other school boards and superintendents.

This potential limitation, however, suggests the strength of this sample as well. The intent of the researcher was to interview superintendents whose tenure in that position pre-dated 1990 to find out if they believed the role of the school board had been altered by the education reforms of the 1990s. Twenty-three of the superintendents interviewed had been in the same school district since that time. Thus, the respondents’ longevity within their district makes the evidence of change, or the lack of the same, more compelling. It also suggests what school boards with successful superintendents do for their K-12 organizations. Understanding the delicate balance between what the school board does and what the superintendent does is important for any school district to successfully function in an open system.

Another of the limitations of this study is the number of interviews held. While 25 represents less than 5% of the state’s school boards, theoretical sampling suggests it is a significant number, since the researcher was hearing the same ideas expressed time and again with all of the exceptions noted. The researcher believed the various properties of school board role were saturated at the point where the interviewing stopped. Again,

theoretical sampling does not allow for the magnitude of the findings to generalize to all of the school districts in Michigan, however.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The researcher's purpose in this study was to describe and explain the role of school boards in Michigan public schools in 1999. More specifically, what does the school board do, what does the superintendent do relative to the school board's authority, and has the role of the school board changed in the last ten years due to the education reforms of this decade? These three exploratory questions guided this investigation. The data is presented in this manner.

In Chapter Three, the researcher presented and analyzed the findings of the three questions in the order they were asked.. The questions were answered from the data gained from the interviews. Assertions are made by the researcher and supported by comments from the various respondents. The comments were inserted in two ways. Many of the comments were not attributed to a specific superintendent. Most often, this technique was used when responses were very similar. Quotation marks separated each superintendent's comments. Thus, if there were five quotes before or after an assertion, the reader should know that it represents five different superintendents' comments. This suggests the reliability of the study, too.

The other method used to present the data was to attribute a quote to a specific superintendent. To protect confidentiality, all superintendents were assigned a letter of the alphabet corresponding to the number of the interview in the study. Thus, Superintendent A was the first interview, Superintendent J was the tenth, and so on. Whenever exceptions to the assertion existed, the researcher described and explained these responses. The exceptions made the validity of the study stronger. In addition, the

researcher includes specific propositions from Thompson's theoretical model in the data presentation suggesting how the school board increases organizational rationality.

Summary

This chapter has been a presentation of the methodology employed. The technique of sampling and a discussion on interviewing were given. The researcher described and explained how the sample possibly affected his findings. The three basic questions that guided this study and the interviewer's questioning were described. A brief narrative of field procedures has been provided. Reliability and validity were discussed so the reader should feel confident that the findings are representative of what experienced superintendents perceive their school board's role is in their school districts. Some limitations were briefly explained. A review of how the data is presented and analyzed concluded this chapter.

CHAPTER III: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Part I: What the School Board Does

Since the researcher has argued that public schools should be described as open systems, it is reasonable to expect that there is a certain amount of influence from its environment, namely the public, business and government. Given the amount of uncertainty and the effects of the environment on an open system, the researcher discovered the evidence supported the assertion that the overall role of public school boards is to reduce uncertainty in the organization by buffering the instructional level from its environmental influences (Proposition 2.2). These influences include demands and expectations placed upon the school district from the parents, the general public, the business community and the legislation passed by the state and federal government. When asked what the school board did for his district, Superintendent B clearly stated this very phenomenon. He described his school board as “a buffer between some of the foolishness we see from Lansing and Washington with the expectations here (his community.)” He continued, “MEAP would be a good example. Lansing would have us devote everything we have to implementing fully whatever. This board says for you to develop what you think is important. If it works out that the MEAP scores are good, then that’s a benefit.” How school boards buffer their educational bureaucracy is described and explained by telling what they do.

Buffer by Hiring the Superintendent

Arguably, the most important task a school board does to buffer the technical core is to hire the superintendent. That is, by hiring the right person, the school board reduces the environmental influences on its classrooms. Getting the right person to lead and direct the school district's bureaucracy, including the teachers, the building principals and other central office administrators, is essential. This person 'bridges the gap' between the technical core and the institutional level. That is, the superintendent facilitates an understanding between what occurs in the classroom and how the school board makes sense of it. Superintendent S explained the relationship this way. "The way we have always operated is that the superintendent is responsible to the board and the board is connected to the school district through the superintendent." The superintendent is the conduit in ensuring congruency between the technical and the institutional levels of the organization.

Most often, "hiring the superintendent" was the response the superintendents gave in explaining what their school board did regarding personnel. As Superintendent B put it, "Hiring the superintendent as frequently or infrequently as that happens is one of their (the school board's) most important functions." The superintendent the school board chooses to hire becomes the 'point man' for the school district. Superintendent K described his relationship and responsibility to his school board. "They told me as the superintendent, I'm in charge of the buildings, successes and failures. The board gives me a lot of authority. They say, 'This is our man, we back him, and we support him.'" Superintendent R mentioned the similar public support his board backs him with as he explained, "The president of the board gets up and speaks (at the opening staff meeting

each year). He always says the person running the district, providing the leadership is the superintendent.”

Many other responses left little doubt about the seriousness of the school board’s role in choosing the right person. “They literally see their most important job as hiring and working with the superintendent.” “They (the board) make the big decisions like what superintendent to hire...” “Our board policy basically is they (the board) are involved in hiring the superintendent.” “They’re responsible for hiring the superintendent. Their role is basically to approve the recommendations except when they’re hiring a superintendent.” “Their role is to hire the superintendent and the superintendent implements the policy.” “They are responsible for hiring the superintendent.” “The board does interviews, does home visits and makes the final decision...” “They hire the superintendent.” “When they hired me, it was a full board interview.” From these various superintendents’ perspectives, hiring the superintendent is the most important task a school board does.

Once the school board has hired a superintendent, it must evaluate him or her annually. Many of the February school board minutes collected by the researcher included references of the school board going into executive or closed session for the purpose of the superintendent’s evaluation. The evaluation process seemed to vary between the districts. “Their responsibility is to evaluate me as a superintendent. They do an exhaustive evaluation of me, they use several instruments and we talk about things... they report out the extension of contracts and so forth...” “They (the board) play a big role (in the evaluation). I set goals for the district and myself each spring that they approve in July. In November, we have a mid-term evaluation closed session at my

request. I review my goals, talk about accomplishments, areas for improvement, things yet to be accomplished, etc. Board members give me feedback along the same lines.”

“This board charges me with coming up with an evaluation instrument that I like... The process they use is fairly simple. They survey all of the staff, inviting them to provide comments. Most recently, the rate of response keeps going down. ... They are finding that the survey is more of an opportunity for them (the respondents) to vent their grief about whatever... the board does read those... they (the board) individually complete the evaluation instrument and they collectively share what they have written down. Then, it is summarily written and given to me.” When asked if this is important, Superintendent B stated, “Oh, it’s essential” Further he added, “Probably, if I did the evaluation, it would be lower.” Superintendent S talked about his evaluation, too. “I have always received positive evaluations, but I have always received suggestions. I have always tried to be responsive.” Evaluating the superintendent is an important function for the school board. Going into closed or executive session to complete the evaluation allows for more open and specific dialog between the superintendent and the school board.

At times, however, the line of authority, a delicate balance of control and responsibility, between the superintendent and the school board is not clear. Distinguishing between and determining the line between the school board’s role and the superintendent’s role and responsibility is the source of major frustrations. It can also put a serious strain on the relationship between the levels in the organization. Superintendent V reinforced this concept of “the line of authority” as he explained, “We would hope, and it’s been that case in the past, that they (the board) understand that they hire the superintendent to run the district.” Hiring the right superintendent and evaluating him/her

annually is quite possibly the most important tasks the school board does for its community.

Buffer by Legitimizing Policy

It is evident that school boards do something that is essential for public school systems to be more viable with its public. Since public schools are open systems, they have many variables affecting them. Setting school board policy is how the school board reduces uncertainty. Parsons (quoted by Thompson) suggests that, “it would be advantageous for an organization subject to criteria of rationality to remove as much uncertainty as possible from its technical core (instruction) by reducing the number of variables operating in it” (p.11). School boards reduce uncertainty for public school systems, especially the teachers and building principals, by reducing the number of, and the effects of, the variables in the environment. This reduction of uncertainty allows the technical core to be more rational. Thompson explains how the institutional level (school boards) deals with “elements of the environment over which it has no formal authority or control” (p.13). These variables include generalized norms that vary from state and federal laws, to informal standards of good practice, to public authority, or to those expressing the public interest.

Most often, school boards reduce the number of variables from the environment through school board policy. In response to what their school board does for their school district, many superintendents answered that establishing policy is its official duty. Indeed, setting policy has been a primary function of school boards since the Administrative Progressives led by Cubberly advocated for this role for school boards in the 1930s. Fourteen out of the twenty-five superintendents interviewed (56%) mentioned policy in their initial response to what school boards did for their school districts. Their

comments conclude that setting policy is what school boards do. “Stay strictly with policy.” “...Their overall role is policy setting.” “Does a good job of setting policy.” “Their official responsibility is to establish policy.” “But they have been very good in just setting policy.” “They understand their roles as a policy maker.” They are the leaders in the sense of setting policy.” “... Oriented toward policy.” and “... To set policy...”

School board policy often reflects its community. One respondent told how provincial local policy generated by the school board could be. Superintendent E felt that, “... policy questions are reflective of your community and what that value is in your community. Where you see the most intensified (policy debate) is when there has been a particular controversy and the community may be divided over whether you should go from a junior high to a middle school or what your philosophy is in terms of teaching phonics or whole language. ... ones (policies) that tend to have the most interest are the locally flavored ones... ...policy really has to govern the perception of the community...”

Further, Superintendent M told of another locally flavored policy the school board was recently considering. “Part D (of a policy being considered) was about home schooling. Not just home schooling, but transfer students... It wasn’t an adoption that evening. We were looking at it together. They were concerned about the issue of transfer students and grade point averages. (The implication was that students coming from a home schooling environment had a 4.0 G.P.A.). We merged into, ‘a student can graduate with honors no matter when they come in.’ That takes care of the home school kids. ‘In order to be named valedictorian or salutatorian you have to be here three semesters.” So, local school boards use policy to make its operational practices and decisions more

rational with its publics. School boards set policies that are reflective of the community they represent. Thus, uncertainty within the organization is removed and the actions of the professional educators are legitimized. Organizational rationality is sustained.

The researcher recognized that nearly half of the respondents (44%), however, did not mention policy in their initial statement as to what school boards do for their community. Even when they did, it was with some reservation. The comments of Superintendent S provide insight into why he answered the way he did. "What it (the school board) really does is what the first eighteen (interviewees) probably told you, is that they set policy. That is true, they do set policy.... More important than setting policy is the symbolic oversight of the superintendent, budget, administration, and programs. But mainly the superintendent and the budget so that people can feel comfortable there is a governance structure in place that the schools must be responsive to the community." This 'symbolic oversight' Superintendent S referred to implies that the school board is the accountability component that allows professional educators to do their jobs and to reduce the uncertainty within the organization with its public, not just the policy setting itself.

Superintendent X did not mention policy making in his initial answer either. He explained what policy does in many school districts, but since his is a large school district, extensive policy setting was unnecessary. "With the absence of a lot of administrative expertise and talent and numbers of positions in small school districts, they (the school boards) tend to respond to it (problems) through policy... Boards have to play more of a management role because they don't have many managers in some of these small districts." Superintendent X would rather operate under administrative

regulations that keep his district more agile. Administrative regulations are specific practices the administration use to take actions and make decisions, but are within the purview of the school board policy. Superintendent X explained, “What you want to do... is be agile enough to respond immediately to changes in legislation, law, rule, regulations, negotiated contracts, etc.” The implication is that school board policy slows the administrative function within a school district. Superintendents like generalized policy that allows for specific operational guidelines and practices to be established by the professional administrators.

Even in the smaller school districts, policy is something superintendents often try to avoid. Superintendent A explained, “I try to keep out of that (policy book) because when it becomes a board policy, then it becomes a board issue. And board issues I can’t deal with the way that I like to deal with them. So we try to make them administrative regulations... let me deal administratively with my principals, that kind of thing instead of having a policy, because then the board gets involved. I would prefer doing it myself.” While school board policies can reduce uncertainty in the organization, administrative professionals may view extensive policy as intrusive and a potential source of micro-management.

The ‘problems’ Superintendent X referred to previously may come from both the public and from state/federal law, variables that are out of the authority and the control of the organization, but still affect it. Instead of providing for the administrative experts (management level) to shield teachers and principals from the outside variables, policies make school districts more bureaucratic, that is, less likely to fall into the purview of special interests in the public. School board policy helps make the technical core more

rational. Actions taken by the technical and management levels are legitimated through school board policy. The evidence supports the assertion that school boards set policy to legitimize the actions of the professional educators. Later, the researcher describes and explains how most school board policy is made.

Buffer as Change Agents

Luecker (1992) found that the board members she had interviewed described part of their role as that of being “change agents.” Initially, none of the superintendents described their board in these terms. During the context of the interview, the superintendents were asked if they saw the school board as “change agents.” No definition of this concept was given or clarification asked. The interpretation was left up to the superintendent’s perception of that idea. As such, the term ‘change agent’ most often was understood as another mechanism to buffer the public school system (Proposition 2.3). The comments from the superintendents supported the notion that while school boards may not be “change agents” in the classical sense, they do seek to smooth out input and output transactions.

Most often being change agents meant the school board supported administrative change efforts. “With the new high school principal, any change he wants to make, they buy right into it because it’s a change... So, I’m not sure they are change agents, but they certainly encourage it and support it. They usually find the funds to support it.” “I’d say they are supportive of change when change is a good thing. I’d say they’re not a group that’s changed things so they can say they made changes.” “I have to applaud this board because they tolerate my love of change... The board has bought into that (philosophy) and they want us to be an outstanding school district... They want us to improve and they take pride in being a part of that. Individually, some might wish to slow down a bit, but

they never said that.” They (the school board) react to our changes. They (the school board) react to our concerns.” “If it is a change that will improve and support instruction, they are supportive.” It is evident that many superintendents view their school boards as change agents in terms of the support they provide toward administrative change initiatives.

Other respondents perceived the school boards as change agents in the sense that the school board smoothes community inputs and allows change in the district to occur. “We tend to be conservative so sometimes we get accused of moving too slowly. This is a community that likes to study things and pilot things. From an educational standpoint, they are seen as change agents... another (example) was a strategic planning process that involved hundreds of community people setting goals... the high school study modified the high school program... another was changing the junior highs to middle schools”... “I think boards can facilitate a process whereby change occurs. I think boards can bring focus to issues that can facilitate change... Boards can be change agents, but only to the degree that they can work with their superintendent and only to the degree that the community can accept them.” “Right now we are on a steady course, but we (the superintendent and his management) came in and we (the school district) went to outcomes-based education, mastery learning... That’s created a lot of change in this community and with the school district. They’ve always been, ‘Go ahead, (name). Do what you think is best for the school district and bring it to us... You don’t have to sit back. If we need to change things, let’s do it... They’ve been progressive and I like that.” “They are in the big picture. They make the big decisions like what superintendent to hire, what budget to approve, what election to approve. Those are the things that truly

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make changes.” Creating community acceptance is a way that the school board buffers the bureaucracy from the public during substantive change efforts.

A few of the superintendents described how their school boards act as the catalyst for change. “They are involved and have initiated some major changes... They initiated it (quality school goal) and it is very expensive...” “The fund balance (the amount of equity a school district has that is not budgeted for expenditures) thing, they initiated.”

Not all of the superintendents welcomed their school board’s change initiatives, however. “I believe the previous board for the last couple of years saw themselves as a change agent. They saw themselves as a vehicle to do things differently than they had in the past. But those people who had advocated that position most loudly in the community did not get re-elected.” Few superintendents described their school board as initiating change because a board member saw the need to do it. Mostly, the role as a change agent was as a supporter of initiatives sought by others in the organization.

Finally, a couple of the superintendents did not believe their school boards could be characterized as change agents. “Maybe, but that would be stretching it. I don’t see them going in that direction. I’ve never known them as real change agents.” “I don’t consider them change agents in this community. We are a very traditional community... They are not big on change for change sake.”

So, school boards have as a role as change agents as long as the definition means supporting administrative initiatives or smoothing inputs from the community. While two superintendents mentioned initiatives their school boards had undertaken, it’s quite possible these could be credited to the administration communicating the need, just not recommending it directly to the school board. The one superintendent who mentioned an

initiative that clearly wasn't his recommendation was not supportive of this role for his school board. School boards have a role as change agents, but mostly as supporters for the changes promoted by the educational professionals. Hence, the boards buffer the educational professionals by gaining community support during change efforts.

Buffer through Representation

Most of the superintendents either described or implied that their school boards represented their school districts. That is, in keeping with the ideals of a representative democracy, school board members are elected delegates of the community and stand for its views. Time and again, superintendents voiced this idea as reflected in their responses. "Basically, I assume our board is pretty much like every other board. They have been successful representing the community." "They do come with their favorite interests so that gives everyone in the community a sounding board." "They are very good at sensing the general tenor of what parents are like in our district. They are very, very representative of the attitudes of the big group." "The board provides me with a lot of integrity because they represent the community, but they are also my go between with the community." "They understand their role is to represent the community, for the education of the children in the community." "Our board really reflects the vision, the mission and the purpose of the community." "They're there to make judgments for the community." "It (the school board) still maintains that connection between the public and the district's employees. I used to have a real good handle on the community and what the people were thinking about the school. I think the board has that." "... We have board members that represent the best interest of the kids and they represent the interests of the community." "... What this school board and school boards in general do, is provide a check and balance so to speak, representing their constituents. The function of the school board

allows community input and community direction... I view ours as representing parents, the non-parents of the community, the business sector..."

Perhaps, this role of representation is best explained by the superintendent who said, "... what the school board really does is represent the community with regard to running the school district. It (the school board) represents the democratization of the governance system so that people feel comfortable that there are elected school board members on there that have an oversight responsibility. ... So that people can feel comfortable that there is a governance structure in place that the schools must be responsive to the community ... their most important function ... is to represent the thoughts, the concerns, the hopes of the community." The answers of the respondents, crystallized the idea that one norm of the role of the school board is to represent the community. How school boards represent their community gives further insight into the school board role.

Formal Representation at School Board Meetings

The most obvious place for the board to hear from the public is at school board meetings. The school board minutes from each of the interviewees' districts indicated there is at least one opportunity for public comment during board meetings. When asked about whether there was a place for public dialog, one superintendent responded, "Yes, at every board meeting the first real action item on the agenda is public comments. We structure that at the beginning of the meeting... We haven't had a public comment for a couple of years." When asked a similar question, another superintendent said, "...people can stand up and state their name, address and concern. If they bring up a real key issue, the president of the board will ask if I (the superintendent) have had the opportunity to

deal with this issue and I usually say no, I am not even aware of it. I then meet with the individual and resolve things that way.” Superintendent J told what his board does with the public comments. “It’s supposed to be that the board doesn’t respond, but only listen. They aggravate people who are waiting for an answer. The president replies that they don’t respond here, but refer them to the experts in administration sitting along the side.” While the school board hears the concerns, it is most often given to the educational professionals to deal with the problem. Since people tend to want immediate answers, this practice often diminishes public input at school board meetings.

Another superintendent explained, “The only other feedback you might get is people coming to school board meetings to represent concerns and we don’t have that.” A final superintendent added, “Frequently, they (the public) don’t have any.” While the board minutes do reflect occasional audience input, frequently the minutes read, “There were no public comments.” Given that regular public comments are not forthcoming, how do board members hear what the public is thinking?

Informal Representation

It seems that one of the best ways board members represent the community is by talking to people and listening to what the public is saying. Communication with the public provides opportunity for the general public to give feedback on the school system within their community. When asked “how” in response to his statement that his board did this, Superintendent V answered by saying, “in a community our size, it’s by word of mouth.... The way ours represents people is at church as they talk to people, as they talk to their friends and their wives. Is it purely representative? Well, probably not any more so than politicians. ... So I think its word of mouth.” Superintendent O explained,

“We’ve done surveys in the community, but most of the time, people talk to them. In a small town, instead of talking to me, a lot of people call a board member. “

Superintendent R added, “...they do have a listening, someone to talk to, someone to share a concern with function.” So, community people talk to the school board members informally about what they think about their school district’s actions and policies.

It is evident that the involvement of the school board members in the community, through a variety of activities and informal contacts, provides the superintendent with ways of knowing what the public is thinking and feeling about the direction and operation of the school system (Proposition 2.2). “In terms of their basic function, they are the eyes and the ears of the community. They reflect what the community wants ... they represent the community and share policies and the way we run our district should be reflected the way the community wants. As far as I’m concerned, they do a darn good job making sure they reflect the mores of the community.” “They are very good at sensing the general tenor of what parents are like in our district. They are very, very representative of the attitudes of the big group.” “The board provides me with integrity because they represent the community, but they are also my go-between with the community. They have a circle of friends that I don’t. These people have their own connections in the community. I get feedback from them. Their wishes and desires are important to me.” “Our board president owns an electric business on one of our busy corners in the district. It’s kind of like a barbershop.” Serving as a sounding board for the public helps the school board buffer the school system by knowing what the general public is thinking and keeping the board from making poor decisions as perceived by the general public.

Representation of Constituencies

Superintendents view their school board members as representing constituencies or specific entities within the community. As such, this is often how the board members have informal contacts with the public and receive feedback from them. “All of the ones (members) on the board represent a constituency...” “... there is a greater tendency today for school board members to appeal to a particular constituency.” “We have constituencies that represent building levels, a constituency to represent the business sector, a couple of board members that have businesses in town. Three of them are in the Rotary Club and they represent them. Each of our current board members is involved in one of the local churches. So, each denomination in town has some representation. So, you look at the parent aspect, you look at some of those unofficial contacts that you have, they represent a wide variety of constituencies.” “... Her kids are involved in school. You know she represents parents who have kids in school. I think board members do have constituencies from their social group, from their neighborhood, from their families, from their jobs, from their church affiliations that helps them represent the community they serve, one of the main functions of the school board.” “People call them up. People have access to them.” “If they have a kid in school, they’ll see people at events and somebody may say, ‘Well, you’re on the school board, what are we going to do about this?’” “... At my particular age, my children are no longer living at home. I feel I have lost contact with students to some extent, that close contact. Therefore the board of education, they still have kids in little league and soccer and everything else so they are at those games I don’t go to any more.” “They can either call them or see them because board members are active in the community. They see them at church, they see them at little league and

say you know I have a problem with this or that.” “The school board can be an important vehicle for assisting the administration in dealing with community problems... They can be a reality check. We as administrators can get into our own little world with our perspectives shaped by administrative perspective. The school board can bring us back to reality and give us the perspective of the man in the street.” The school board represents the perspectives of lots of differing constituencies and interests in the community.

Representation the Right Way

While serving as a sounding board for the public, both formally and informally, is something school boards do, superintendents are quick to point out there is a right and a wrong way to do that. The “right way” is for it to come through the proper channels. That is, “They still refer any concern that parents may have to administration. Then, if a citizen appears before the board at an open meeting, they defer that answer to administration” (Proposition 2.1). Another superintendent gave an example that explained the “right way” for a board member to be a sounding board. A school board member had recently called him and told him of a concern. “The last thing that happened was we had our Vaudeville Show which is a Rotary-sponsored event. We let them use our facilities. They were upset because we had taken the doors off of the bathroom and the reasons we had done that. The high school principal had requested that because he didn’t want kids hiding in the bathroom and so on, especially with all the violence that’s been in the press recently. They called the board president and complained about it. So he called me to find out what the story was and to fill him in. I’m going to have to respond to this woman whose husband is actually in the Rotary.”

Several superintendents described what their school board members do. “When phone call come to them, they have been schooled on thanking the people for their questions or comments. They have been quick to call the superintendent’s office if there is an issue out there and ask him to research the issue and get back to them. Almost without exception, that has been my experience...” “... if parents call board members with concerns there is a form that they have and we encourage them not to answer, not to micromanage. Refer them to administration, let administration do all the answering.” “Out of my board members, I have two-thirds that act like a board member should act. Parents call them to complain and they (the school board member) will either call me or say “call the superintendent.” Fine! Very appropriate.” The “right way” is to let the superintendent or his designee handle the problem or concern. The school’s bureaucracy negotiates the problem from its perspective (Proposition 2.3). This is the right way for school boards to represent their community.

Representation the Wrong Way

A few superintendents gave examples of the “wrong way” for school board members to be a sounding board for the public. Superintendent Y told of what occurred in his school district recently. In this example, a board member had not shared communication with the superintendent when he/she had received it. Superintendent Y said, “I might walk in (to a board meeting) and someone says ‘A teacher strangled a kid and threw him out the window. What is going on?’ If I don’t know anything about that, how do I respond to that? That is a definite problem.... We have a procedure the parents can follow if they have a concern. (When) that procedure is followed, we (the administration) usually get most things resolved. The parent has a final appeal to the

board if it is not resolved. That was always well understood and really for the most of the time and during some harrowing times, board members handled it well. That is not happening now. It creates a negative attitude.”

Another superintendent explained what a board member did to solve a complaint. “There was a situation where we had a parent in an elementary with two children in the same building. The kids were having a hard time... We had a lunch supervisor who appeared over a period of time to be singling out this child... In my absence one day, my board president had gotten a phone call from a parent and he proceeded to go into the building and have a discussion with the building principal. He gave the building principal the directive that this child was not to be disciplined in any way by anybody until the superintendent returned. Clear attempt by a board member who went well, well beyond his scope of authority and responsibility in an attempt to fix the problem.” The last example of the “wrong way” for school board members to serve as a sounding board for the public is for the board member to go out looking for discontent. “Some board members, who are not otherwise employed, put their whole life into being a school board member and always show up. They let people bend their ears. You find them all over the community ‘bending’ peoples’ ears. I have... board members dipping into everything. I have one that is never happy. Happiness is not solving a problem for this person; it’s the pursuit of a problem.” The wrong way for a school board to represent its community does not allow the educational professional to intervene in an appropriate manner. This action (or lack of it) usually creates further problems for the school’s bureaucracy.

Representation of Special Interests

Representing specific constituents is akin to representing special interests and “single agenda” board members. That is, people who run for the school board with one main goal in mind. When asked if school boards represented special interests, one superintendent responded,

No question about it. Usually their own. School board members who run for the first time are there because they are upset with something. They are either upset with the coach, they’re upset with the teachers, they’re upset with the principal, they want to get rid of the superintendent. I’ve had several run for the board and get elected because they wanted to get rid of the superintendent, or as one of the said. ‘I want to truly evaluate the superintendent.’ Well, that was a nice way of saying he wanted my ass. Well, after spending a year with me, when he wrote my evaluation, he said, ‘I truly misjudged our superintendent. I had a different perception.’ They run for the board and they have no idea what it is like... and they run for special issues (Superintendent A).

Another superintendent echoed this by stating that, “The kinds of people that should be elected to boards... aren’t promoting a single agenda, or any interest in that area.” There are people on boards of education that shouldn’t be there because they have a single-issue agenda.” Lastly, one of the superintendents recognized that special interests from school board members were a way of life. “As far as special interests, you always have that from some board members. We have a football/soccer controversy that goes on continually.” Special interest board members may tend to micromanage the school district in their specific area of interest. As a result, superintendents often have difficulty working with special interest and single agenda board members.

Representation as a Sounding Board for the Superintendent

Serving as a sounding board for the public is only a part of the school board’s role. The school board also legitimates recommendations the superintendent makes to it. Before the superintendent makes a recommendation, however, he/she often uses the

school board to “bounce that off from them informally to see where they are at and to see what their feeling is.” One superintendent told how he “tests the waters” before he makes a recommendation. He explained, “If it’s a loser, it isn’t going to the board.” Other superintendents find out what the board is thinking in work or study sessions. “We discuss a lot of things to get the feel of what the community would feel in an area because as educators we are involved in it everyday.” “They respect the difference between policy and administration, but we also know in this community people are interested in schools and very observant to what is going on in schools. That is what our study committees are all about. We take no action there, of course.” “The best example of that (sounding board) would be the committee activity. When you go to board committee you get a pretty good feel.” “I will call board members on issues. As a sounding board, or to inform them about some type of crisis or something that’s happened that I think they need to know right away.” “I get a lot of good feedback from them...they have their own informal constituency that covers the district.” So superintendents like to listen to what board members’ questions and initial responses are to an idea (Proposition 2.3). This feedback helps to shape administrative recommendations.

Not all superintendents are real confident their board members are up to this task, however. One superintendent explained, “Good board members can provide some valuable information... I can gauge reaction (public) by how the board reacts. I have two or three key board members and I take their reaction on an issue because I’ve been there, I know them, and I know the community. And I’ll know that’s pretty much a microcosm of how the community would react. I also have some other board members that are so far out of touch they couldn’t be a sounding board for anything.” Another superintendent

mentioned a further limitation of using members as a sounding board. He asserted, "There is not a lot of communication between board members and individuals dealing with board issues unless there is an issue that everybody is concerned about." Again, a superintendent said, "I find that isn't totally effective asking for feedback from the board members because sometimes they forget to call or maybe don't even read the message." Using the school board as a sounding board isn't always the most effective way to buffer the school district, but it does assist the superintendent in ascertaining potential reactions.

Representative of the School Board: the President

Superintendents rely on the school board president time and again as the primary sounding board. "I meet with my board president every two weeks. This guy is out and about in the community. He is a retired GM guy, well respected in the community. He is a good guy to go to." "I communicate with the board president all of the time. As things come up, I'll call the board president to let him know what's going on and get input from that person." "I call the president three times a week. He will sometimes suggest when the other board members should know something and we fan out or he will say, 'Let's keep this between us.' The rest of the board is comfortable knowing that the board president and I communicate." "They (the board members) realize the board president is the focal point. He and I talk several times a week." "If there is something coming up or something going on.... I'll pick up the phone and call the school board president. That's the way we've worked it and the other members know that." "I use the board president a lot this way (sounding board) to get their (the board member's) opinion on how you feel about this or how you think the community's going to feel about this issue." "The role... the board really sees themselves playing... is a reflection of the leadership they have on

the board. If they have a strong board president that believes the administration is doing a good job... their role is less involved.”

The leadership role of the school board president is of the utmost importance for a well-functioning district. “I work with the board president to discuss difficulties I may be having with board members. The board president will negotiate a solution between that member and me.” “If we are having a serious personnel problem I would let him know first.” When the school board president and the superintendent were working together, the public school organization appeared to be running smoothly. “I’ll say, Dick, this is going on. I don’t think it will hit the media. But, I wanted you to know such and such.” “At first they were not going to have me present, but the board president convinced them...” “Let me go back to that, board presidents are key. If you have a good, strong board president, that’s essential. You need one to keep the other board members, shall we say, on task.” “... The board president should be ... that check and balance between the board and the administration. The role of the president is important to give the administration speed, timing and important information that would help recommendations to be finally resolved and supported by the board.” “Like a president... would talk to board members about issues that were of concern to the board and he would bring them to the superintendent. He could get a sense or a pulse of the board so that he could perform his role as emissary of the board.” “When they come in, I usually direct calls at the president if there’s something the board needs to know.” “The board president and I have a lot of contact and discuss issues and concerns.” Thus, supportive school board presidents serve as a buffer between the superintendent and the rest of the school

board. They have a very important part of the organization in allowing the management and the institutional levels to work together. (Proposition 2.4).

School board presidents that don't support the superintendent and his or her recommendations are negatively viewed by their superintendents. Two superintendents openly questioned the support of their board president. The uncertainty and non-support the superintendents had received from their board presidents had made these respondents question their intent and the "drag" they have on the organization. The first superintendent explained, "If board leadership (the president) believes that changes need to be made, that there needs to be more oversight... that managing... it becomes cumbersome to the process." When asked if he used the board president as a sounding board, the second superintendent replied, "Yes. It will be interesting with the new board president because there is some definite hostility towards me. This will be the first time that I have worked with a board president that has overt hostility towards me. Usually, in situations where the president and I disagree, I give the advice and my opinion. If they choose to ignore it, that is on them, but we maintain a professional relationship. I'm not sure this new board president can work like this..."

A lack of a working relationship between the board president and the superintendent makes for a dysfunctional school board. Since the board president is such a key role, incongruent superintendent and board president ideologies and philosophies can cause the whole school board to dysfunction resulting in district-wide disarray. Superintendent D explained the implication of a poor working relationship between the management and the institutional levels within the organization. "... They are not getting in the way of education and sometimes that happens with school boards and they can

cause a district to dysfunction.” Again, the researcher argues that there is a delicate balance of control and responsibility within a public school system. When the system becomes imbalance due to one of the levels, the superintendent or the school board, gaining too much power or control, buffering is ceased and the school district may lose organizational rationality.

Buffer as Negotiators

The school board is responsible for all for all contracts signed by its employees. The role they play in the negotiations leading to contract ratification varies from school district to school district. The “degree of involvement continuum” includes everything from sitting at the negotiating table; to watching, but not negotiating; to only setting the parameters and voting to agree to the tentative agreement between them and the teacher’s union. The evidence presented by the superintendents indicates that traditions of the individual school district determine who actually negotiates the labor contracts. Nonetheless, the school board is the entity that is ultimately responsible to “ration its resources” (Proposition 2.5) to better protect its technical core from environmental fluctuations. Thus, whether the board directly or indirectly negotiates the contracts with its employees, the contract between the school board and the employees helps organizational rationality exist within the school district. Using Thompson’s model, negotiations and the resulting contract agreements are another way that the school board buffers the bureaucracy. Given that, negotiations are an important part of what school boards do.

Sitting at the Table

The evidence from this study suggests at least three different models of who actively sits at the bargaining table and “makes the deal” exist. The first one described is

where the school board members sit at the negotiating table. At least three superintendents mentioned the use of this model for negotiations in their district. Superintendent O's comments indicated he feels this is important for school boards to do. He said, "... they are at the table. In fact, one of them is the spokesman this year. Which, in this situation, I think is healthy." Superintendent M described their negotiations similarly. "For teacher negotiations, we always have two or three members at the table." This phenomenon where the school board is actively sitting at the table seems to be most often practiced in smaller school districts. Superintendent C explained it this way. "They have always sat in on negotiations. In a small district, it is very common. ... There has been two board members on the negotiating committee. The third and fourth members all rotate in so they have some experience at the table or the caucus committee. That's been pretty traditional." The direct negotiation's model allows for the school board to know the issues first hand and the degree of urgency the negotiating employee group (most often teachers) feels toward these issues. However, it is not the model used by most school districts.

Superintendent W explained why he doesn't like to use this negotiating model in his school district as he described what the school board 'should' do. "What they should do in negotiations is set the parameters for the negotiations that are based on the advice of the administration, the existing labor relations in the district, the ability of the district to pay given the projected revenues, and then step out of it. I don't like board members at the negotiation's table. I told the last board member who wanted to sit at the negotiation's table, 'You can sit there and be at the table if you attend everyone of our planning sessions, you thoroughly understand and read the contract we're negotiating, and when

you are at the table, you don't say anything and you don't give anything away by your facial expression. If you think you can do that, then you can (negotiate).' He never showed up. I think the board of education members have a tendency to get drawn into the negotiations." This comment suggests that the superintendent didn't believe the school board member knew enough about the issues to make a 'good' decision. That is, he/she might get caught up in the emotions at the table and give an advantage to the other negotiating group. It also suggests that negotiating groups want to draw the school board into the negotiations if they (the labor group) feel the school board may not be getting all of the necessary information from the superintendent.

Observing, but not Participating

The second model that emerged from the interviews was one in which the school board was involved in "setting the parameters," but not directly negotiating at the bargaining table. This model did allow for board members to be present during the negotiations, however. One superintendent described his district's negotiation process this way. "... Two, sometimes three, school board members will show up for the negotiation sessions. They do not participate, but they sit in. The board members observe. When we caucus... board members have a chance to dialog. Prior to the start of negotiations, I have a meeting with board members and administrators on the team to set the parameters. I want the board to buy in to the parameters before we begin. When it comes for ratification, I don't want four of them saying they won't support this." Superintendent S described the role his board has in negotiations in a similar way. "Of course they play an important role in negotiations. They do determine the parameters, but only after we say, 'Here is the budget, (here are) our expected revenues and what other

districts will settle for, here are the language issues we can expect, here are the language issues we think we should address. It is like an action item. They have lots of good information, but they make the decisions. They don't go to the table as negotiators. They do visit the negotiations, especially when they feel it would be good for them to show up to make sure the teacher team knows they are interested and involved." This last comment suggests that having school board members present during negotiations is an effective way to communicate the importance of the negotiations and to increase the urgency to get a deal completed. In this negotiating model, the school board is adjacent to negotiations.

Indirectly Involved

The most common negotiation's model described and explained is one in which the school board sets the parameters (usually, after the superintendent has defined them), is informed by the superintendent or his designee the status of the negotiations, and then ratifies the tentative agreement. Superintendent F described his school board's actions by saying, "They have been very good at setting the parameters for us and then they don't sit at the table. They are not even at our (negotiating) sessions. ... They (the board) have given us kind of a line in the sand where we can't cross..." When asked who drew the line, the response was, "The board." His additional comment, however, clarified how 'the line' is drawn. "We (the administration) kind of suggest to them where that line ought to be."

Superintendent K's described his school board's actions in negotiations as being non-interfering. "In negotiations they have kind of a laissez-faire approach. ... We work with the MASB (Michigan Association of School Boards). We set up an open meeting

with the board to discuss areas of concern and how we would like to negotiate with them (the union). We give them a copy of the contract.” He further told how the school board is not always aware of negotiation proceedings and what can and can’t be done.

“Sometimes the board comes out with an anti-union perspective. They say things like ‘take away MESSA (Michigan Educational Special Services Association).’ ... The fact is you can’t do that (arbitrarily). You have to educate the board.”

Similarly, Superintendent U explained what happens in negotiations in his school district by describing what had occurred at his last school board meeting.

... The assistant superintendent negotiates. Monday night, we had about a ten-minute closed session with the board after the regular meeting to give an update. The assistant came in and said here’s where we are. ‘We’re close to a settlement with the teacher’s union. Here are some of the highlights. We expect to get a table agreement later this month. We expect the teachers to ratify it by the end of the month. We’ll come back at the August meeting with a recommendation for your approval.

When asked what they did with the information presented to the board during the closed session, Superintendent U responded with,

They ask questions. ... We had a 16.4% increase in health insurance and we had budgeted 10%. The cost to the district was another \$52,000 in revenues.... They can relate to things like salary schedules, etc. They can relate to what a teacher makes, and what a secretary makes, and what a custodian makes, and what an administrator makes. ... especially in the context of what they do in their career. We kind of set our own parameters administratively, i.e. what are our resources? What’s being paid in the county? We want to be sure the board is on line with us, so we don’t go out and get a table agreement and have the teacher’s ratify it, and bring it to the board and have them say, ‘What in the hell are you doing? We’re not going to approve that.’ It’s kind of doing our homework.

This third negotiating model keeps the school board informed of the status of negotiations, but only from the perspective of the administration and only when it chooses to provide an update. It seems this negotiating model may leave the school board with a less than objective representation of all sides of the issues. It may also suggest

reasons why labor groups often desire to draw school board members into the bargaining sessions.

In a like manner, Superintendent V described negotiations in his district, only during these negotiations, the school board is employing legal counsel as part of the negotiating team. “We negotiate. Chuck (assistant superintendent) is our lead negotiator along with our attorney. They do the negotiating.... Here’s our process. We get together and decide what we want to do, you know, strategy. We, includes Chuck and I and any other administrator at the cabinet meetings... So then we’ll meet with the personnel committee of the board and tell them, ‘Here’s what we think.’... Then we’ll have a closed session with the whole board and say we’ve met with the personnel committee and the administration recommends that the total blah, blah, blah... And here are some issues we think we need to settle. ...to this point, they’ve always agreed. Then the authority is given to the negotiating team to go out and get it done. ... Often times, we’ll have to end up going back to the board it seems like to get another half percent.” Once again, the school board has oversight of negotiations, but no direct involvement. The board’s understanding of the bargaining issues are framed by the superintendent or his/her designee. The school board is indirectly involved.

Making Negotiations Tougher

There are times, however, when school board members go outside of the negotiating team and the superintendent’s purview to ‘get a deal done.’ This may be for individual political gain or to make the superintendent look bad. When this occurs, negotiations get muddled and school board/superintendent relations are strained.

Superintendent W explained what happened in his school district when the board president got involved in support staff negotiations.

We had a secretary's contract that took a year and a half to get done because board members got involved. We had one member, the board president, who took it upon himself to call the secretaries and ask them what it was they wanted. How could he help them? How could he get them what they wanted? And the secretaries he was calling told them things that their secretaries' negotiating team wasn't even bargaining for. So, when it came time to getting close to this contract, the board, through the president, thought the agreement was going to be something totally different than what was negotiated at the table. It was bizarre, just bizarre. We had an executive session on negotiations for our secretaries' group. In this session, I had board members advocating for the labor group, telling the superintendent and the negotiating team that we were too hard on this group. We didn't give them enough... We got through that phase of it... We were going to mediation... We were on our way to MERC (Michigan Employee Relations Committee) in Detroit. The board knew we were going. The board, in the meantime, had made it very clear that they did not like the chief negotiator... So, the board through the board leadership forced me back to the negotiation's table. That was a victory for the secretaries because they didn't like this guy at the table saying 'no', so get the superintendent back to the table. I went to the table where I headed the mediation. We were going to leave for mediation late in the morning. At 9:00 a.m., I got a call from the board president who said he and a couple of other people on the board didn't think it would be a good idea to go to mediation. I said 'We're going. They don't understand the process and we're going.' We ended up getting a settlement through the mediator and eventually inked a contract. But the meddling of trying to get in and fix it for the employee group for political gain, screwed it up, big time... But, it was a learning process and the learning opportunity that paid dividends when we got into our teachers' negotiations the next year. We had some tough negotiations with our teachers, but the adamant and combative attitude that the board leadership had brought into negotiations had taken negotiations into the community. Eventually, it would lead to his demise.

Contract negotiations with employees is a particularly sensitive area. Individual school board members may use negotiations as political opportunism, especially if he or she believes the superintendent is vulnerable. Generally, the school board is expected to support the efforts of the negotiating team, regardless of whether board members are directly, adjacently, or indirectly involved in the negotiations. While the parameters for

negotiations are officially established by the school board, most often the superintendent or his designee has suggested the framework.

Summary

It is evident that the school board has a very important function in a public school system. The school board reduces uncertainty in the environment by buffering the teachers, principals and other support staff from inputs from the public, government and business. By doing so, the school board allows for a degree of organizational rationality in the day-to-day operations of the public school system. It accomplishes this by hiring the superintendent to run the public school organization, legitimizing decisions through policy, representing the interests and concerns of the community through both formal and informal means, serving as change agents, and negotiating contracts with employees.

While there are other issues that school boards deal with, these are the tasks the researcher found school boards with experienced superintendents do on a consistent basis. Essentially, school boards bring organizational rationality to the public school system by buffering the school district, both the technical core and the professional administrators, operating in an uncertain environment.

School Board Oversight

What does the school board do regarding personnel?

The superintendents were asked what their school boards did in regard to personnel. Besides hiring the superintendent, as discussed previously, the evidence supports the assertion that school boards usually receive and approve the personnel recommendations from the superintendent or his designee. While the personnel practices and traditions vary slightly between districts, school boards most often defer personnel selections to the educational professionals.

Serving on Personnel Committees

Deferring personnel selections to the professional educators should not suggest that school boards are not involved with, or informed of personnel issues. Many school districts have a personnel committee consisting of school board members and other professional educators. Superintendent J described what this committee does in his district. "That committee meets every four to six weeks with our associate superintendent for personnel. He will review with them the kind of personnel issues we have whether they are problems with coaches, teachers, administrators, bus drivers... There may be discussion of contract issues, negotiations, updates with various bargaining groups." Superintendent Q explained how the personnel committee functions in his school district. "If there are issues related to performance or problem areas in personnel, I will work with the personnel committee initially and then the full board... They stay out of day to day details. They rely on the superintendent and staff." Superintendent R reported, "We have a personnel committee, but when it comes to hiring teachers, they are brought to the board. I include their (the teacher selections) resumes in the board packets. Support staff, we (the administration) do it. It doesn't go to the board. Resignations are put on the

consent agenda. Hiring administrators, I always have a committee.” Most often, the professional administrators deal directly with personnel including employee hiring and firing, contract issues, and other personnel issues.

Approving the Superintendent's Selections

Despite the fact is that upwards of 85% of a school district's budget is used for employee salaries and benefits, school boards are usually not involved in the selection of staff. The following responses show how little the school board does in many districts. Superintendent V summarized what his board does by saying, “For teachers, we throw a resume in and we make a recommendation. We have never had a question at all. It's been a while since we hired any administrators. I guess if I was hiring a high school principal, I might have a little more input from certain board members... But, no, they (the school board members) don't get involved with personnel. I keep them informed.”

Superintendent G said, “Administration. We do all the recommending to the board. Basically, by the time we recommend them (new employees) to the board, they have been hired.” Superintendent I answered, “Accept our recommendation. Again, a high degree of trust because we come through with some good candidates. Proof of the pudding is they are not into selection. The only time they were involved in selection I asked them to be involved. The president of the board is an electrical contractor. We had a retirement of our building and grounds director, and I asked him to come sit in... That was the only time.” Superintendent U added, “...Personnel recommendations come through the superintendent and I feel very strongly that when the principals and the directors and assistant superintendents are hired, that's the responsibility of the superintendent because

they all report to the superintendent... The only administrator that is reporting to the board is the superintendent.”

Superintendent D responded, “As far as classroom teachers, the administrators do that and they come with one recommendation.” When asked if the board got involved in hiring teachers, Superintendent Y answered, “Usually, no.” There has been a time, and we got a couple of duds because of that, there was a time when one board member got in the middle of that. We have a good procedure for hiring. We have them teach in a classroom situation... We have people come in and assess them. We have interviews, the typical stuff.” Superintendent N replied, “Teachers come on a consent agenda. I give the board a resume and background. The board is usually not involved in the interviewing process...” Superintendent Q added, “Recommendations for hiring of professional staff come through me from the principals and to the board.” Similarly, Superintendent P noted what the school board did in his school district. “Other than approve certified staff, nothing... They hire the superintendent and approve certified staff based on the recommendations of the administration. That’s it.” “The teaching and custodial positions are handled by the appropriate staff,” responded Superintendent W. With a few exceptions, it is evident that the school boards do not get involved in the selection of the instructional staff.

Superintendent S explained his role in personnel and gave a recent example of what his school board did with his recommendation. “I hire the high school principal, the business manager and on down. I take all certified employees to the board for their approval, but I have already signed contracts with those employees pending board approval. It is pretty ceremonial, but we share the process, resumes. I hired two

elementary principals. They approved on my recommendation... They realize that this is a function of administration, not the board.” Superintendent D told what the school board does in his district. “The board appointment is restricted to administrators and teachers. The others are employees that are employed without board sanction...” Likewise, Superintendent K described his board’s part in staff selection. “They are not involved in hiring. They don’t dictate who should be interviewed. They do have a philosophy to interview qualified local people when possible. They only become involved if it is the superintendent or the high school principal. They might ask for two finalists. I make the recommendation and introduce the candidate to the board. They ask questions and then make a motion.”

In some cases, the school board and its members are discouraged from becoming involved with personnel selection. Asked what his board does regarding personnel, Superintendent F responded, “Not as much as they would like to. We have a couple of board members who would like to get much more involved. I... have one in particular, who would like to hire everybody that we hire. I’ve tried to convince him he wants to stay out of that. I try to stay out of that as much as I can. Building principals hire our teachers. I don’t meet them until they have already been hired. Our supervisors hire their staff. The only ones that even go to the board for approval are the certified teachers. Coaches don’t go to the board for approval.” Once again, while the ‘official’ hiring of personnel is approved by the school board, it defers responsibility for the selection of personnel to the educational professionals.

Selecting the Leaders

When school boards are involved in the selection of school personnel, it is likely for the administrative professionals. Superintendent W answered, “We typically have board representation on upper level administrative positions... building level and assistant superintendent... they are part of the interview team.” Superintendent O reported what his school board does by saying, “They just give approval for all positions. The only time they get involved with interviewing would be when we hire an administrator...” The response by Superintendent H was similar to the others. “They’re involved... any central office people and the building administrators...” Superintendent N was asked if his board was involved in hiring staff. He said, “No, except for administrators. We use a whole process involving teachers, community members, students and administrators into feedback sessions... I make the recommendation based on the feedback...” So, even if the selection is made by committee, the superintendent makes the final recommendation.

Superintendents are sometimes reluctant to include school board members in any interview procedures. Superintendent U told of his board’s involvement in a recent central office hiring. Again, the school board was not necessarily encouraged to participate in the selection process. “The district just hired a new special education director this month. I let them know when the interviews were and I certainly invited them to come if they wanted to, but none of them showed up. I didn’t expect them to either. I didn’t necessarily think they should have been there, but I did invite them.”

Sometimes, the person recommended for a position does not get approved, despite the inclusion of a school board member on the interviewing committee. Superintendent

W explained when this happened with the following response. “Most recently, the assistant superintendent (recommendation) was not (approved). Although we had a board member on the interview team and he supported the recommendation, when it got to the board actually taking action on the recommendation, the board member... voted no.” Putting this example aside, the representation of the board typically helps verify the interests of the board and allows the board to be informed through a member representative.

Making Exceptions

Superintendent M was asked if his school board took an active role in personnel. He answered, “Yes, they want to know who these people are and why they were selected. However, they don’t say, ‘Hire this person, hire that person.’” This superintendent explained what the teacher interview procedure was in his school district. “We (principal, teachers, and superintendent) interview and bring two or three candidates to a second interview. The second interview includes parents whose children have just completed the grade under consideration and at least one board member from the personnel committee. They (the committee) meet with them (the teaching candidate) to get a feel if we are on the right track. (Is) this is a person who would fit our district? The person (board member) from the personnel committee makes the motion when I bring the name to the board meeting.” When asked what the school board member did when the last two people were hired, the superintendent responded, “Actually, that board member had three set questions he asked. Each parent had one. Altogether there were six questions. I started by asking the candidates... The school board question dealt with the extra things the candidate could bring to the district beyond the classroom- coaching, etc. The other two

questions dealt with special education. First, experience with emotionally impaired kids and then mainstreaming them with general education kids.” The school board had an important part in the selection and approval of staff in this district. This example is an exception to the norm where the school boards usually only offer final approval on the selection of educational professionals.

Firing a Popular Person

While school boards provide oversight of the personnel function, recommendations to remove someone from a position comes from the superintendent. Superintendent W told what happened in his school district when he made a recommendation to remove the athletic director. The political fall-out affected a school board election and potentially jeopardized his position as the superintendent.

... We had a major divisive issue on our board of education a couple of years ago relative to an athletic director's position. A small school district, good athletics, and in my opinion, the athletic director was causing more problems than he was solving. I was getting (complaints), time after time after time, on a regular basis from coaches, parents, kids, administrators, teachers, board members and there was only one central figure in there. And that was our athletic director. It started to fall apart and my recommendation that he be removed from the position fell apart at the board level. He is still the AD. So, he wasn't removed physically, he was removed surgically. We made some changes in job responsibilities and duties. I brought in a head basketball coach because we needed one, but we didn't have a teaching position for him. We created a position of athletic coordinator, placed him in that position, and reassigned some of the duties and responsibilities from the existing AD. The AD change was political defeat for me as the superintendent. The political defeat carried on for a couple of years, but kids benefited. Kids are not abused now, kids are not getting hurt because I've neutralized his ability to be able to be harmful to students, harmful to coaches, harmful to parents. So I've gotten what we need for this district. It's a better-run athletic department, but politically it was hell. And it carried on a couple of... you want to talk about some board of education issues, we've had. At the time that dilemma and controversy was going on, we had a board of education election. The candidate that won was supported by the athletic boosters that thought I was picking on the athletic director. So, the AD and that personnel decision.... It's not uncommon that personnel decisions that are made by administrators become political issues.

So, while the school board generally follows the recommendations of the superintendent, exceptions exist that suggests the school board may override the personnel recommendation, especially if board members perceive community support for the person being removed. This example suggests the oversight of personnel a school board does possess.

Summary

Previously, the evidence suggested that the most important task (personnel-wise or otherwise) for a school board to do is to hire the superintendent to run the school district (p. 73-76). Once hired, school boards often have personnel committees that meet with the superintendent and/or the designee regarding labor issues. The degree of involvement by the personnel committee varies from district to district. With few exceptions, however, school boards generally hire and fire personnel at the recommendation of the superintendent. The evidence given by the experienced superintendents suggests that school board activity is generally one of oversight when it comes to personnel.

What does the school board do regarding finances?

The superintendents were asked what their school boards did in regard to finance. Superintendents mentioned that school boards legally must approve the annual budget, amend the budget as needed, and accept the auditor's report. Superintendent U summarized what school boards do in regard to finance quite abruptly as he responded, "It's perfunctory. You know the assistant superintendent for business oversees the financial part of the operation. The board approves the recommendations to approve the budget, to amend the budget, to accept financial reports every month. It's perfunctory at best."

School boards were kept informed of their monthly revenues/expenditures through reports coming from the superintendent's office. School board finance committees also kept the school boards informed. Many school districts used a committee format with three board members and the superintendent or his/her designee serving on the committee. School board members occasionally asked questions about various expenditures, especially for payment to certain vendors. Beyond that, the school boards do not do a lot in the area of finance. Primarily, the evidence suggests that school board members don't understand finance so they leave it to the experts. Fund equity is one such concept that school boards struggled with understanding. With a few exceptions, school boards mostly defer to the educational experts in regard to school finance.

Serving on Finance Committees

School board members were involved in district finances through committee work. Superintendent J talked about the board committee structure operating in his district. He observed that, "The finance committee is probably the most active. They meet on a monthly basis, or more frequently depending on need... Finance deals with all kinds

of budget items or federal and state grants that are proposed.” Superintendent N also described his board finance committee in positive terms. He detailed what this committee does for his school district. “We have a finance committee. The treasurer is the chair of the finance committee. We run all board members through that committee for at least one year of their tenure to give them a feel of school finance. Most recommendations come through that committee, with the associate superintendent of business chairing it. I also attend those meetings. Basically, all recommendations come from that committee with the support of the business manager and me.” Superintendent V reported that, “They approve our amended budget, they approve our audit, they approve our proposed budget... We run everything through our finance committee... We have not had those big board meetings where the board decides what’s going to be in place, what programs and what the costs are. Not to this point, no. We have never had that.”

Superintendent Q explained how the financial knowledge of the three committee board members added to the district’s overall financial success. “You have two or three guys that are real sharp on finance. First of all, I have a great business manager and second, these three sharp board guys. I rely on what the business manager recommends and the attitude of the three key board members. They look at ...cash flow... expenditures. They are good at not raising issues at a board meeting. If there is a concern, they raise it privately or within the finance committee. They have real faith and trust in the business manager so in fact there are very few issues or concerns that come. It really is probably more in the long-term view toward finance.”

Superintendent M defined the importance of the financial committee in his school district. He explained how the board helps determine financial stability and thus a future

for the school district. “We have a standing finance committee. They meet an hour before the board the first meeting of the month. They meet with the business manager. She goes over the bills payable with them that they were given the previous Friday. She explains all balance sheets. The treasurer can make a motion to accept bills payable, always supported by someone on the finance committee. The message is that they know about it.... This board looks at every single line of the proposed budget as presented by the business manager and me. They have lots of input. They help us prioritize. Our conservative board helps us maintain our small district.” The financial committee in this small district is very active and involved. As described and explained, however, Superintendent M’s finance committee was an anomaly to the other finance committees discussed.

Superintendent W told how his school district used the committee structure until recently. He explained what happened when it stopped following the recommendations of the board committee. “We used to operate under a fairly rigid committee structure and we had a finance and facility committee. We met on a regular basis and our role was to make recommendations and do projections and to discuss that during the finance committee. The board would get their recommendations from that committee. Over the last couple of years, it has changed to some degree where the board leadership thought it was their role. Through the support of the rest of the board they were able to make adjustments and changes in finances and redirection in some budget areas. We created some funds at their insistence... So, we allocate \$100,000 each year for this fund (capital improvements) before we do anything else...”

Not all school districts use a finance committee structure. Superintendent O explained why this is in his district. "... We don't have a separate finance committee here. They wanted to do it as a whole board. That's fairly unusual. But, that's a decision they made early on when I came here and talked about a finance committee. I think that was an outcrop of a previous regime where they had some problems financially. They all wanted to look at it (finances). It works." Superintendent S was adamant in his dislike for all board committees, not just finance. He responded to a committee question with, "No, we have no committees. I don't like committees. I'll meet with the whole board ten times before I'll meet with a committee." A possible inference is that all school board members wouldn't have access to all of the financial understanding of the school district that the finance committee members would. Thus, school board finance committees are not used in all school districts.

Lacking in Understanding of School Finance

Part of the reason that school boards are not more involved in their school district's finances is a general lack of understanding of school finance. There seems to be a heavy reliance for school finances on the administrative experts. The evidence supports this when reviewing several superintendents' comments. When asked if the board left the finances up to him, Superintendent C answered, "Almost entirely and I have to say it's almost too much. They don't have a good grasp of finance. It's pure arithmetic, but it takes time to get into it. They look at the bills, but rarely ask questions about them. It's hard for them to understand fund equity... I have an awful time convincing them that because we have \$600,000 it's not really available..." Superintendent F answered, "Not nearly as much as they ought to be. We struggle with that all the time. One of our goals

next year is to get the board more involved... It's been hard because they don't understand it. And if it's going well, they just sit back and let it go. But, as things get tighter and tighter, they are going to have to be more involved, so they can help make decisions on what parts of the budget to slow down." Superintendent G explained his board's involvement this way. "Once it's (the budget) approved, we have a financial plan that's approved for the year. Their involvement is to hear us and understand what we are asking for. That's the involvement. They do not get involved into the nuts and bolts. They react and respond to what we bring them." Superintendent H responded by stating, "I would say very little. That particular area is central office... As far as day-to-day finances... probably one of the things they are least involved with. They have authority, but the least involvement." When asked what the board did in his district, Superintendent I said, "Very little... They're smart enough to know when things wouldn't be right and catch it. But, I'd say there is a high degree of trust just to be checked off by the auditors to make sure we are honest." "They approve the budget, they approve the rates for debts and so forth, but primarily it comes from me. Over the years, I think they have learned to trust me financially... They really don't do much with finances other than final approval."

Superintendent Y noticed the lack of school finance understanding in his district, too. He told the researcher, "There is a lack of understanding. That creates problems for us... The problem is the board doesn't always understand. The numbers can be intimidating. If you don't have the background or work in the situation, you don't know what is going on... How do you reconcile expenditures when your budget seems so large? We run a 25-27 million-dollar budget. When you have a request for band uniforms

or sabbatical (leave) that costs \$30,000, what impact does that have on the budget?” This lack of understanding may make financial decision-making more difficult and usually requires the school board to rely solely on the experts’ recommendations.

Superintendent U explained why his school board changed a traditional practice in his school district. As described, it could be traced back to this lack of understanding on the part of the school board members.

For the last five, six or seven years, whatever, the board treasurer actually gives what we call the treasurer’s report. He doesn’t prepare it, but he gives it. He will sit down with the assistant superintendent before the meeting and sort of do a random, miniature audit of all of the expenditures and payables for that month. He just pulls different invoices and then he will give the general fund revenues/expenditures for the month and recommend the bills be paid. When I came to the district, each board member, on a rotating basis, took all of the bills home and looked at them.... They didn’t know what they were looking at, or they would see where you bought paint at \$4.99 a gallon at Frank’s, but you could have bought it for \$3.99 at Harry’s... That’s irrelevant.

School boards’ lack of understanding doesn’t always allow board members to see the ‘big picture’ when it comes to school finance. Thus, they rely on the experts’ recommendations.

Creating an Understanding for Board Members

Since school boards have difficulty keeping up with school finance, superintendents detailed what they did to keep their school boards better informed. Superintendent D stated, “With finances, board members always want to make sure that good financial procedures are in place, that the reporting they receive reflects what’s happening, and that it is reported in a way they can understand it... We develop reports that they can understand, like percentage of income by month... We put together information that is helpful... But as far as finances are concerned, they want to be sure that our income and our expenditures are fairly even... They spend a lot of time in the

spring reviewing our budget and what's happened to it..." Superintendent S told what his school board did with school finance. "They do a lot. That is an important function that they recognize. We update them with our budget forecasting system. We update them all the time. They know exactly where we are headed. If we are headed for a deficit or a surplus, they know about how much." Superintendent X reported that, "We involve the board a lot. We have a year round budget planning process. We get done with one and start another. In the initial stages of planning, my staff does it, my directors and me." The school board expects the superintendent to give them accurate financial information in an understandable format to assist them in evaluating financial recommendations presented by the administrative professional.

Reviewing the Revenues and Expenditures

When prompted, all of the superintendents told the researcher that their school boards received monthly financial reports. Interestingly, board members occasionally asked questions about payables. Superintendent S described this phenomenon. "...They approve a financial report every month. Most of the financial reports have hundreds of entries and some will question or ask for an explanation. Mostly, it is smaller things. You would think it would be multi-thousand dollar items. It is smaller items where the entry is kind of funny in one way or another. It's a payment to another school or a refund to an individual. That is what they question..." Superintendent L replied, "We keep them apprised as to how the money is being spent and how we are trying to preserve resources. We try to get them knowledgeable about sources of revenue... They are good at asking questions regarding expenditures. They don't bring up line item questions during a board meeting." Similarly, Superintendent X told what his board did with questions. "...If they

have a question, we encourage them to call before the meeting. Most of the time they do... ” Finally, Superintendent O mentioned his school board asked questions, too. “They question some of the bills. If they see a vendor’s name, they may question that and want to know what that expense was for.”

Superintendent N was asked if his board reviewed expenditures each month. He said, “They get copies of them, but our board members don’t do that. I have had very few questions in my eighteen years. Treasurers have reviewed the bills in the past, but in the last eight years they haven’t done that.” When asked why this was, he answered, “ They don’t want to spend the time...They are trusting after so many years of no incidents or problems. They trust us to do things properly. We run a tight ship.”

Not all school boards were as trusting, however. Superintendent P told about his school board’s practice. “We have board members that are concerned with the budget and will look at every purchase we make with a very fine line of verification where they’re looking for how the money was spent and where to keep track of it. One board member in particular does that so it might be considered an overseeing type of responsibility.”

Superintendent P was asked if this member did anything else besides looking over his shoulder when it came to finance. He answered with, “Not really. Occasionally, he will bring up a comment or an observation that is a good observation. He might find an expenditure that was extravagant or unnecessary.” Superintendent W described a similar occurrence with one of his board members. “We’ve had an ongoing “stump the Business Director” activity for the last three years by one board member. And every time he asked a question, he’s lost.” When asked if he does this at public meetings, Superintendent W answered, “Yeah, at public meetings and I believe he is demonstrating to the community

that he is watching what's going on in the business sector... Most recently, 'What was the business expense for \$1600.00 at Sam's Club?' The answer was for textbooks and that was the best place to get these books, a popular reading novel that we are going to put into our high school curriculum." So while school boards do provide oversight over school district finances, these two incidents suggest that what board members question, the forum they ask it in, and the perceived nature of the request is not always welcomed by the superintendent or do they believe it to be necessary or appropriate.

Summary

The experienced superintendents told how their school boards were informed of school district finances by either serving on a school finance committee and/or by receiving monthly revenue/expenditure reports. Most often, these reports generated very little finance-related questions from the school board members. If there were questions, they were related to specific vendors with whom board members might be familiar. In general, school boards provide oversight of the school district finances, but an overall lack of understanding in school finance requires school boards to rely heavily on the recommendations of the administrative professionals.

What does the school board do regarding curriculum?

The superintendents were asked what their school boards did in regard to curriculum. The evidence supports the assertion that school boards don't do a lot with curriculum besides legitimizing it through policy and approving course offerings, textbook purchases and curriculum adoptions. Much like they do with policy, school boards most often defer their judgment(s) to the recommendations of the educational professionals. The responses generally suggest that school board members don't have the expertise, the knowledge and/or the interest in curriculum direction, design and development. With a few exceptions, if a school board was involved in the design and development of curriculum, it was with one of its board members being on the school district's curriculum committee or with three of its board members on a board level curriculum committee. In a few instances, superintendents said that individual board members had a special interest in curriculum, especially noted by their review of books for recommended textbook adoptions. Even when school districts had its school board members more actively involved with curriculum direction, design and development, much of the onus for curriculum stayed with the professionals. The school board was most involved with curriculum if a controversial class or curriculum was being discussed or adopted. Thus, while the school board has oversight of curriculum, it mainly accepts the recommendations of the educational professionals in the school district.

Describing and Explaining a Paradox

Even though teaching students is at the core of the K-12 public school systems in Michigan, it is not what school boards do. Superintendent P explained the paradox this way. "I think most of our board members really don't have much of a clue about what really happens instructionally in school.... Our main job is teaching children which is

interesting. You would think the board would be spending more time on that and people would be more enlightened board members. But, my observation is that isn't the case...."

The following text describes and explains what school boards do regarding curriculum and how it delegates this important task to the educational professionals.

Listening to the Experts

School boards depend upon the educational professionals to lead curriculum.

"They rely upon staff as far as making curriculum changes. We fell below the state average in 5th grade writing. I immediately sat down with the elementary principal and he's going to make some changes for 5th graders next year..." "Their role is minimal.... Their job is to be sure we have the experts to oversee that... So basically, they have to be sure the district has hired competent, capable people. For example, at our board meeting Monday night, we had a fifteen minute presentation on our MEAP scores. We looked to correlate it back to 1993 in terms of how the students had done. They asked questions of the assessment person regarding our scores... but their role in curriculum is peripheral at best." "...Every aspect of our program we bounce off our Board of Education. They hear us, they massage it as far as they perceive the community will react, but basically it's run by the administration." When questioned whether they (board representatives) asked a lot of questions at (curriculum) committee meetings, Superintendent V replied, "No, I attend them all. They'll ask questions, but they pretty much figure the staff is the professionals in this area..." "We keep them very well informed regarding curriculum developments and changes.... The curriculum process is owned by the staff and the board provides oversight, but it is similar (to other areas). They don't get directly involved."

School boards members don't understand curriculum. "It is the least area they understand. Instruction is the one area most difficult to grasp from a lay person's point of view." "They have no role because they have no expertise." "They are not experts in curriculum so they don't get involved in that." "I have seen their eyes glaze over when we get into curriculum..." "Curriculum issues are almost totally directed from staff to them (the school board) unless it is an unusual situation." "In reality, they are not very involved in curriculum development and design."

School boards aren't necessarily interested in curriculum. "That comes to the board for approval.... It (curriculum) is not an area of interest." "It comes down to if we please them (the school board), they don't push us. They haven't had to push us because we have been out front of them." "I seldom have a board member ask to talk about the math curriculum." "Rarely do you find anyone interested in representing the curricular interests of the district because usually that kind of interest is not found." When asked what the board does curriculum-wise, Superintendent Q answered, "Not too much. Most boards tend to be comprised of business people- individuals that are not into curriculum. They rely heavily upon the direction of the superintendent and staff..." "Last week, they said, 'When we have to do textbook recommendations, we don't need to see the books. We trust you people. Just make them available in the curriculum office for review.'" "We have a good curriculum director. He works with staff to develop, change or modify new curriculum. That comes to the board for approval..." "We've had a curriculum director that has operated with some leniency and some support from our board through the administration." Thus, the evidence supports the assertion that school boards depend upon the educational professionals to direct, design and develop curriculum.

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There were instances where superintendents mentioned they had individual board members who were very interested in curriculum. “We have a couple of our board members that are real, real interested in instruction and curriculum.” “Actually, we have two board members right now that curriculum is their main focus. Again, that is the exception rather than the rule.” Superintendent Q told about two of his board members’ interest and described it this way. “There happens to be two school board members very interested in curriculum. One is a retired teacher, the other a chemistry professor at the University of Michigan. Recently, we presented them with a series of textbook adoptions. Those two came in and looked at every single textbook. The other five members could care less. They don’t get into that...” These comments seemed to be exceptions to the general rule that school boards are not interested in curriculum.

Serving on Curriculum Committees

School boards do get involved with curriculum through representation on school districts’ curriculum councils and/or school board curriculum committees. Much of this described involvement, however, is more symbolic and out of a sense of obligation than as a contributing member of the committee. “We have a curriculum committee of the board.... Curriculum concerns are always brought up there.... Curriculum presentations are brought before them. There is an educational report at the board meetings. The board hears from teacher committees, from administrators about what is happening in the district and what direction we are going instructionally.... “... My experience of having community members on curriculum committees is they sit back unless they have a real burning interest or desire in an area.... They sit back and let the educators develop the curriculum and they have input. But, it is not a burning issue for most of them. They trust

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us in that area.” “They (board members) serve on curriculum committees since we restructured to meet state guidelines.” “We have a board member who is part of the curriculum council.... We assign someone to be a part of that. Again, that’s just so they (the school board members) know what’s going on and so there’s some communication to the board about what we’re (the educational professionals) doing with curriculum... they (the board) just want to see our scores improve.” “There again, they (the board members) are part of that process (curriculum), but usually we (the administration) bring recommendations.” “They’re there with the overall committee to find out what’s going on so the board has a representative there. Because some of it has an impact on the budget... And sometimes the board does ask the representative about what’s going on and so forth. That’s been a good thing.” “There is a board committee for curriculum. Most often this supports our 10-year strategic plan implemented by the school district and approved by the board.” “We have a curriculum committee. Every major change or new innovation gets taken through the committee. We think it is important that they (the board) do understand what is going on in curriculum. Any purchase concerning curriculum goes through them and then to the whole board. We like the board to be involved in all those areas because it takes the weight off from us.” When Superintendent W was asked if the school board got involved in curriculum in any other way, he answered, “There has been some cases through a committee structure and through discussion they have been somewhat involved.” School board members do serve on curriculum committees, but mostly to keep the school board informed. Board members on these committees generally defer to the educational professionals.

Responding to Controversy

There are times when the school board gets more involved in curriculum direction, design and development. This occurs most often when the curriculum issue is somewhat controversial in the community. Two superintendents mentioned reproductive health as one of the issues that their board is more interested in and involved with developing. “The area they are most involved in is our sex education program, the health education component of K-12 health program...” “They sit back unless they have a real burning interest or desire in an area, usually human reproduction... When you get into human reproduction... if you don’t use community members, you can pay dearly for that.” Reproductive health isn’t the only curriculum school boards actively dealt with. Superintendent F described how his school board got involved with a high school Internet class. “... That program raised a whole lot of issues. It is kind of an advanced computer class for high school students. We have an instructor who has kids in and they debate over the Internet very controversial issues. It started seven years ago and each year the kids got into more and more controversial issues. Some of the artwork that the kids started to do became, in some board members minds, very inappropriate. So we spent about three months on that whole thing, trying to get him (the teacher) toned back down. It gets into a lot of those first amendment deals. It gets into censorship. We had a lot of things on the Internet that our kids were putting out that board members were unhappy with and community members were unhappy with.” So, there are isolated instances in which school boards do get involved in curriculum issues, but mostly school boards follow the recommendations of the educational experts in their school district.

Making Exceptions

Superintendents from a few of districts described their school boards as exceptions to the previously described norm. Superintendent T described his school board's interest and involvement with curriculum as one of these exceptions. "They play a key role here. This is a community that really delves into education, probably more than any place I have ever been. They are active in program development... Any new programs, if we are going to have a new course, depending on the nature of the course like anything with human growth or development, they meet with community groups in open sessions, hearings.... If we are adopting a new text, it will be introduced at one meeting, available for board and community, and a month later introduced for action. They actually come in and review. Two board members are regular on that." When asked if the school board has an active role in curriculum, Superintendent M answered, "They do. We bring the finished curriculum to them for approval. It's a blanket thing that they have always approved. We do everything K-12. It goes first to the Educational Excellence Committee, then to the board and then to the school improvement team. They (the board members) will often make suggestions. Recently, they asked to look at elementary school language in our curriculum study. They came up with the idea of writing assistants. Our kids write at least three times a week at the high school. We have teacher assistants paid by salary assist with the writing process and the grading of papers. (This was a) Board idea."

Summary

The experienced superintendents didn't see their school boards too involved with curriculum. The school board was most likely to get involved with curriculum when a controversial curriculum issue surfaced in the school district. While exceptions to what

school boards do in regard to curriculum were described and explained, the evidence supports the assertion that school boards do provide oversight of curriculum, but are not actively involved in curriculum direction, development or design. These tasks are most often left to the educational professionals-teachers, principals and other curriculum experts.

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PART II: What the superintendent does to better explain the role of the school board

While the school board is the legal entity that controls the operations of the school district, much of its authority is delegated to the person hired to run the school district on a day-to-day basis, the superintendent. The evidence demonstrates the extent the “professional administrator” has taken over duties once held by the school board. While school boards still oversee the whole district from a legal stance (380.11a; 380.611; 380.1102), the complexity of the public school organization does not allow the interested amateurs (school board members) the time or the expertise to make decisions on a daily basis. Superintendent A speaks of his school board’s desire to have an educational expert run the bureaucracy. “... I went there eleven years ago... I was given the keys to the office and told ‘to run the place.’ Frankly, the more I do, the less the board has to do. ... most of my board members like it... you run it and we’ll kind of look over your shoulder.” By describing and explaining the degree of involvement the superintendent has in every part of the public school organization, it is the researcher’s argument that the role of the school board becomes better defined.

Using Thompson’s model to describe the public school organization, the superintendent is in charge of both the technical core and the management service levels. The oversight (looking over the shoulder) the school board provides gives the school’s bureaucracy the authority necessary to make more rational decisions by legitimizing their actions through school board policy. The superintendent frequently communicates with the institutional level, keeping it informed of any significant events. In return, the school board serves as a ‘check and balance’ for the school’s bureaucracy.

The role of the superintendent has expanded as the complexity of the public education endeavor has grown. The following description and explanation of what the superintendents do in the areas of policy, communication and recommendations to and with their school boards helps to describe and explain the role of school boards in 1999.

Initiates policy

Setting policy for the school district is one of the main things that school boards have historically done. The evidence continues to support the premise that school boards set policy, but it also suggests that their level of leadership in policy-making is very limited. Previously, it was reported that 56% (14 out of 25) of the superintendents responded that policy is one of the main things school boards do for their school district. When superintendents were specifically asked who initiates, writes and recommends policies, their answers portray a different picture.

Most of the respondents suggested they (the superintendents) were the source of new policy. Some implied this by omitting this question and moving onto the part that asked who wrote it. Seemingly, those who wrote it also initiated. Others stated they were the source of policy unequivocally. Superintendent S responded to the question when asked if most of the policy was initiated by him, by simply stating, "All of them." Superintendent C replied with, "I would say that most of the initiation comes from the administration." Superintendent D responded, "That comes from the superintendent." Likewise, Superintendent K explained who initiates policy in his district. "I point out where policy is lacking." Superintendent N answered that, "Normally, it's our leadership team in administrative council that initiates an area that they or I feel need specific policy." Superintendent V commented that, "... any new policies to this point have been ones the administration has brought forth..." Superintendent W answered, "... they expect

the superintendent or the administrative team to give them advice and counsel as to what policies they need.” Once again, Superintendent C added, “The board does a lot on policy. But I have to tell you that it’s my idea or my insistence that we do policy every month.” In sum, it appears that superintendents are among the first to react to events and situations necessitating policy by suggesting it to the school board.

Not every superintendent took all of the credit for initiating policy, however.

Superintendent E suggested that new policy might come from others in the bureaucracy who recognized the need for additional policy. He responded by saying, “New policy can come from staff or administration.” Superintendent L said policy in his district comes two ways, “Mostly, policy comes from that (NEOLA-Northeast Ohio Learning Associates) or the department (Michigan Department of Education) or some other source.”

Superintendent E told how policy came from other sources, too. “We have a law firm that we use that really keeps policy from a legal point of view. They send representatives in to meet a couple of times a year...” Superintendent K explained how a recent policy regarding expulsion was initiated. “... As we sat down with the attorney he recommended policy language changes.” Likewise, Superintendent I explained his district’s policies come from NEOLA, a consulting group. “Most policy comes right out of NEOLA. They recommend something to us based on something that they have discovered working with other schools. We have hardly written any of our own policies the last five years... anything else falls under implementing procedure which under policy is called “Administration of Regulation.” We just choose to call it implementing procedure rather than policy.” This action circumvents the school board from intervening in situations that

the administrative professionals deem intrusive. In effect, this means that the school board has even less input in the operation of the school district.

A few of the superintendents conceded that, at times, the school board members have suggested the need for new policy or policy changes. School boards were never credited as the sole source for new policy, however. Superintendent L told how policy is begun. "It can be initiated by a board member or any staff member." Superintendent O framed his answer with a slightly different twist. He responded, "Sometimes I do, and sometimes board members do, and sometimes the state does." Superintendent Q responded to the question of how policy is most often initiated by saying, "Probably the state or a combination of things really." Superintendent R says both he and the board do. "If I see there is a need, I do. If a board member gets an idea from a conference or sees, through a newsletter, an issue, they bring it to the committee." Finally, Superintendent L answered, "Once in a while a board member will call... for a new policy and we look at it."

So, the initiation of new policy usually comes from the superintendent. Others who might initiate it include staff members, consulting groups like NEOLA, school board attorneys, legislation from the state or federal governments, or school board members. Eventually, however, the policy ends up being a product the superintendent or his administration has had a significant part in writing.

Writes Policy

While school boards are involved with policy development to one degree or another, writing board policy is most often a function of the superintendent. A common practice in many of the districts is when the need for a new policy or changes to an old is recognized, it goes to a sub committee of the school board. Most often, this sub-

committee is composed of three board members, the superintendent or his/her designee, and other educational professionals. Once again, however, even though the board is involved in the beginning stages of policy development, it seems the administration has purview over it. That is, the superintendent brings a policy draft to the committee, thereby framing the discussions. Superintendent D's description of his district's process explained how intentional this can be. "... The board puts together a sub-committee of three school board members to review policy... so it is really incumbent... administratively to make recommendations about policy changes that should come about or new policies that should go in. ... We will obtain policies from other school districts and do an edit and a mock-up... then the sub committee looks at it and does a review... When they (the sub-committee) are ready to have it come to the board, these policies are reviewed. It seems that the administration recognizes the need for policy, shapes the policy to fit its concern, and looks to the board to review and authorize it.

Similarly, Superintendent E responded by explaining, "We have a person on staff who is our Director of Community Services who does the actual writing of policy. The board committee will then look at it and see if that is what they do or don't want to recommend and then it will ultimately come before the whole board." Superintendent J explained, "We have a Director of Board and Information Services. She meets with the board policy committee and they deliberate on policy. She works with staff members that the policy impacts. Suppose it's athletic eligibility. She will work with the athletic director, as well as the Deputy for Instruction or Secondary Education. They may give input to the draft policy. When the draft is done, it is referred to me.... This line is fuzzy. I may say 'Great' or 'Be careful.' Eventually it goes back to the board for a vote..." In

collaboration with the school board policy committee, the superintendent or designee often is responsible for writing school board policy. The school board legitimates the policy through school board action at a public board meeting.

Superintendent K described how his district develops policy by saying, “The board appoints a three member policy committee. I am on that committee. I may involve the administrators as needed to represent their fields, for example, transportation or the director of maintenance... We bounce it around. I write the policy and take it back to them (the school board members)”. Superintendent G said, “The administrative team writes the policies with the approval of the board. Then we hire an outside firm (NEOLA) to massage it.” Asked what that meant, Superintendent G replied, “Ah, to make sure that it follows state and federal laws. We have a small district. We don’t have the staffing to stay abreast of everything that happens in Lansing. So, as those laws are changed, it affects many school board policies. We automatically update them.” Superintendent N reported that, “We have a policy committee that reviews that (policy) and sends it to the whole board for review. ... Interestingly enough, we just contacted MASB to help rewrite our whole policy book. ... Our board policy committee, leadership team and myself will be involved in the process.” Superintendent Q explained, “There is a policy committee of the board so that when issues come up, whether court decisions or legislative action or local circumstance generates them, there is a fluid mechanism in place to design new policies. ... (We) bring them to the full board for first and second readings. Then, in fact (they), become policy.” Thus, while the board is involved in reviewing and writing policy through sub-committees (three board members), the superintendent and/or other bureaucrats have a prominent role in policy formulation.

Superintendent L said that his board relies on the administration to generate policy. He added, "We also use a policy service that gives us advice and guidelines. NEOLA happens to be the one we've used for the last eleven years. They keep our feet to the fire. ... We sit down with the board and have a recommendation of policy for them to work with." Superintendent I responded that his school board relies upon NEOLA for policy, too. "We have NEOLA do our basic policy and procedures and of course we go through and pick and choose. We really fly all of the way with NEOLA..."

Besides NEOLA, there are other consulting services providing similar services. Superintendent H explained who writes and revises policy in his district. "Right now... we have hired MASB. They review our last five years of minutes and our current policies... Through a review of the laws, (MASB is) making recommendations. ... Literally, the administrators have gone through the entire policy book and then we make recommendations to the board. ... The board... discusses them (the revisions) at meetings. They give the direction. I rewrite it. They (the school board members) decide that's what they want." Again, the board is setting policy, but the educational experts have limited the board's role in policy setting by framing it with a suggested policy in written form.

In other school districts, the board does even less in the formulation of policy. Mostly, they approve what outside experts have written. Superintendent U told how policy-making happens in his district. "We went with a consultant service, NEOLA, based out of Ohio. They took our existing policy...and interfaced them with some of their boiler plate stuff... we have an update service from them so we get twice a year updates... So none of our policies are written locally... they may be modified locally... using the consulting services of an expert makes a lot more sense. Then basically, the

school board would approve it.” Superintendent U explained why it makes more sense. “They (school board members) don’t need to ... have the ability to write policy themselves because for most of them, it’s beyond their abilities, or their backgrounds, or their expertise.” When asked who writes the modified policy, Superintendent U replied, “I do and then I recommend to them... So, at the first reading I’d review it with them and give them a chance for input and comments... at the subsequent meeting, they’d approve it. My experience has been that 95 plus percent of the time at the second reading, there has been no comments. It’s just a move. The researcher asked if there was discussion during the initial reading. Superintendent U answered, “They may have clarification... My experience has been with the board that normally there is not a lot of discussion around it... we have never made any significant changes to a proposed policy recommendation based on board input in the last few years at least.” This comment suggests that much of the policy-making authority of the school board lies with the superintendent. Later, it is explained how this may occur.

Superintendent M is the source of the research in his district. “I research all new policies. It then goes through our personnel committee or finance depending upon which one. We write it to our standards. Our attorney checks it. One reading and two weeks later it is adopted at our board meeting. ... As far as setting policy, they pretty much rely on me to gather the information.” Superintendent O is very involved in the writing of policy, too. “Ultimately, I end up writing it (policy.) I sit down with the board affairs committee and we go through it and kind of create it together. We sketch it on outline form and I put it together.” When asked who writes policy in his district, Superintendent S responded, “I do.” He added, We respond to situations as they come up that we do not

have a policy on. The board expects me to recommend those policies that I bring to them.” Asked a similar question, Superintendent W said, “My responsibility as superintendent is to write the policy and recommend and to suggest policy to the board...” Once again, the superintendent is very active in policy-making, but this time he/she is doing the research and/or the writing of the policy. These actions further remove the school board from all policy-making other than the final authorization of it.

Not all of the practices within a school district are a result of policies, however. Superintendent F explained what his district tries to do with policy. “As something would come up day to day in the building we go to the (policy) manual. What we try to do is to get the manual to match what we are doing.” Thus, by formalizing a current practice into a policy, the school board is legitimizing the actions of the educational bureaucracy. As Superintendent G pointed out, “For the protection of the superintendent, you do need a definitive policy that has been approved by a board of education because parents are challenging decisions a lot more today than they did years ago.”

Summary

The evidence provided by the experienced superintendents supports the premise that while school boards sanction or legitimize policy, the superintendent and/or other educational experts limit the degree to which school boards initiate and write policy. Often, the superintendent is the person most responsible for new policy and revisions to current policy.

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Communicates with Stakeholders

The evidence supports the assertion that the superintendent spends a lot of time communicating. Much of the communication is with the school board. The school boards receive regular updates about everything going on in their school district. The methods of communication used include writing, calling, faxing and emailing. The communication the superintendent sends buffers the educational organization. (Proposition 2.1) “Under norms of rationality, organizations seek to seal off their core technologies from environmental influences.” When school board members have knowledge of events and issues, they help buffer the school system by sharing this information with the public.

Communicating with the School Board

The evidence supports the assertion that superintendents keep their school board members informed of everything that is going on in the school district. Superintendent T asserted that, “One of the tenets of working with a board... is keeping them informed.” “No surprises” is a reciprocal practice of superintendents and their boards. That is, the superintendents tell their board members routinely what’s happening in their schools. The timing of superintendent/school board communications is essential for the school board to effectively buffer the bureaucracy from the public.

Indeed, the superintendents see communications with their school board as very significant. “That’s the number one job of the superintendent, ‘the care and feeding of the board.’ They need a consistent message that way.... That’s my job to keep the board informed.” “Certainly, the superintendent has a certain, you know, ‘care and feeding’ of board members. They’re your bosses.” “Communication with the board members is the key. Board members are tolerant of what is going on, but they have to know about it. The one thing you don’t want to do is put them in a position where they are surprised by a

concern, problem or event in their own school district.” Superintendents continuously strive to keep their school boards informed.

Communicating through Board Updates

Most often, the superintendents send out weekly packets of information regarding their school district. The following comments explained their practice. “I send out a weekly memo ... that is anecdotal and it’s just the kind of thing that says, ‘Here is what happened this week’ and you might hear over the back fence from the neighbor.” “I send out every week an update of some kind.” “... a weekly Friday newsletter summarizes anything and everything that happens in the district. I address key concerns. They (board members) are most important clients. They validate my work with their support.” “I send an update every Friday. That’s a fairly common practice. But that’s very important that they receive information on a weekly basis so we keep them informed of what is going on.” “I send out a weekly communication to the board.... It goes out every Friday. It’s just an update of what I’ve been doing, what’s happening in the school system, concerns that people may be raising about a given issue, decisions that will be coming up at future board meetings they need to be thinking about.” “...I send a packet every Friday.... I write a commentary from a paragraph to three pages on every agenda item so they have a full explanation of each item. On the off weeks (non-board meeting weeks), I write them a packet telling them what happened here, I received this letter, here is a problem you should be aware of etc., etc., etc.” “I send the board a weekly note that updates them on happenings in the district. They receive board briefs following every board meeting.” “I send them every Friday of the year a packet called the Friday Update which isn’t too particularly original...” “We send out News and Notes every Friday to keep the board

informed about whatever is going on.” “I send each of our board members a weekly update of activities on Friday. That’s pretty standard with most of the superintendents.” Many superintendents send out packets of information every week to keep their school boards informed.

Other superintendents only send out informational packets the weeks the school board doesn’t meet. During the weeks of meetings, the board receives a full board packet of agenda information. The communication going to these school board members is very regular, just not as often. “I have an ‘in-between’ the weeks we don’t have board meetings. I send them a packet that informs them of new developments.... We keep them abreast of developments, but it is up to them to determine their desired level of involvement or knowledge.” “I believe in tremendous communication with the board. I do a confidential board update every two weeks- personnel issues, discipline problems and other incidents.” “The week opposite board meetings, I send an update to the board. I require every administrator to write an update in outline form with bullets. Bullets of key things that are happening or about to happen.” “... I keep them informed through written updates between board meetings, sometimes as much as daily.” “The first and third Wednesday they get an update from me. In that update is everything that I think would be relevant to them. I do a lot of writing.” Written communication to school board members is an important task for superintendents. It keeps the board informed of whatever the superintendent believes they should be aware of in the district. It helps ensure the board doesn’t get any surprises. Superintendent X said written communication serves one more important purpose. “It is important for a superintendent to make sure their

communication is more than verbal. It has to be in writing so you have a paper trail to cover your tracks.”

Communicating during Crises

From time to time, issues arise in the school district that superintendents feel their boards need to know immediately to help manage rumor control. This practice assists in buffering the school district. To do this in a timely manner, the superintendents typically call their board members. Once again, the responses indicated that calling board members is a common practice of superintendents to better keep their school boards informed. “If there are crisis issues, then I would telephone each one of them.” “I do a lot of work on the phones. If there is anything I think about any issue that comes up, I’m on the phone with them (board members) right away... If something goes wrong at school, I call them before they hear it from another source and give them information I have. I don’t think they have had many surprises.” “If it is an issue that will hit the paper, I will call each board member and let them know or I fax the information to them.” “I’ll call other board members on issues that come up that I think are serious that they need to be informed of right away.” “... If we have a bomb threat or something that is significant they need to know right away, my goal is to make sure they hear about everything from me. If they hear it at the store or at church, that is a problem.” “If key things happen right here, I call every board member.” “I keep them informed of day to day happenings by email.” “The only time I would call them on issues would be, for example, if there was a significant event in a school that was going to draw media attention and was going to get in the community. I’d want them to hear from me first.” “If I think it’s going to get out into the community, I’ll call the board members.” Superintendents call board members, especially

if they believe board members are going to be asked questions about an event or situation.

Superintendent E explained his rationale for communicating to school board members individually. “What we try to do is anticipate what as a board member we would want to know. Last week, we had a case where a group of our kids were on a trip in France and there was a bus crash. We learned about it Thursday morning from the Associated Press about 10:30. Our board members knew everything that we knew by 11:00. If it is something that is really a ‘biggie’ our plan is... to call each board member... We did that probably three times that day as we were updating.” Thus, keeping the school board informed and apprised of events is important for the superintendent to do.

Communicating with Individual Board Member Concerns

Due to their membership, school board members may have a special audience with their superintendent. Several superintendents described and explained what they did when individual school board members asked questions or requested information. “Every communication sent to one board member is sent to all. There are no secrets or cliques.” “If a board member asks me, for example, about the district’s drama program, I would put copies of that information to all of the board members in the next update. Because information is power and you don’t give disproportionate information to one board member or two board members and have the other board members not know what’s going on.” “The only thing the administration can do is if you get a question from one board member and you get them an answer, then the rest of them get the benefit of the same answer and you inform them what the question was. So, you keep everyone

informed about what everyone else is thinking and their individual concerns. It becomes a major communications, no surprises, kind of style of communicating. I generally don't talk to persons on the board about issues that are hopefully going to all of them. I usually write a memo to all of them if I want them to know about it." "You don't just have one or two members that you keep informed. That is a problem that you can run into. You lose your cohesiveness and esprit de corps."

Further, Superintendent Q described a recent meeting he had with one of his school board members. "There are two board members that come in once a month with a grocery list of six to eight concerns. One wanted to know what we were doing with the issue of values or character education. She wasn't pressing for an immediate response. I said that I would ask that of all of the administrators and bring that together as a composite report. When that occurs that an individual board member asks a question, all of the board gets the answer. I don't respond to just the agenda of one board member. They are welcome to come in and ask questions." Superintendents strive to give the same information to all board members in their communications with their school board.

Communicating Takes Time

Superintendents spend a lot of time communicating to and with their school boards. When asked what percent of his time was spent communicating, Superintendent S answered, "More than anyone would believe.... I inform them so much they assume they know everything. So if something comes up they didn't know about, they think it was in there (the packet) and they didn't see it. That's a good position to be in." Other respondents suggested they spent a lot of time communicating with their school boards, too. "So, I give a lot of written information to the board and I don't really care if they

read it. It's information that's presented to them." "...If anything, we over-communicate rather than under-communicate." "I do more communicating with the board than I used to do. I ask board members to meet monthly, individually, to talk about issues. I spend more time communicating than ever before." "Personally, I'll either see or talk to my board members at least every other week." Communicating with the school board takes a lot of the superintendent's time.

Communicating at Special Meetings

Communication between the superintendents and their school boards never seems to stop. Many have special workshops or committee meetings. One of the byproducts of these meetings is increased communication between the two top levels in the school district. "We communicate through committees... policy, financial, facilities..." "The other way we communicate with the board is that we hold two workshops a year... That is really a good session for communication and airing things out. Those get better every year." "... We have retreats.... You can call them retreats or work sessions, but it's just a time for us to dialog and communicate." Several superintendents use special meetings to increase their dialog with their board members.

Communicating with the Public

Besides regularly communicating with their school boards, superintendents also are the official school district 'voice' with their public. When asked who communicates with the public, these comments are reflective of the typical responses. "It's pretty much done through us hired guns. The administration takes the front on almost everything here. The board plays the supportive role. They put trust in us. We try to prove we are worthy of it." "I'm really responsible for most of our communications. I've been the chief

spokesman for the district.” “... Communications is directed through the superintendent. ... All communication with the press and the media is through the superintendent.” “I write a monthly article in our local newspaper. I have a superintendent’s advisory council that invites community members, business leaders, and school board members to attend. Communications is ongoing. You can never do enough.”

Superintendent E responded that communication with the public is very important because “... You are selling trust, and people will hear things and perceive them. The key area is to make sure that you have the right vehicle for that kind of information.” This often means a letter sent to parents from the superintendent.

We try to anticipate what those needs are going to be and then get it out there immediately, even individually. Occasionally, in an elementary school, there will be a rumor about someone trying to kidnap a kid, a strange car at a bus stop, or that kind of thing. When the police are involved, we always send a letter home that day with kids to parents explaining just what happened. This year we started school where a thirty-year teacher had been involved with a student. We became aware of that three or four days before school started. We were able to get that communicated. We sent a letter out explaining the details of it and with the support of the union and the teacher as well. It really became a non-issue where I’m sure we had not handled it that way we would have just had a horrible thing.

Summary

The experienced superintendent communicates with his school board about everything. This communication keeps the school board members informed and updated about events and issues within the school district. By knowing information, school board members can speak knowledgeably with their own constituencies. These experienced

superintendents suggest that communication is one of their most important roles. The superintendent is usually the chief spokesperson for the school district, especially in the event of special situations and crises.

Makes Recommendations in Decision-making

School boards make decisions for their school districts on a regular basis. The evidence suggests that superintendents most often make the recommendations that they believe will benefit their school district. The school board legitimates these recommendations through board actions. These comments demonstrate why superintendents make recommendations to their school boards. "I firmly believe that most things that the board does has to be based on the recommendations of the superintendent. There are very few decisions that a board should make, can make or will make that don't have a recommendation from the superintendent." "In our district the board does one thing, and that is, they hire the superintendent.... They then turn the responsibility over to me to ultimately make the recommendation... I think that if you have a board that is really comfortable, they realize that the real power they have as a board is the flexibility they can give the superintendent. Then, having a superintendent who values not the credit for the decision, but getting where you need to get..." "I believe that you can only have one leader. The superintendent should make the recommendations to the board. I will not allow others to recommend to the board. You have one executive office." "Normally, all recommendations come through me. That's part of our operation. The board accepts recommendations from me. I receive them from committees..." "...We have a committee structure and I believe in giving administrators leadership opportunities.... The final recommendation comes from me. I make that to the full board." "I do. I make a recommendation on every action item." "All of that (recommendations), would come through the superintendent." "I make them all.... I always put a recommendation. I can't think of a time where I didn't recommend something.... I would rather make a recommendation and not have them go with it or

modify it, than not make any recommendation.” “Normally, the administrators will discuss things.... I will normally, if there needs to be a recommendation, I will make it that either I recommend this, the administrators recommend this, the staff recommends this and then the board makes a decision from there.” “You are like a CEO. You make recommendations.” “They will always in the end ask, ‘What is the recommendation?’ and they can work with that.” Despite input and discussion with other educational professionals and school board members, many superintendents make the recommendations for all school board actions.

Other superintendents’ responses indicated that others on the administrative staff made recommendations, especially if the decision was regarding something in that person’s field of expertise. Once again, it is evident that the school boards take direction from the bureaucratic officials when it comes time to make a decision. “I realize there is a lot that goes into a recommendation or decision so they rely a great deal upon me and the administrative team.” “Fortunately, in our situation, all recommendations come from the administration.” “A lot of the times I make the recommendations primarily because I have the background information....” “Every decision made by the board will come via a recommendation from a central office staff member.... There may be traffic out there in the district with the issues, but ultimately they come through the system to this office...” “The way we operate here is that all matters that go to the board will have an administrative recommendation. That is the way they like to operate.” “We have the various business heads (central office administrators) that can bring forward the recommendations.” “... They (the school board members) are not getting in the way of education... and sometimes that happens with school boards...” “They (school board

members) give us a lot of leeway to make recommendations. They are very supportive. They ask good questions. It helps sharpen us.” “(The) school board... decides what it is we are going to do, mostly based upon the recommendation of the superintendent.” Mostly, the school board relies on the educational professionals to make recommendations for school board action.

This is not to say that school boards make decisions without any input or discussion regarding the issue in question. Several superintendents described their school board decision-making posture and what leads up to the superintendent’s recommendation. “This particular school board... reviews recommendations and in the end will come down on what they believe is the best for the schools and the best for the students.” “The way I’ve always looked at it is that a board member should not take their head off with their hat when they come into the room. They’re there to make judgments for the community.... On occasions, they question recommendations, but generally, we put something on as a discussion item before they vote on it.” “We run through a process here so by the time it evolves to board action, the board has given ample input into whatever decision needs to be made from the administration. We do not have a lot of washing of unnecessary laundry in open board meetings.” When asked if his school board took direction from him, Superintendent B explained, “Depends on who you talk to about that. There are those who say this board is a ‘yes’ board. I choose not to characterize them as a ‘yes’ board. I would say that actions are not taken until we have discussed them.” Most of the school board discussion on an action item takes place before the superintendent makes a recommendation. One superintendent described what he does when it doesn’t look like a recommendation is going to be unilaterally endorsed by his

school board. "If it is a loser, it isn't going to the board. If I'm looking at an issue that maybe is 4-3 or 5-2, it's not going that way. Too much opposition. Back to the drawing board."

Several superintendents talked about how successful they have been through the years making recommendations. "In the fourteen years that I have been here, not a single board member has voted against a single recommendation." "... I say one thing at this time. It has been twenty years now and we have had one person vote 'no' one time at a board meeting. That means there has been a lot of drive toward consensus and reasonableness.... I usually don't make a recommendation until I know it's going to be seven- zero. That means I work a little more..." "Over thirteen years, my recommendation has been voted against once. I brought it back and it was approved later. I count that 100%. My main job with the school board is to give them good information and give them good recommendations." "Every recommendation has passed in eleven years except for two." When asked if he remembered what these two were, Superintendent K explained, "One involved a junior who wanted to graduate with the senior class. She had fallen behind because of illness.... I said they (the school board members) should stick to policy... an exception could cause further problems down the road... Mother and daughter both started to cry, tears running down their faces. It (the recommendation) was gone. The child walked." The second one occurred when, "I was looking at a K-5 organization. They (the school board members) had strong feelings against K-5. The night of the presentation, I headed the committee. I put the report together and delivered it. I was so much into the picture that I was the picture.... We talked. We tabled. Next meeting we went K-1st, 2nd-3rd, 4th-5th." It seems these

superintendents believe it is important for school boards to agree unanimously to their recommendations and take pride in their successful record.

Not all superintendents have this track record, however. Sometimes school boards or individual board members fail to support the superintendent's recommendations. This is most likely to occur when an individual member is dissatisfied with the direction the superintendent and the school board are headed. It is particularly frustrating for the superintendent when it happens unexpectedly. The anger was evident as Superintendent A told what happened at his previous board meeting. "An incident came up at the last board meeting which will give you an indication of how two members of my board are functioning. I had on there (the agenda) the extension of the administrators' contracts. They have three-year contracts. They have two left after this year and every year we extend it. I couldn't be happier with my administrative staff. I had to put on the agenda that I wanted to extend their contracts, and he said (one of the board members), 'I want to change that. I don't want to extend their contracts. I want to table this until later.' The board turned to me and said, What do you think?" Superintendent A was clearly agitated by his perceived insubordination by this board member as he related this story. Thus, superintendents may believe school boards should follow their recommendations without reservation.

Superintendent D, however, explained how he believed superintendents didn't understand the difference between 'recommend' and 'demand' when it came to decision-making opportunities "Let me explain to you where I think superintendents get in trouble with their school boards. Some of my peers will make a recommendation to the board, but it isn't a recommendation. It is a demand. So when the board goes in a different

direction, then they get all bent out of shape about it and begin to say things that they shouldn't say professionally about the board.” Superintendent W added, “If you end up fighting with your board members, ultimately you are in a losing proposition. ... I only attempt to be their representative. If they say that is not an important issue, that is fine.” Thus, the superintendent gives the very best recommendation he or she can make to the school board. Most often, the school board accepts the recommendation. When it doesn't, the superintendent needs to remember that he or she works for them. The school board may have a different perspective than the superintendent. Superintendent L explains this with, “I think school administrators need to remember that school board members are committed to the community. They don't come as an employee. They expect us to come here as an employee, do our professional duties, and perhaps move on. Educators need to make decisions as if they will live here for ten years. Your decisions are sounder when you think long run.”

Summary

The evidence presented supports the assertion that the experienced superintendent is the leader in a school district. Most often the superintendent or his staff initiate and write new policy or revisions to current policy. The superintendent keeps his stakeholders informed of everything that he feels they need to be aware of. To do so, he writes, calls, faxes or emails board members as necessary to make sure they know what is going on in the school district. The superintendent or his staff nearly always makes a recommendation in decision-making for their school board to consider. Superintendent U describes this role as “...the point man for the school district.”

The role described and explained by this sample of experienced superintendents includes policy initiation and formulation, recommendations in decision-making and

keeping the school board informed of what is happening with the overall operations of the school district. The general tendency is the more leadership this administrative professional assumes, the less likely the school board is to become involved in the day-to-day operations of the school district. This involvement was referred to as micro-management and was viewed negatively by these superintendents.

Part III: What are the Effects of the Education Reforms on the Role of School Boards?

How did P. A. 25 affect what school boards did?

P. A. 25, the Quality Package, was the first educational reform passed in Michigan during the 1990s. Superintendents were asked what impact P.A 25 had on their school boards. Many of them believed that P. A. 25 had not changed what school boards did. Of these, several superintendents described and explained P. A. 25 as something that affected administration, but not necessarily the school board. Some of these superintendents saw an increase in staffing needed to handle the additional reporting required by P. A. 25. Some superintendents saw that the additional communication from these required reports did make school boards more knowledgeable about curriculum. Some superintendents felt the mandates of P. A. 25, including school improvement teams and annual reports, supported what was already happening in their districts. Still others suggested it had a substantive change on what occurred in their classrooms, but not necessarily on the school board. Other superintendents were not so sure. There was some indication from these superintendents that P. A. 25 altered what school boards did. Finally, one superintendent felt that P. A. 25 was yet another ploy by the legislature to centralize education at the state level. Thus, the effects of P. A. 25 on school boards varied from district to district. The evidence supports the assertion, however, that school boards were not directly affected by P. A. 25.

Superintendent E was among the superintendents who didn't see any way it changed his school board. He said, "We were not impacted until Proposal A... But we looked at reforms more through public relations with P. A. 25... We spent more time looking at research and doing things with like districts..." Superintendents N and O both

believed their school boards were not impacted by P. A. 25 either. “The curriculum efforts impacted our district, but not the board itself.... School improvement plans didn’t impact us because we have always had that process... It didn’t impact us in terms of changing direction.” “I don’t think it impacted school boards at all. It was more than voluntary in that there were some requirements that we had to do with the law. Here, we were starting that process anyway.... It forced some schools to do some things that good schools were already doing. So, that one didn’t impact the boards at all, at least not here.” Similarly, Superintendent S didn’t see how P. A. 25 had affected his school board, but did recognize that it added a dimension to his school district. He explained, “I don’t think it had a major impact on school boards. It did impact the district. It required a school improvement process which we took advantage of. We still have our school improvement process actively going. It didn’t impact the board.” Superintendent Y hadn’t seen a change to his board either. He summed it up this way. “...We did what they were doing anyway. We sent a report to the community annually. I really don’t think it did that much.” These superintendents recognized that P. A. 25 had very little effect on their school boards.

Some superintendents believed the impact on their school board was indirect. Superintendent C didn’t feel it impacted his school board too much, but implementing its mandates was expensive and the mandates caused a lot of uncertainty in reporting procedures. “It had some effects because there were certain requirements that we had to follow taking a lot of time. I’m not sure it affected the board’s thinking that much... I went to the in-services as well as the administrators and no one knew what they were doing including the Department of Education people or the ISD people. I see that as

probably a billion-dollar mistake because there was at least a billion dollars spent on trying to comply with its requirements. No one knew what the hell to do with them (the reports) and what they were supposed to look like. So we had meetings which didn't have a whole lot to do with education. But it had to do with doing the annual report..."

Superintendent L noted a similar futility with P. A. 25. "I haven't figured out what P. A. 25 was intended to do other than fill the coffers in Lansing. I think we do some things better as a result of P. A. 25, but the issue becomes more important like annual reports than what it stands for.... Many of those initiatives are being driven from the surface. If the mandate ceased, would these things continue? Some school improvement things would continue. We have better staff development. We are more resourceful and inclusive... I don't think the level of student output has increased. That's what it's all about. They cause us a lot of work that takes away from our purpose." Superintendent H reported, "I think the intent was school improvement and the annual report... It affects the school, but I think there is not a whole lot of community interest in that.... We end up compiling statistics that are used by a few people.... There is a lot of work put into it for the amount it is actually used...." These comments imply that their school boards were impacted financially by P. A. 25 mandates, but that it didn't have a direct effect on what school boards did.

While other superintendents stated or implied that their school boards had not altered their role due to P. A. 25, they did add that it changed how they talked to school boards. Superintendent D explained, "It changed what we did with the board. So we communicate a lot with them differently because of P. A. 25... So you just help the board understand what the issues are and what the potential impact may be and how we are

structured to address it.” Superintendent G reported, “The only impact it had is on administration. It hasn’t... (affected) the board other than they hear reports, they receive reports, year end reports...” Superintendent V added, “They (the school board) probably see more school reports now than they used to because of P. A. 25.” Superintendent Q believed it didn’t affect his school board either but added, “They had very little involvement. They wanted to know what was happening, when, where and how and we told them.” So, the reports generated from P. A. 25 mandates kept the school boards better informed about their school districts.

Superintendent P recognized what the increased communication regarding P. A. 25 meant to his school board. He explained its effect on his school board by explaining, “Not from a leadership standpoint, just from a reactionary standpoint—reacting from perceived mandates or actual mandates and perceived needs to improve instructionally probably brought about some spending time in different ways at board meetings. They were more focused on student achievement... There is more focus on student achievement now that the board addresses than ten years ago. But it’s not by any means a quantum leap.”

Similarly, Superintendent R described how the school board was told about this reform, but how it didn’t affect them too greatly. “I think that (P. A. 25) had more of an impact on building administrators and the assistant superintendent of instruction. We informed the board of the ramifications of that particular legislation, what it means for our buildings and improving opportunities for kids. But I don’t think it had an affect on board members.” Superintendent K agreed. “It hasn’t impacted our board other than to note these things happening. They hold me accountable... It’s an administrative issue.

They make sure we write good reports. Good boards always mandate quality.” P. A. 25 affected what the professional educators did more than what the school boards did.

Superintendent T, however, acknowledged a more profound change in his school board’s attitude resulting from the increased communication. “I see school boards now since P. A. 25... they are far more knowledgeable about day-to-day operations, perhaps. Superintendents realize they need to keep boards more informed. I see them being far more knowledgeable, far broader in their approach. Fifteen years ago, there was more interest in negotiations as a single issue, working for or against the unions. Now, I see it broader, more program-oriented. More towards what they do in curriculum.”

Superintendent W believed his school board got more involved in curriculum than before, too. He answered, “It forced our board to become more involved in the dialog and discussions at the district level of curriculum and school improvement.... There are some concepts of the core curriculum that board members can understand. ... They can understand that there are measurements involved now with curriculum content and curriculum compatibility...”

Superintendent M felt P. A. 25 had affected his school board. When asked if it had changed what the school board did, he explained, “It did here. When P. A. 25 came into play, it had seven components. We were in the middle of the effective schools movement so it really fit with what we were doing.... It was helpful for our staff who felt they were going in many directions. The board said, ‘We feel better.’ The annual report was covering many of the things we were spending money on. We spent a lot of money on teacher in-service in this district. Over the years, that has come up for scrutiny by the board on several accounts. P. A. 25 really helped cement the necessity for teacher in-

service. The other thing, they (the board members) weren't happy with the report card, especially the figuring of the drop out thing. They took a political stance on it. They actually wrote the governor. We had two students drop out of school the year the whole thing started. The way it was computed, it looked like we had a drop out rate of sixteen percent! Wait a minute! Two kids in ten years do not make a sixteen percent drop out rate. They took issue. We were on the right track with parent advisory, etc. It just sort of made them feel good. We were doing it right."

Superintendent U described a different change in school board behavior. He believed that P. A. 25 had made a significant impact on how school boards viewed the public school organization. He explained it saying, "... The boards have seen a change in how schools do business because of P. A. 25. We, in the effective districts, have flattened the bureaucracy. It's more of a horizontal model now. Realizing that your real experts are your classroom teachers... I think school boards have seen how the organizational structure in the effective schools has changed. There are probably still districts doing business the same way they did before P. A. 25, but it's like someone ignoring the speed limit sign out there. They are not paying attention to what is going on. I think P. A. 25 has been the single biggest piece of educational, legislative reform that has had a positive impact on public schools.... In good districts, it's affected how schools have done their business. It's put more authority and I think a commensurate amount of responsibility into the hands of teachers. That's where it belongs."

So school boards received more reports and communication regarding curriculum as a result of P. A. 25. School boards became more knowledgeable about curriculum and what happens in schools as a result of the increased reporting. Perhaps, P. A. 25's

greatest effect on school boards was indirect. Quite possibly, P. A. 25 increased the degree of curriculum knowledge that school board members had previously.

In response to Superintendent U's implication that perhaps those school boards (districts) not affected by P. A. 25 were 'bad districts', Superintendent I explained what his district did with P. A. 25 mandates. "Probably jumped through the hoops is what we did. Did what we had to do, kept doing our thing.... Again, the whole reason is because this legislation was designed for schools that weren't getting their act together doing stuff. We were doing so much of the stuff that was there, not exactly the way they wanted it, but frankly, we just do the stuff. We make sure it's written up the way it's supposed to be and keep doing what we're doing." Superintendent R told how he acted similarly to this legislation. ".... We informed them of P. A. 25, but we are not reacting to legislation.... We inform the board about it, but we don't make a big deal about it." Superintendent K added, "Legislation, per se, wouldn't make that much difference." Thus, despite the mandates required by P. A. 25, full implementation varied from school district to school district. As a result, the effects of P.A 25 on school boards varied as well.

Finally, Superintendent J adopted more of a cynical view of P. A. 25 and its effects on his school board. He replied, "It impacts our ability to make policy. You have seen a centralization approach in Michigan. Big Daddy under the Capitol dome controlling what goes on.... Every time a law like that (P. A. 25) passes, it narrows down your ability to manage the district under local control..."

Summary

While the legislation possibly created a deeper understanding and appreciation of curriculum for board members, the evidence given by the experienced superintendents supports the assertion that P. A. 25 did not affect what school boards did for their school district.

How did P. A. 335 and P. A. 336 affect what school boards did?

P. A. 335/336 was an education package that contained several provisions. The researcher used three parts of this education reform that he believed had the greatest capacity to affect what school boards did as units of analysis. In turn, these units would help determine if P. A. 335/336 had affected what school boards did. The first was section 380.1278a. This act established pupil performance standards to measure achievement of the academic core outcomes. Essentially, the pupil performance standards are measured by MEAP testing. Therefore, P. A. 335/336 increased the significance of the MEAP testing. The researcher referenced the increased significance of the MEAP in his interview with the superintendents. The second was section 380.1284. This law increased the minimum length of the school term if the school board wanted to receive full state school aid payment. The third was section 388.1620. This proviso created the foundation allowance per membership pupil. Most often, the researcher refers to this as Proposal A. An analysis of the superintendents' responses to each of these parts of P. A. 335/336 is presented in the upcoming sections. The researcher's summary at the end of each section suggests his findings.

Michigan Educational Assessment Program's (MEAP) impact

Centralized Curriculum

While MEAP testing was begun long before P. A. 335 was implemented, its significance to public school districts across Michigan increased with the passage of this education package. MEAP became the catalyst for curriculum reform and curriculum alignment. P. A. 335 legislation mandated that a model core academic curriculum (380.1278) be developed by the state board and then it, or a similar curriculum, adopted by local school boards. To ensure that school districts were teaching a core academic

curriculum, pupil performance standards were to be developed (380.1278a.) Thus, P. A. 335 contained the curriculum piece (core curriculum) and the assessment piece (MEAP) neatly packaged as education reforms. Later, P. A. 289, the Revised School Code, repealed the core curriculum mandate, but the significance of MEAP testing continued to affect local school districts and thus their school boards. The evidence supports the assertion that MEAP testing, enhanced by the aforementioned mandates of P. A. 335, has changed curriculum locally and centralized it at the state level. The MEAP has affected the design and the implementation of curriculum that was once left to local school control.

One of the superintendents admitted the MEAP tests brought a centralized focus to curriculum that was not always there. Superintendent D explained it by saying, "...It has brought focus to the curriculum. Every school district before the MEAP testing was sort of an independent enterprise. Now they are being compared, one with another. So as a result, there is a focus on what is important... It really did line up, for example, social studies. It is coming on line and our staff members are really worried about that and it has caused...a whole restructuring of how social studies will be taught to freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. They are getting clear about that..."

Aligned Curriculum

Further, this focus has meant that the school districts' curriculum is better aligned with the MEAP than it was at one time. Superintendent U described how this has improved MEAP results in his school district. "It (MEAP) has certainly affected the articulation and coordination of the district curriculum. When I came to the district I'm in, our MEAP scores were very poor. One of the reasons was because we didn't articulate our curriculum to correspond to what was being tested..." Likewise, Superintendent N

told how it aligned curriculum in his district. “I wouldn’t say it has driven it (curriculum), but we certainly have adapted it to make sure we are aligned with the MEAP.... The new MEAP was pretty tough so we had to make adjustments.” Superintendent X simply stated, “We’ve tried to align our curriculum to MEAP. We’d be foolish not to.” Superintendent H agreed the curriculum development in his school district had been affected by MEAP testing. He told how, “... we are now getting our curriculum aligned with the core curriculum from the top to the bottom, K-12, and also sideways so that all their grade sections are teaching the same thing. There has been a major emphasis in that area to improve our MEAP scores...” It is evident that school districts responded to the increased significance of MEAP testing by adjusting and aligning their curriculums to the MEAP tests.

Drove Curriculum Changes

Many superintendents went beyond saying their districts realigned curriculum to meet MEAP standards. These superintendents described the MEAP tests as ‘driving curriculum’ changes in their school districts. Superintendent C said, “It (curriculum) is test driven and we’re judged.” Superintendent F added, “What we have decided to do is let it (MEAP) affect us a great deal and let it drive our curriculum and make sure we are aligned where we should be with the test...” Superintendent O agreed. . “Absolutely. It (MEAP) drives curriculum. Similarly, Superintendent R recognized the effects MEAP had in his school district. He asserted, “It certainly affected curriculum. When the box scores are printed in the Sunday paper, if your district is not doing well, you are going to be asked ‘why?’... You have to follow through with the basic curriculum (state curriculum framework). The board understands that...” It appears that most school districts adapted their curriculum to correspond with what the MEAP tests covered.

Perhaps, Superintendent B summarized it best by simply stating, “We all work at our MEAP scores to continue to improve. That’s just the reality of it.” By doing so, the results of the assessments should reflect more favorably on their school district. But, why is scoring well on the MEAP tests important for a school district?

Competition for Students

Superintendent C explained the importance of students doing well on the MEAP to the school district. He said, “Rightly or wrongly, we’re all lined up from the highest to the lowest... It becomes very important to attract new families to the district. People look at it. The board is well aware of it. The teachers and the administrators are well aware that’s how we’re judged.” Superintendent L added, “...People compare us. We are vulnerable to the size of the front yards.” Superintendent V told why his district has given the MEAP tests added significance by saying, “... We put more emphasis on the MEAP just because politically we think we should look better than we have been... We want to make sure in our outcomes that MEAP is reflected in there. Absolutely! We are astute enough to say those should be important...” And Superintendent W added, “We now have a measurement of satisfaction of our instructional programs through the MEAP tests... Our board understands that MEAP tests are a standard of success...”

Alternately, Superintendent Q described how lower than expected MEAP scores were affecting his district. “We talk about it (MEAP) all the time, but it started hitting administrators pretty hard in May. We are not doing well given the gene pool in this district. We need to step (up) the ante. It will be a real keen interest... You are a slave to the MEAP. What do people look at? If they (parents of transfer students) have five districts in this county, they look at test scores.... You better do well on the MEAP...”

Given the impact that MEAP testing has had on curriculum and the politics within the district, what have school boards done with the results?

Making Changes to Improve MEAP Scores

Local school boards expect its superintendent to make necessary changes in problem areas to improve student MEAP scores. Improving MEAP scores is a function of the educational professionals. Superintendent G described what his school board's actions were with the following. "...Ever since MEAP testing has been around, it has affected us because as I call it, 'the football ratings.' Every superintendent wants to take to their board a good posture when the local paper publishes it, so I would say definitely, MEAP testing has affected us and has had an affect on my board of education.... They do not like being on the bottom rung. They want, my directive is, that we better be at the top of the league or develop some programs to show improvement, show stability, and they are publicly affected by the MEAP testing.... MEAP has driven changes..."

Superintendent K told how his school board reacts. "... They (the board members) expect a plan and a way of articulating that plan so that the community understands any blip on the horizon and how we will deal with it. They get reports. They hear all the reports and read the papers. At times, I get a call from a board member asking why aren't the scores higher in this area. They want information. I never hear you should get rid of X, Y or Z principal and solve the problem..." Likewise, Superintendent M explained that his school board expects the administration to develop an action plan. "They (the school board) want to know the scores, but they expect the administration to take care of it. If the principals can't show what is being done to improve a problem area, they won't last long. When it is MEAP time that is what they (the principals) talk about

to the board.” The professional educators are responsible for devising and implementing action plans to improve MEAP scores.

Superintendent T’s response, however, implied that his school board didn’t expect the administration to be the only one working on problem areas. The school board was involved, too. “Our board and administration watch the scores very closely. We work on the problems. The board has updates and is knowledgeable about what is going on. They discuss it when we have the test updates, but they are not single focused on testing...”

The Positive Impact of MEAP

Somewhat surprisingly, the superintendents’ responses indicated an overall positive attitude toward MEAP testing and its effects on their school districts’ curriculum. Superintendent S stated his feelings unequivocally and explained why. “I think it has had a positive impact. MEAP testing is not supposed to be used for comparison purposes, but everyone does. ...It creates a greater level of accountability for instructional programs... The power of publishing a number in the newspaper is amazing... They (the board members) do the same thing administrators do. They compare themselves to other districts to see how we are doing.... We tend to respond to low MEAP scores.” Superintendent U viewed MEAP similarly. “MEAP has had an impact and overall, the impact has been more positive than negative.” Essentially, MEAP testing has forced school districts and its employees to evaluate what they are doing and make necessary changes in curriculum alignment and delivery systems.

A few of the superintendents mentioned that MEAP testing not only centralized curriculum, but it also increased teacher’s accountability for teaching that curriculum. Superintendent Y explained this phenomenon by saying, “The High School Proficiency and the MEAP are designed not so much to ensure students achieve at a certain level.

They are really trying to determine curriculum, what is taught in the state. That is not all bad. In our curriculum, we found one of the biggest discrepancies was that teachers weren't teaching what was on the MEAP... Sometimes, teachers close the door and go off in their own little world. The kids are learning, but it is not necessarily something of use to them later..." Similarly, Superintendent P responded, "... I do believe we should tell a teacher what to teach and what the student needs to learn and what the expectations are. As teachers need expectations for students, school boards and administration, the state and the national level need to have expectations for education in this country.... So, I believe the idea of MEAP is a good thing..." Superintendent L told how his district didn't give MEAP testing a lot of attention previously, but how 'raising the stakes' is a good idea for the state. "... "There is nothing wrong with commonality. Education is a state function. We need to understand the state is transportable. The education of a kid in Monroe is as important as a kid's education in Mona shores in terms of overall quality of our State. A common body of knowledge and a set of basic skills make sense...." The researcher found the general support for MEAP testing among the superintendents interviewed to be quite favorable. Perhaps, the increase in teacher accountability was part of the reason why.

The Negative Impact of MEAP

There were exceptions to this overall positive trend of superintendents toward MEAP testing. A couple of the superintendents made remarks that were less than supportive regarding the MEAP. Superintendent H summarized the impact of MEAP testing on curriculum this way: "It (MEAP testing) is a backdoor control of curriculum." Superintendent J was more critical. He noted that the MEAP was used to assess the performance of school districts, not the students writing the tests. "It (MEAP testing)

affects politics because politicians and others who don't know anything about MEAP scores make judgments that are not appropriate.... The political stakes have become so high. Who is being tested on the test? Superintendents, principals, staff, the teacher. High stakes- not what the test was designed to do. Not at all. Now you are the teacher. You don't want to look like an idiot. You go in for the next five days, but you are not teaching to the test... You make sure those kids can respond to that stuff. They cheat. Plain and simple. No quality control. The policymakers, the governor or mayor are running around ... saying we're going to take over school districts. They don't have the criteria to do that.... There's no consistent quality on how the test is administered..."

Summary

The evidence, given by the experienced superintendents, found that the MEAP has driven curriculum reform, or at the very least, curriculum realignment at the local level. While most of the superintendents interviewed supported it, MEAP was viewed as a de facto state curriculum. Their school boards leave it to the educational professionals to plan ways to improve MEAP scores so that the school district is more attractive to those moving into an area. The MEAP has increased school boards' awareness of curriculum. Indirectly, the school board has been affected by MEAP testing, both in terms of curriculum and instruction and comparing itself to other school districts. In terms of practice, however, the school board has not altered what they do as a result of the increased significance of MEAP testing resulting from P. A. 335/336, since it was previously concluded that the school board didn't do much with curriculum.

The Extended School Term Impact

Part of P. A. 335's education reform package was an increase in hours and school days. Hours would increase to 1,080 by the 1999-2000 school year. The number of instructional hours would be extended to 210 days by the year 2010. In its earliest implementation stages, the effect of this mandate on school boards seemed to be minimal, since most school districts could meet the days/hours requirement with minor adjustments to their master calendar. The day/hour increases have, however, negatively affected labor negotiations for some school boards, especially in negotiations with salaried employees. Other superintendents, whose school boards have not been affected yet, believe the increase of 51 instructional hours during the 2000-2001 school year may affect negotiations. A few superintendents believed their school boards' negotiations had not been affected, nor did they see this occurring in the near future. Some superintendents described the effects of extending the school year as another example of how their school boards were losing local control. Finally, one superintendent expressed his school board's expectation of minimal compliance with state mandates as "...Make sure you are clean, but don't go nuts."

Negotiations Impacted

The biggest impact the extended school day/school year has had on school boards is at the negotiating table. Superintendent O described and explained the dilemma placed upon the school board by this requirement found in P. A. 335. "Well, its made it very difficult to do what we need to do because the state's made that requirement, but they are not giving the money to pay for it. When they give us a 3% increase and they have all of the requirements of adding days and hours... the teachers are saying we want to be paid for the additional time we work. And that's a legitimate request. But there's not money

there to pay for it. It makes it very, very difficult so you have to take it out of someplace else so you can pay the employees that the state has made a requirement for. That one's frustrating." Superintendent A voiced similar frustrations. "Two years ago, the teaching staff wanted a half percent pay increase for every additional two minutes worth. They (the union) went down to minutes. I have no control over that. Our legislators say you have to go 1047 hours. So we had to add some time. Did they add any money to add the time? No. Did they think the teachers were going to come in and volunteer to work two extra minutes, four extra minutes, eight extra minutes a day? That's not going to happen. So they (the legislators) really put us in the middle of the sandwich." Superintendent F saw the effects it had on negotiations, too. "It has impacted negotiations. That is the number one thing, we've been pretty fortunate, we've lengthened the days, we just extended our contract into next fall. We were 51 hours short at the elementary level, so we added 10 minutes to all of the school buildings, we're going to start 10 minutes earlier in every building next year. So our secondary schools will be above even the new requirements, and we'll only be 20 hours away at the elementary. We've kind of already talked with them about adding 6 minutes to the end of the elementary day in 2000/2001. Superintendent U added, "It affects your schedule, sometimes it affects collective bargaining."

Superintendent T responded similarly stating, "That's been difficult but we have excellent relations with the bargaining unit so we work through that. We've changed the length of the school year, we've given a little more in salary increases but they understand that it doesn't have to be hour by hour increase. We put in release time etc.- pay in a different form." Superintendent V answered, "We've been able to, the only

modifications we've had to make are in the elementary pretty much. Our high school already had the days and hours and the middle school was pretty close. So it hasn't had a big impact on us yet." So, many school boards have been affected by the extended school year at the negotiating table.

Negotiations about to be Impacted

Extending the year had not impacted all school boards yet, however. Some superintendents told how it may affect their school district in 2000-2001 when the school year is extended by 51 hours. Superintendent I reported, "I would say the hours and days thing hasn't impacted us to this point but we are on the brink right now. We're going to have to make some decisions how we will handle this." Superintendent P talked about the effect surfacing in negotiations in his school district. That is, more days and hours for the staff, but not necessarily the increase in the foundation grant to satisfy the employees working more hours.

That hasn't affected us because we have had more hours than were required has been. We are all right this year, but the year after we're going to have to add some days or hours or a combination of both. Well, I don't really know if the school board will approve what I want to do. I have presented it to them and they have not disapproved of it. We're in the process of negotiating our contract right now. Everything is done except money... My philosophy is that if we add days, then they should get paid because it's extending their work year. If we add hours, they shouldn't get paid extra for it because falls within the time frame of their 190 workday calendar... on the pay thing, we base it on the 190 workday calendar and they have 38-hour weeks. That includes times before and after school. So if we add 10-15 minutes of instruction a day, that still falls within that 38 hours a week. So, they shouldn't get paid extra, but that's not the way they look at it. But, on the other hand, we have more hours at the secondary than we do at the elementary. Should we pay high school people less because we don't need to add as many hours there? But, on the other hand, the dilemma the school board will have is that our budget is about a quarter of a million dollars in the red for next year. The year after that, unless we do some budget cutting, is going to be even worse than that. That would be when we'd be adding up to 5 additional days. That would be an additional 2-2.5% to salaries. For us, that would mean an extra \$350-\$400 thousand bucks that we don't have."

It wasn't just the teacher unions concerned about the extended school year. Superintendent K described the negotiations he had with his building principals. "... We already asked 183 days at one point. The board never saw that as an issue. That was administration. Meet state guidelines. The administrative bargaining unit obviously wanted an increase in salary but I asked for more time. They each gave five days. The board was overjoyed. They loved it. The five days don't necessarily fold into the work year. They might be required during the summer." It is evident that extending the school year has already or will cause school boards problems as they negotiate with their employees.

No Impact on Negotiations

A few superintendents responded that extending the school year has not affected their school boards and/or their negotiations. Superintendent E explained, "We've worked out with our teachers that we don't argue about the money, everybody knows where it is. The first part of bargaining is we determine what the size of the pot is going to be and then later how we are going to carve it up, and included in that is whatever the changes are that we have to do in terms of length of time, and employees agree to do that. We've never had the two tied together." Superintendent R answered that it had not affected his board either. He answered, "... We certainly continue each time new legislation happened to inform the board at a public board meeting and through my updates or through the committee structure. That particular issue has not had a profound impact on this district. We just settled a contract that will include the additional 51 hours for a year from now without having to increase salaries." And Superintendent S said it hadn't impacted his school board yet, nor did he believe it likely to in the future. "... We haven't been affected yet and I frankly didn't think we would ever see the increased days.

I'm wondering if we will see the increased hours. As soon as some district pays for increased hours and says this is Headlee impact and you're not paying for it, the state may back off of that. That (the extended school year mandate) has not affected us and we are just watching it." The superintendents in these school districts, however, happened to be receiving large annual increases in general funding due to schools of choice and/or because they were a fast growing school district. This might explain why extending the number of instructional hours in the school year hasn't affected their school boards' negotiations. That is, these school districts' funding increases allowed their school boards to offer more than minimum salary increases. Many other school boards may not have either of these phenomena, schools of choice and/or rapid growth, occurring in their school district. Thus, their pay increases have been kept to a minimum. Now the state is expecting school boards to increase the hours in their calendars without the benefit of any extra money to support this time increase.

At least one school board hasn't been affected because of the its response to legislation. Superintendent I described and explained how he and his school board reacted to the education reforms coming out of Lansing during the past decade. "The big thing these last ten years. They (the state) made a rule and then you ask who's going to check on that again? So that's my philosophy. Do what you have to do and make sure you are clean but don't go nuts. If it makes sense, do it."

Impacting Local Control

When asked how extending the number of hours affected their school board, a few superintendents directly stated or implied that the state was further diminishing local control. The first two talked about legislation in terms of the school calendar.

Superintendent A replied, "It takes away, we have no local control. The push to start

school before Labor Day. That's a local decision and it should be a local decision. Some districts close on November 15 because it's the opening day of deer season. That's their decision." Superintendent E described and explained the impact on his school district this way. "...When you look at the push every year for the post Labor Day start recognizing that the calendar already is being extended, that really ought to be a local decision. In our case we usually start before Labor Day and let the calendar dictate it. If it is really going to be an early Labor Day then we might start after, but that ought to be a local decision... I do think that it is more state intrusion, and I think that it is really academic because it is built in already as to increases in hours and increases in days. So ultimately, that's going to impact the time anyway. Kids won't get out until after July."

Superintendent L discussed what he believed the state was doing and how it affected his school board. The frustration felt by this superintendent was evident in his response.

I think they were responding two ways down in Lansing. You want to know what is going on in the district but you can't be there. You set up a framework that says if you do these things you have a better situation. The state is saying we are paying for education we expect you to educate these kids. Fair game. We don't send out money without holding strings to it. I don't expect them to. I think that helped us get where we needed to be anyway. We may have wanted to go there on our own but couldn't sell it to teachers or community. They go overboard. It's easy for them to micromanage. Look at the legislation. The governor waves a sawed off shotgun and says we will not allow these in schools anymore. Heck, I never saw one in school anywhere. It looked cool on television. Now we have new laws. We didn't need new law. We needed backing to deal with it should it happen. You can't pass legislation from the top without the debate in the trenches and on the streets. The best proposal I saw was one that said get your hours in and do it in any number of days. They mean well but they have a harder time fixing their idiocy.

These comments suggest the educational professionals believe the state is legislating what was once left to the local school boards, and appropriately so.

Summary

While the extended school term has financial implications and has impacted negotiations with salaried employees, the evidence given by the experienced superintendents suggests that the role of the school board has not changed. It is likely, however, that their school board's sense of local control has been further diminished as the state controls the minimum number of hours in the school year and continues to intrude upon school calendar requirements.

Proposal A's Impact

A significant part of P. A. 335/336 was Proposal A. It shifted the tax burden for public education from one that relied heavily upon property taxes to one that relies primarily on sales tax. The result was the primary source for funding public schools in Michigan shifted from the local level to the state level. There were two types of responses from the superintendents, those that believed it has negatively affected their school district and those that believed it has positively impacted their school district.

Some superintendents said that the role of the school board was affected by this shift since the school districts no longer had to pass operating millages to fund their schools. Not every superintendent believed that removing school boards from the millage business has been 'healthy' for his/her community, however. The described tax shift is credited as further decreasing local control. The fact that children are funded now, not school districts, has changed school board thinking. This reality, coupled with schools of choice legislation and the increases emphasis on MEAP testing, has altered the way school boards do business. Schools of choice legislation has allowed school boards to compete for students with its neighboring school districts. MEAP scores are used as a comparison measure.

Other superintendents believe Proposal A created more funding equity between schools, especially between the lower funded and the state average. The foundation grants have allowed these school boards to grow fund equity while adding programs and increasing the wages for their employees. Most often, the 'catch-up' school boards and their superintendents saw it as positive legislation.

Removed School Boards from the Millage Business

With little exception (ISD-wide millages are still allowed, but very rarely successfully attempted), Proposal A made passing school operating millages something that school boards no longer do. Superintendent H thought this made his board's role simpler. He responded, "I think it took them (the school board members) off the hook of going after more funds. It made their role easier... It has taken us out of the millage game. I think it has forced people in education to look at how they spend money. Prior to that, it would be spent, plead poor to the public, and go after more millage..." Similarly, Superintendent O supported this assertion by stating, "Well, it made life a lot easier because of millage issues as millages became a non-issue. It made where they (the school board members) can spend more time doing the kinds of things (for) schools (they) should be doing instead of spending so much time campaigning for millage elections and so on." And Superintendent V added, "In our district, it basically made things a little simpler because like all school districts, the money goes to the state and comes back in the form of foundation grants.... Of course, we got out of the millage business which is good."

Others superintendents mentioned that Proposal A removed their school boards from the 'millage game', but they were not as positive about the change. Most often, the complaint was their school board had no way to raise revenue to fund their ever-growing operational expenses. Superintendent S explained, "That (Proposal A) had a major impact on districts and boards alike. No longer do they have millage elections or can we control our revenues.... My frustration with the legislature is there is no long-term financial planning possible in schools. I can tell you what our expenditures will be, but I can't tell you our revenues. That has an impact." Superintendent E responded, "Before Proposal A,

before the changes... there was a lot more flexibility in things like curriculum and budget and that sort of thing. If you did an effective job, you could go the community and you'd ask for a millage increase. They would say 'yes' or 'no.' If you really wanted to move into an area instructionally, you didn't worry whether it had been tested on the MEAP..." Superintendent L added, "We shot ourselves between the eyes when we supported Proposal A and got out of the millage business. We gave away local control. We don't have any. If you're broke, what can you do except cut? ..."

Superintendent M described how Proposal A had impacted his school board. "A major change for us. This community had been voting millage when there was no money from the state. We were self-sufficient. We were close to the cap of 50 mills...It took us out of the millage business and it scared us.... The teaching staff was used to negotiating raises and having money. They would expect the board to come up with the money and they did. That was stopped..." Superintendent Q described the dilemma Proposal A made for his school board. "It really buttoned the district down because as I mentioned this is a very affluent community, a very wealthy community, a lakes community. ... Our foundation (grant) is soft. It is middle of the stream.... Wealthy people who want a lot for their kids and not a lot of money (available) to deal with it.... I met with 12 of my neighbors last night over these very issues. They have a hard time understanding that.... We have a foundation (grant) and I explained the whole concept. They do not understand Proposal A. Not at all to the point where they said 'You can't bond for a new school.' Yes, we can, but we can't come to you for more operational millage. It has had a major impact on this district. The board has been very involved in that (foundation grant) via the fact that (it) is the bread and butter for the school district."

Finally, Superintendent R mentioned that his school board was still in the millage business since they are a growing school district. "Proposal A had, and will continue to have, a significant impact. Removing the millage campaign was a joke... for us because we still have bond issues."

Superintendent W described and explained a different phenomenon that occurred on his school board once school boards were no longer going after millage increases. He believed millage campaigns were an effective way to discover good, potential school board candidates. Without this opportunity, school board candidates emerged in his school district who had not seen 'the big picture' and who tended to be more single-issue candidates. He explained the impact this had on his school board and on the school district.

Well, it's taken us out of the millage campaign business. I believe there is a real radical difference now in how boards of education members get involved in the education process than they used to in the past. Umm, we used to have years ago, pre-Proposal A, was a training ground for board members. We called them millage campaigns. Every year, in our school district for example, for a period of ten years, we increased our operational millage one year, every year, for ten straight years! We had to go back to our community sometimes year after year, sometimes two or three times a year, to get operational millage. And every time that we did that, we sought people in our community who had distinguished themselves as leaders in parent advisory groups, PTOs, STPs, Booster groups, etc. And there were people who were willing to step forward and put their public credibility on the line on behalf of schools and proclaim in meetings, in conversations across the back fence, and the contacts in the grocery store that 'we need this millage, we need the support from community, and they as a voting constituent are willing to vote "yes" for an increase in operational millage because they think schools are so important.' When people did that in the millage campaign activities, they saw the big picture. They got a real good view on how elementary and secondary programs developed. They got a very good idea of the financial implications of running a school district. They got a real good idea on what it means to have labor peace. So, they got a better picture of the full operation of the school district than someone that wasn't involved in the big process. I think that if you look, at least in our history, if you looked at those people who have stepped from a millage campaign business to a board of education seat, they have been some wonderful leaders. They are great

community-minded people and they took that board of education seat because that was the next step. It was the next step for them because they worked so hard to get that millage through that they weren't going to let the community "undo" what they had worked so hard to do. So, we had that stepped into the board of education seat through election campaign, they were used to campaigning, they know the process and they are committed to good education, but for good education for all. We don't have that training ground now. We don't have that network. So, what we are left with in post-Proposal A, are those people, constituents, who have perhaps some involvement in special interest groups such as band boosters, athletic boosters, elementary school (booster), high school whatever, middle school whatever, or parent type, advisory type activities. Or a parent, typically a parent because they are more involved with the schools, that may not be involved in those activities, but has a political agenda and would like to use the school board as a stepping stone into maybe city politics or county politics. So, post-Proposal A, without a training ground for good board of education members leaves a void and that void is going to be filled by something. I believe the wise superintendent is going to find a way to fill that void in a way that's going to benefit the school district. I believe the school districts are going to be best served by people who have the bigger picture. But if school districts don't recognize that, administration and other board of education members don't recognize that, I think what we are going to see are people that have a narrow political agenda and could possibly have a very self-serving agenda and become a member of the Board of Education."

Two other superintendents believed that getting out of the millage business had changed their school boards and/or their public. Superintendent C responded, "I think it has impacted the school board. Prior to that time, I think you had people running for the board on the basis of cutting fat out up there (the school district), so I don't have to pay more taxes. Since that time, that has diminished somewhat." The implication is that fewer people are interested in running for the school board since school operational funding is now a function of the state. Superintendent L framed it a bit differently as he noted the negative impact it has had on his school board. "Today, the community doesn't have the responsibility to fund their own schools. We don't have that need to communicate with them. We run around communicating, but we are not selling anything anymore. We took a step backwards from our communities and local control..." So, despite getting school

boards out of the millage business, these superintendents did not view that effect as being too positive for their school boards and/or school districts.

Diminished Local Control

Many of the superintendents surveyed believed Proposal A negatively affected local control and their school boards. Not the least of these was the aforementioned inability of school boards to increase revenue locally. The tenor of the superintendents' responses suggested the frustrations they observed since the funding shifted to state control, the control the state now asserted over education and the fact that about the only way to raise revenue was to enroll more students. Superintendent N explained what Proposal A had done to his school board. "It increased the emphasis by the board and finance committee on finance. It was always a challenge, but Proposal A was a reduction of taxes for the community. We had 49 mills... It was great for them (the homeowners), but put the district in financial straight (jacket). It curbed the amount of money we can ask of our community. The board has to spend a lot of time figuring out finances... We have cut... This is the second year in a row that we are in deficit spending... The bottom line is the money is the control... Before Proposal A, we got 95% of our money from the local tax payer. Now we get 95% from the state. Of course the golden rule... He who has the gold, rules! Whoever controls the money makes the regulations and the rules." Superintendent T recognized the control the state got from Proposal A as well. "We went from being a district where 98% of our money was local to one that is over 50% state funded. When the state has funding control, they also have program control.... We are far more attuned to what the state is doing. We are far less independent when it comes to finance. The board has had to change their thinking." These two superintendents described how the state has circumscribed local control through Proposal A.

In fact, several superintendents stated the loss of local control over and again in their response to the question of the effects of Proposal A on their school board. “Part of your local control has been severely eroded.” “... It’s shifted the locus of control for school funding from the local level to the state level...” “There has been a real shift, more toward state control on issues, that the board has had a lower level of leadership than I think it had before.... A lot is really dictated by law... When that shift was there, you really knew that the state was going to dictate that (control) through the funding cycle.”

Superintendent O, however, doesn’t believe local control of finances has been affected since his school board didn’t have a lot to begin with. He explained by saying,

I don’t think the finance piece is more controlled by the state now than it used to be. I think it’s the same control from the state because the state makes the laws. The laws previously said you had in-formula and out-of-formula districts. This was very unfair. You had to pass millages. In poor districts, it was more difficult to do that. With the law changes, you have the same control from the state. Just because it comes from the state and is distributed more equally, doesn’t mean the state has more control over it because it still comes from the tax payers. But it is sent through the state instead of directly through the schools. Ultimately, the control from the state is the same. They make the rules and we have to follow the rules. Some people wouldn’t agree with me because local people had the ability to give more money to the schools. In this district, that didn’t happen. They didn’t give us more money for schools so we struggled... The state control is the same as the finance piece goes.

Superintendent D expressed local control differently. He explained why he believed local control still existed with his school board. “The local control is how the funds get spent. Absolutely, no question about it, priorities are determined at the local level. Technology is a good example of that. It has been consuming hundreds of thousands of dollars, but it is a priority (with his school board). Even though funding is restricted, how it is spent on class size, where you have aides, those are all value

judgments on how to use that money,” So, whether the superintendents believed the state has taken more local control or just changed how it controls the money, it is clear that Proposal A has limited the local school boards’ ability to increase revenues for its schools. The evidence suggests that local school boards still have many decisions to make that reflect the school district’s community.

Changed the Locus of Funding

Superintendent E described the effects of funding public schools since Proposal A was selected as the funding choice in 1994. “I think a lot of the change came about with the school funding change. For years and years, there were the rich and the poor, in-formula and out-of-formula... I think that a real shift where school districts were funded previously and that became an era where kids and families being funded... Before Proposal A, before the changes... there was a lot more flexibility in things like curriculum and budget and that sort of thing.” Superintendent D saw a similar trend. “Our dependence on the number of students in our school district changed because (before) it didn’t make any difference how many students came here because 98% of the revenue was generated right here. That’s not true anymore. What the state did was redefine local tax and called it state tax. That part of property tax now goes to the state and then comes back in a different way that is more restrictive than it was in the past.” Incidentally, both Superintendents E and D lead school districts which were out-of-formula under the former school aid act.

Thus, school districts’ funding now depended on the number of students, not the value of the property within the school district. The result is school boards compete for student enrollment with neighboring school boards. Schools of choice and charter schools have encouraged the competition for students. Superintendent L described the effect on

his school board as, "...they (the school board members) have become more market sensitive."

Superintendent Q described and explained why his school board believed it needed to hire a marketing person. "The competition is for kids.... We recognize with charter schools and private schools and districts next door the competition is on. Let the games begin. Trying to get kids. This marketing person I've been talking about is helping us raise the ante. It will help us get into a little Madison Avenue. The school board is very supportive of this. The community doesn't understand it. We get calls and letters to the editor, "Why are you doing this?" They don't understand that it is your bread and butter now. You have to have kids." Superintendent W added, "The kind of revenues that 'choice school' students bring into our district allows us to operate programs."

Further, Superintendent W told how his school board questioned why he recommended enrolling schools of choice students when classroom space was limited. "Why would we want to be a school of choice and bring students from outside of our school district if we are tight for classroom space and we had to build all of this space?" My response basically was that we couldn't afford to operate without the choice kids. We couldn't offer our lower incident, lower enrollment programs at the secondary level, or even at the elementary level, without the additional revenue that schools of choice students bring in. So, that's one aspect of how it's changed the way we do business. I think it's taken board members a while to step out of the old model of our kids (who) live in our district boundaries and their parents pay for their education. Therefore, anyone that lives out of the district doesn't have the right to our school district's education. That's not

an argument anymore.” The school board recognizes what increased enrollment does for its school district’s operational revenues.

At least one superintendent expressed the ‘downside’ of the competition for students. He described this in terms of a battle. “What I think is bad is when districts start stealing kids from other districts and then it becomes divisive. ... When that happens, everybody feels they have to do it and that leads to war within districts...”

The dependence on student enrollment has its limitations on potential revenue. Superintendent P described and explained what effect Proposal A had on his school board and what looms in the very near future. He said, “With Proposal A, actually our base that was set when Proposal A took place, was high enough that the increases with Proposal A plus the fact that we are increasing in enrollment, has put us in a pretty good position. Back in 1993 or 1994, we had a fund balance of a half of million dollars. Now we have a fund balance of over 2 million dollars, so we have been able to build it up over time. But, I think the positives of it (Proposal A) now are going to turn into negatives in the future. Now our enrollment has leveled off, in fact, it has begun to decline at the elementary level... Proposal A has provided a ‘capitated system of funding.’ That is to say, there is a cap on the amount of money that we can receive. With the fact that we are going to be losing students, we are going to get less revenue proportionally. We are not going to be able to pay all of our expenses... All school systems are in the same boat. It is creating some new ‘have’ and ‘have nots’...” The superintendents in formerly ‘out of formula districts’ recognized the locus of funding moving from the school district to the student being funded. This has affected how their school board does business.

Created More Funding Equity

One goal of Proposal A was to create more funding equity between school districts. The heavy reliance on property tax created huge funding disparities between school districts with a large property tax base and those that had a small one. Thus, the cost of education had become a function of the property wealth in the community. Proposal A proponents believed the tax shift from property tax to sales tax would lessen this disparity. Superintendent X responded, “So we ended up supporting Proposal A having the belief that it would be very good in terms of equity for the districts under \$5000/kid....It (Proposal A) brought equity to the rural, small districts. They are more attuned with the money and their salaries are coming up.”

Not all superintendents believed that equity has been achieved, however. Superintendent J explained, “Under Proposal A... you slow down the growth of the high spending districts to decrease the gap between low spending districts and the high. Rich and poor, holding down the rich district and moving the poor up to narrow the gap. That’s the theory. You and I won’t live long enough to see the two (districts’ spending) come together. Look at School District Z, those places spending \$11,000 per kid. We spend \$6000 per kid. There is not enough money in the state to bring my district up to District Z. The politics are so vicious you can’t bring District Z down to here...” Superintendent R was also not so sure equity was achieved, however. He added, “... We are still fighting the equity issue hard. Proposal A, in our opinion, was property tax reform. It wasn’t educational finance reform. The gaps between rich and poor continue to exist. It is a priority of our district and school board to work with our legislators to improve the equity issue...” So, not all superintendents believed Proposal A achieved its goal of creating more funding equity.

Increased Funding in Previously Lower-funded Districts

Several superintendents indicated that Proposal A has had a positive effect on the funding in their school district. They were quite favorable toward Proposal A. All of these superintendents' school districts were below the state funding average in 1993 and have been 'playing catch-up' to the state average foundation grant since 1994. Their comments reflected their 'catch-up' status. Superintendent B explained, "On the financial side, obviously, there were some positives. Ever since then we have been increasing our fund balance. Quite frankly, one of the reasons we were able to do that is Proposal A. We were a low, low foundation starting school. We were a catch up district and won't have caught up until everyone else has caught up next year. It has allowed us, since we were getting 6-7% increases during this period, to improve programs somewhat, but to also sock some away." Likewise, Superintendent F reported, "Our district has benefited from Proposal A... because of the big bumps we got in the foundation grant to catch us up and the large number of new students, we've benefited a great deal." Superintendent I described what it meant in his school district. "We have a board policy that says ten percent (fund balance goal), but since Proposal A came in, we are leading a different life. We were one of the ones at the very bottom. There was no one getting less than us. ... We were 520th out of 525 in the state. ... This extra income we've been getting has allowed us to put in programs we never had before... We've built it (the fund balance) up now." And Superintendent A was still another superintendent that saw the upside of Proposal A. "... Our fund balance has continued to grow even though our expenses have increased proportionately... We don't know when Proposal A is going to impact us." So, the superintendents in the lower funded school districts pre-Proposal A saw it having positive effects on their school board.

Summary

The evidence given by the experienced superintendents supports the assertion that Proposal A has affected what school boards do and how school boards think. It has removed school boards from the millage business. No longer holding millage campaigns have had both positive and negative impact on school boards. Proposal A has created more funding equity while at the same time possibly diminishing local control. The fact is that the state controls the amount of revenue that school boards use to fund their operating expenses. School districts receive their revenue from the state based on student enrollment, not property wealth. The greatest impact of this revenue shift was felt by superintendents from previous 'out of formula' school districts. By definition, the researcher describes Proposal A as progressive legislation in that it increased funding equity between school districts, the amount of district resources and the surveillance of the state over matters formerly left to the local school board. The effect is that public education in Michigan is more centralized at the state level than it was ten years ago. It would seem that since school boards may no longer hold operational millage referendums in their school district, that their role has been altered. Instead, millage election resolutions have been replaced by schools of choice options and public school academy competition.

How did P. A. 289, the Revised School Code, affect what School Boards did?

The main provision of P. A. 289, the Revised School Code, gave the local school board more authority by granting it 'general powers' status instead of the 'limited powers' that it formerly had. Two superintendents indicated that P. A. 289 was the impetus for policy revisions. Several superintendents indicated that after P. A. 289, the state increased its legislative activity thereby further restricting the local authority.

The evidence, however, suggests that this increased authority for school boards has not occurred. The vast majority of the respondents answered that their school board had not changed what they had done previously. Several possible reasons why P. A. 289 has not affected school boards and what they do are described and explained.

There was one notable exception to the norm. This superintendent described P. A. 289 as a "watershed activity that many boards of education haven't realized yet." He described and explained what his school board did with its newly authorized 'general powers' and the potential it has for school boards to assert more authority and control over the school district, authority and control that has eroded through the years due to progressive legislation and the professional educators.

No Effect

The assertion that P. A. 289 has not changed what school boards did is supported by the following comments. "I wish I could be more definitive here, but it hasn't changed a thing here. It really hasn't." "Well, I attended every one of the workshops, but to be honest, I can't think of an area where a major change has been made in how we do business." "That didn't do a thing here. We talked about it. We read about it. The ISD came here and spoke to us about it, but honestly, nothing came of it. It is there, but we were not having a problem before that." "I don't think any. I mean they don't feel it and I

don't perceive it. We don't really do anything differently than we did. I think we had as much power before as we do now." "They do (recognize general powers), but in reality it has had very little impact on them. There are no specific issues that they have come out of that to my awareness. Occasionally, they will bump into it, but not really. It has minimal impact of the three (reform packages) you have mentioned. It has had little or no impact." "I have to remind them (the school board members) that we are a general powers district and that we do certain things with our organizational meeting. I don't think that has made one wit of difference. We haven't changed policies because of that." "Nothing. Minimal. Zero. It caused the state to revise the school code book and it's still about as unorganized a document as I have ever come across. General powers hasn't had any issues that have affected the district I'm in or had a bearing upon it." "I can't think of any significant changes that it has brought about." So, the evidence suggests several superintendents believe P. A. 289 did not affect their school board practices.

Small Effect

While Superintendents G and H had not seen a change in what their school boards did, their respective responses suggested it had some impact on their school district. "No, it hasn't changed it (the school board). It allowed the administration to be a little more flexible... Science teachers are tough to come by so we developed a home growth program where we hire a couple of our former grads who have graduated... decided they want to go into teaching... so while she's working on her teaching degree, she can teach.... But, basically it (P. A. 289) has not impacted our board." "I think it has done very little. It sounded like it would do a lot. It helped us in some areas. Possibly in subcontracting. If we want to subcontract work because we had union lockouts and things

like that. It helped us in this fashion, but overall they were to cut down the number of laws, but they're coming back up again.... Our policies are being revised, but very few are being drastically changed... on paper it looked good, but I don't think it has done a whole lot realistically." Again, the Revised School Code had done little to increase school board authority.

Negative Effect

Some of the respondents believed their school boards had been adversely affected by the Revised School Code, often reducing its authority. Superintendent A explained, "... since general powers and the elimination of much of the school code which we had operated under for years, their (the school board members') perception was that they would have more authority. In reality, they have no more than they had before. And very often, less.... Our board feels like they have less authority even though it's general powers." Superintendent R answered, "They (the school board members) keep seeing their powers eroded. Lansing keeps saying we want local control restored to all public agencies, but currently the board sees the state as more of a meddler than actually giving them more freedoms. Again, we strongly believe in local control and practice it. We deal with the mandates and the laws the best we can..." Superintendent J summed it up this way, "Increase it? No example I can give you. Every action they (the state) take ties your hands further."

Increase in Legislation Effect

Several superintendents believed that after P. A. 289 was enacted, the state increased regulations that further restricted local authority. Superintendent N explained, "We think that is humorous. In our opinion, the state legislature has meted out more rules

and regulations than ever before. ...Every time a new regulation comes out we say, 'We thought we had control over that.' We sense that every legislator feels they must make a regulation for public schools or it won't look like they are doing their job. It's ridiculous. They are supposed to be giving us more local control." Superintendent L recognized the increase in legislation also. "Frankly, I haven't seen us having a lot more freedom to operate. They (the state) immediately started legislating other things you are required to do. It (P. A. 289) was well intended. If it says you can't do it, then you can't. We hassled with them on driver's education funding. We got eight different answers from the state department. None held up, but it's mandated. General powers act says you can run your schools but..." Superintendent V added, "... They would give us more general powers and authority. I liked that. That was Engler's big thing. However, now in turn, ever since then each year, they are mandating more and more things that fly in the face of that concept. To be very honest with you, no, I don't think it's changed anything with us. But, it's ironic that they say we're going to give you general powers to do more and more local control. Then they're mandating more and more things each year from the state." Finally, Superintendent S responded, "General powers was a great idea. As soon as you put the general powers into effect, you started legislating categoricals and specific laws again." These superintendents believed that for any extended authority a school board was possibly granted under P. A. 289, further legislative mandates had negated P. A. 289's impact in the years that followed.

Policy Revision Effect

Superintendent B said P. A. 289 required his school board to do a policy review. He reported, "... it required us to do a policy review as a board. That book (pointing to a

book on his desk) is a policy book. We did a total policy review as a result of that.

Because of the general powers nature of that act, we found that the board had a few more freedoms than they had before. That had both the good and the bad. One of the issues we had to deal with right away is that under the act, for example, the ability to review grades of a teacher changed. Before, there was a state act that said what you could do. Under general powers, there was nothing. So we had to create policy for the way we wanted to handle it. So, it created more work, but all in all, I haven't seen too many negatives from that." Likewise, Superintendent X explained that P. A. 289 was the catalyst for policy revisions. "That was one of the reasons we wanted to revise our district policies because the general powers had come into play. We figured we needed fewer policies and those things that weren't prescribed by law, we would be presumed to be able to deal with as a district as opposed only what was prescribed in law would we have the right to deal with it. It was on that basis that we thought we needed fewer policies rather than more policies... So, it did affect the board in that they went in the opposite direction of what we thought they should because of the general powers' policy. (Early in the interview Superintendent X had described how the intent of the policy revision was to 'cut down' on the number of policies the district operated within. The opposite had occurred, however, when MASB gave them examples of all of the policies they had worked with other school districts. So as the administration tried to pare the policies down, the prevailing question from the school board was, 'Why is the administration trying to get rid of all of these?' So, P. A. 289 caused school districts to revise their policy books.

Why Such Minimal Effect?

The suggestion that P. A. 289, the Revised School Code, didn't provide an opportunity for school boards to extend its authority should not be confused with the fact that it had little effect on many school boards. There were a few possible reasons implied by the respondents.

One possible reason why school boards were reluctant to change includes the idea proposed by Superintendents B and F. "Are the general powers a big umbrella of opportunity for people? "It might be if a school board was less conservative than this one. This one tends to do what was done before if within reason. We are not out to recreate the world..." "We haven't had a big hue and cry from our board to really use all those authorities and powers they have. I think they would just as soon just kind of operate as they have. They've been real successful now for 10 years. As we get new members and they kind of want to go in different directions, we just remind them where we were and where we are now..." In these communities, it seems the school boards were satisfied with the status quo. Superintendent W believed this was the reason why many of the school boards showed indifference toward P. A. 289. He asked the researcher, "Who are you talking to? You're talking to superintendents that have been around for 10 or 12 years all right? You're talking to people who have been in relatively politically stable communities. You're talking to people who are serving in school districts who are relatively satisfied with the service they are getting, right?"

Superintendent S explained another possible reason why school districts didn't extend their authority. Essentially, on the advice of the superintendent, school boards minimally comply with state edicts. "A lot of legal changes, what you can do is duck.

Take the school violence package coming out down the road that the governor will sign. We will have teacher snap decisions, which will be interesting for principals. They can suspend their own kids without administrative oversight. That will all take place for awhile. We will write some policies and monitor it and it will go away after awhile. The legislature has to show they are responsive just like we do. I am not into having major reactions to legislation..."

A third possible reason school boards were not affected by P. A. 289 is a lack of understanding by the school board members as to what P. A. 289 and the 'general powers' authority had extended to them as the school board. Superintendent X explained it this way. "I don't think they have really assessed what that means to local control, to the ability of the board... to do things differently than we did in the past.... I don't know whether they (the board members) saw it as a link to presumed powers or not. I did. I thought it was wide open now and we can do what we need to do to serve the kids. We just haven't discussed it at that level... I don't think our board has thought about that particular change in legislation as a way to change the role relationship between the board and the administration." This lack of understanding wasn't prevalent in all districts, however.

One Big Effect

Only one of the twenty-five superintendents interviewed described and explained the phenomenon that occurred with Superintendent W's school board. Superintendent W began,

Our previous board leadership had a very good perspective on the power that could be had through general powers to school districts. He (the school board president) had a clear understanding that there is a window of opportunity in the creation and the establishing of the board of education bylaws. They could

conceivably give boards of education tremendous power over virtually every aspect of the school district. To some degree, our board of education's leadership took that power. One of the first things our newly elected board leadership (president) did three years ago was to establish board bylaws. We worked very closely with MASB, but in the process of establishing bylaws, what our board leadership (president), and I'll continue to emphasize leadership because I think the leadership had a much different agenda than at least the minority and probably full understanding of the majority of the board. What the board leadership did was create a system of committees and committee oversight that in one way or another had one or two board members always assigned to a committee. And they created a process using redrawn bylaws to gather information, to monitor activities, to infuse, to inject, actually, board members into the decision making process. Deeper into the bureaucracy, deeper into the district than had ever been done before... But, the board bylaws, every school district has to have bylaws and we got on the bandwagon early and we established our bylaws. I was given a very clear message and I understood the message that the role of the superintendent is not to get between the board bylaws and the board. But the board wants to have the bylaws written in a way that gives them powers or ability or influence lower into the organization than they ever had before. And (if) that's what the elected officials want and that's what the board wants, that's what the board is going to get. So, the revision of the school code to give general powers to local boards of education, I think it's really, really key. It's a watershed. It's a watershed activity, action, that many boards of education haven't realized yet. But, you couple that with the ability for a board of education to load up a board with a single interest and their ability to control the organizational structure of their bylaws and you combine those, you've got an interesting combination that could radically change a school district over a very short period of time. There was, in my opinion, a very clear individual agenda that was brought into our board of education that was continued through the election process at the next board of education election. And then, the target was the bylaws that gave individual board members and the board of education more powers, more authority, and...

This example suggests that the authority extended school boards by P. A. 289 is much greater than most of the school board members, or even their superintendents, recognize. The example described and explained demonstrates P. A. 289's capacity to transform the school district from one headed by the educational professionals to one led by the elected school board members. The reality, however, suggests this has not occurred in most school districts.

Summary

P. A. 289, the Revised School Code, has not affected what nearly all school boards in the study do. Most likely, communication regarding P. A. 289's capacity to increase authority for the school board was disseminated by the superintendent or his designee. Quite possibly, the capacity of this legislation to further empower the school board was never examined. Given that the most of the experienced superintendents had been in their school district for ten or more years, this suggests the school board was satisfied with what was occurring. Looking for new and different governing provisions was unnecessary. Thus, according to the superintendents, this legislation had zero impact in 96% of the school districts' respondents.

The lone exception, however, demonstrated the capacity P. A. 289 has to increase the scope of authority for school boards, most likely at the expense of the bureaucracy. In the one school district where P. A. 289 had a big effect, its school board leadership recognized the opportunity to include itself in all parts of the school organization through the formulation and development of its bylaws for governing matters. (Previously, bylaws were unnecessary because the school boards had been "limited" in their governance powers by the fact there had to provisions cited in the School Code of 1976 to allow them to do something.) This school board penetrated the bureaucracy unlike any previous one. School board members were deeply involved in the education bureaucracy. The result was more power and authority than the school board had ever had before. The cost, however, was removal by office through the democratic process. The school board leadership failed to get re-elected. The community evidently wasn't ready for the delicate balance of governance to tilt in favor of the school board. Local control via the school board election was asserted.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The researcher has described and explained how the role of the school board evolved over the past 200 years. The early common schools were largely decentralized, local entities reflecting the community's values and expectations. By the mid-19th century, many urban school districts had hired superintendents to oversee the schools, the first major change affecting the school board's role. Gradually and incrementally, superintendents and their accompanying bureaucracies took over many of the duties that schools boards had done as part of our country's grass roots tradition.

The second major change in the role of school boards was caused by decentralization and the widespread inefficiencies found in many rural and urban school boards. Led by Cubberly, the Administrative Progressives recommended that school boards should act as a legislative body and turn the executive functions over to the superintendent. This action further increased the role of the educational professional. Since that time, court decisions rendering equity, the growth of collective bargaining for school employees and a number of federal and state initiatives further challenged what school boards do.

The researcher's purpose in this dissertation was to describe and explain the role of Michigan public school boards in 1999. To assist in this task, the researcher also sought to learn the role of the superintendent in relationship to the school board, and to determine if the three education reforms of the 1990s further altered the school boards' role. In answering these questions, the researcher argues that school boards continue to play a central role in the governance of Michigan's K-12 public school districts. That is,

even in the face of increasing state control and the accompanying increases in the professional bureaucracy, the school board's role is important and continuous. The school board serves the function of buffering the organization from the uncertainties that affect public education. The school board oversees the educational bureaucracy by its legal authority. In so doing, it is a "check and balance" of the professional administration. Further, the school board reflects our country's representative democracy in action.

This final chapter begins by summarizing the answers to the three exploratory questions that guided this study. The evidence provided by the experienced superintendents suggests that school districts are more functional when the school board allows the professional administrator to run the school district, but that the school board has an important role. The researcher explains the delicate balance between the professional administration and the school board. Lastly, the researcher argues for the continued need for the lay school board in the largely professional-dominated world of the public school organization.

1. What is the role of the Michigan public school board in 1999?

Using Thompson's explanation of organizational rationality, the Michigan public school boards reduce uncertainty in the local education organization. The school board buffers the technical and management levels from the many variables that could disrupt and interfere with the educational endeavors of its school districts. Thus, the role of the Michigan public schools is to buffer, to protect or lessen the shock of an impact, the public school organization from the vagaries of outside pressures and/or inputs.

Specifically, the researcher argued the school board reduces uncertainty by buffering its school system in the following ways:

- By hiring the right superintendent to run the bureaucracy of its school district;

- By legitimizing decisions through school board policy;
- By representing the interests and concerns of the community through both formal and informal means;
- By serving as change agents, i.e. supporting the efforts of the educational professionals in bringing substantive change in its school district; and
- By negotiating contracts with its school district's employees.

Further, the school board provides oversight of several critical areas in the public school organization. These include personnel, finance and curriculum. With few exceptions, however, the researcher found that school boards usually followed the recommendations or the advice of the superintendent and/or his designee in making decisions in these very important functions. Most often, the superintendents believed it was necessary for their school boards to receive and act upon their recommendations in these three areas since the experienced superintendent had a better understanding of the issues involved with each recommendation. Yet, the school board legitimized the recommendations through official school board action.

2. What does the superintendent do relative to the school boards' authority?

The evidence presented in Chapter Three supports the assertion that the superintendent is the leader or "point man" in the school district. Most often, the superintendent, or his central office staff, is involved in all aspects of the school district. The managerial level makes the recommendations for decisions to be legitimized by the school board. The general tendency is that the more leadership and direction the administrative professional assumes, the less the school board becomes involved in the day-to-day operations of the school district. Experience superintendent respondents referred to daily management interference from the school board as micromanaging. This school board involvement is discouraged. The evidence gained from these superintendent

interviews suggests that the leadership and the direction provided by the superintendent are crucial for the school district to function. The researcher found that experienced superintendents in these school districts do the following:

- Initiate and write policy;
- Make recommendations in decision-making; and
- Communicate with stakeholders, especially the school board.

The scope of these three actions taken by superintendents is unlimited. Their leadership, whether direct or indirect, affects all aspects of the broad-based, bureaucratic public school system. As such, the researcher argues that the role of the superintendent is more expansive than that of the school board, but not necessarily more important. A clear distinction between the two roles is important in well-functioning school districts. The superintendent leads and directs the educational organization while the school board buffers and oversees the public school organization.

Policy-making is what school boards have done in the years since the Administrative Progressive's model was adopted throughout the U.S. While it is true the school boards do set policy, the evidence given by the experienced superintendents is clear that superintendents, or other informed sources, initiate and write most of the school district policy. In effect, the educational administrators devise policy. That is, when school boards are described as establishing policy, they are officially sanctioning what the superintendent or his designee has suggested and written. This authorization legitimizes the actions of the educational professionals. (The evidence suggests how seldom the school board initiates or writes school board policy.) Thus, by sanctioning policy, the school board buffers the technical core and the management by validating the actions of the educational bureaucracy.

Superintendents or their designees make recommendations on nearly every issue that comes before the school board. Often, there is written and/or discussion regarding the merits of the differing sides of each issue. With few exceptions the experienced superintendents reported their school boards legitimized these bureaucratic recommendations without a dissenting vote. Once again, the school board buffers the educational bureaucracy by making the final decisions or perhaps, more accurately, endorsing the decisions made by the professionals. Similar to establishing school board policy, the final decision is generally one that was recommended by the administrative professional.

The superintendent communicates with his school board about everything. This suggests the more information the school board members know, the more knowledgeable and informed decisions they can make. This knowledge may help buffer the organization as board members talk with their constituencies. Inundating the school board with communication has other possible effects as well. Danzberger (1992) believed it “allowed school administrators rather than board members to “control” policy, particularly because many administrators have made it a practice to overwhelm boards with detail-and reams of meaningless paper and statistics not vital to governance” (p. 7).

Frequent communications may be the necessary “feeding and watering” of the board members some respondents referred to during the interviews. Perhaps superintendents believe Machiavelli was right when he wrote, “... Wise princes have always taken great pains not to make the nobles despair, and to satisfy the people and keep them content; this is one of the most important tasks a prince must do” (p. 60). Communicating with school boards is one way the experienced superintendents kept the

school board members content. Whatever the reason for the minutia of detail, the evidence is clear that these superintendents keep their school boards informed about everything.

The role of the school board is best explained by knowing what the superintendent does in a Michigan public school organization. On the one hand, the school board (the representative democracy) has the legal authority to supervise and control the operations of the school district (380.11a; 380.611; 380.1102). On the other hand, the superintendent (the lead bureaucrat) is the person most responsible for controlling the functions of the bureaucracy since this educational professional has the knowledge, the expertise and the experience to make the appropriate recommendations to the interested citizenry (the school board members). This is a delicate balance of control and responsibility. The researcher believes the evidence given by the experienced superintendents supports his finding that the educational professional is most responsible for policy development and formulation, for communicating with the stakeholders, and for making recommendations in decision-making. As such, the more the superintendent does, the lesser role the school board has. The school board, however, allows the superintendent to function within board parameters, namely school board policy. Superintendents often refer to school board policy as they make recommendations with difficult or controversial decisions. The school board provides the superintendent with public approval and the appearance of democratic decision-making. When tough or controversial decisions regarding local issues occur, the school board makes it more likely that the public will accept it. Thus, school board policy buffers the professional educators from outside pressures and variables.

3. Has the role of the school board changed in the past 10 years due to the legislative education reforms?

The three education reforms examined included P. A. 25, P. A. 335/336 and P. A. 289. A brief discussion of the net effect of each education reform on the school board's role follows.

The Effect of P. A. 25

While P. A. 25 legislation may have created a deeper understanding and appreciation of curriculum and the delivery systems operating in the various school districts, the evidence supports the assertion that P. A. 25 did not affect what school boards did. It most likely affected the technical core, the teachers and building principals. Thus, the school board role was unaffected by P. A. 25.

The Effect of P. A. 335/336

Due to the scope of this reform package, the researcher divided the legislation into three salient areas he believed the superintendents could respond to in an informed manner. These were questions regarding Proposal A, the increased significance of statewide MEAP testing and the extended school year.

The analysis would seem to support the assessment that Proposal A affected what school boards do. After P. A. 335/336 passed, school boards could no longer hold operating fund millages. This affected what school boards do and how they think about school finances. The state now provides 80% of the funding. Since the state now controls the operating revenue, many superintendents believed there has been a loss of local control. Proposal A has affected the way operating revenue is generated. The reliance upon the foundation grant has forced school boards to vie for 'schools of choice' students instead of operational millage to increase its general fund revenue. So, despite the school

boards' loss of tax levying privileges by holding millage elections, school boards still must vie for more operating funds. Thus, many superintendents believe what school boards do for their school districts have not been affected.

Other evidence suggests that the loss of running millage campaigns has reduced a source of identifying potential school board members. Still other experienced superintendents have seen their school districts fund equity and program capabilities increased due to the foundation grant increases in operating revenue. In short, the funding change caused by Proposal A has affected the role of the school boards to one degree or another. Most often, the effect was dependent upon the overall financial stability of the school district prior to Proposal A.

The researcher found evidence to support his assertion that MEAP testing has driven curriculum reform, or at the very least, curriculum realignment at the local level. Despite the fact that MEAP has caused curriculum changes, the impact on what school boards do as a result of the increased significance of MEAP is minimal. Again, the earlier evidence given by the experienced superintendents supported the assertion that school boards didn't do much with curriculum before the legislation. While, P. A. 335/336 affected school district curriculum through the increased significance of MEAP testing, the effects on the school board role was negligible.

The evidence regarding the extended school year suggests that the respondents' school boards have probably been tangentially affected in negotiations with salaried employees. While the extended school year provision has made negotiations more acrimonious and difficult in some school districts, this legislation has not altered what school boards do. However, it is likely that as the extended length of the school term is

continuous in the upcoming school years (through 2010), school boards will be faced with the challenge of meeting the extended school year mandate with limited resource increases from the state.

In summary, the two most tangible changes brought by P. A. 335/336 that possibly affected school board were the loss of tax levying authority and the local control of curriculum. Yet, the evidence from the experienced superintendents suggested what their school boards do has not been greatly affected as a result of this education reform legislation.

The Effect of P. A. 289

The Revised School Code (P. A. 289) has the greatest capacity to affect the role of school boards. Ironically, it is the legislation that all, but one of the respondents informed the researcher had not had any, or, at least, very insignificant effect on their school boards or their school district. Possibly, the school boards' lack of understanding regarding the implications of this legislation was one reason. Most of the information the school board receives comes through the superintendent's office. It's possible the implications of this legislation were never fully disseminated and/or discussed with many school boards. Since the superintendents interviewed had been in the district ten or more years, satisfaction with the balance between the superintendent and the school board was not questioned. The one exception to the norm demonstrated how significantly P. A. 289 could increase the scope of authority for school boards, most likely at the expense of the administrative professional.

Summary of the Education Reforms Effects

The three education reforms presented, P. A. 25, P. A. 335/336 and P. A. 289, have had virtually no impact on the role of the public school board. (A similar finding

was discovered in the previously described Pilot Study.) Perhaps, the loss of tax levying privileges was the most salient effect mentioned by the experienced superintendents. Running millage campaigns, however, has been replaced by vying for students. Of the three, P. A. 289 has the most capacity to change what school boards do although this potential has not been experienced by most school boards, however.

The Conclusion

The role of the school board in the public school organization has been analyzed in terms of what the experienced superintendents see their school boards doing in their school district. While the historical record asserts that many of the tasks that school boards traditionally did have been absorbed by professional administrators or have been altered by progressive legislation, the researcher argues the 1999 Michigan K-12 public school board continues to have a central role in the governance of its schools. The school board buffers the educational bureaucracy from the uncertainties of the public school organization as it operates in an open system. The school board buffers its school system in at least five ways.

Buffering occurs:

- by hiring the superintendent to lead and direct the school system;
- by legitimizing decisions through the approval of school board policy;
- by representing the interests and concerns of the community to the professional administration;
- by supporting the efforts of the superintendent during change efforts; and
- by negotiating contracts with the school district's employees.

In addition, the school board provides oversight of several critical areas in the public school organization. These are personnel, finance and curriculum. While the

evidence supports the assertion that the school board most often follows the recommendation of its superintendent, the school board is the “check and balance” for the public school system. The “check and balance” concept was explained by Superintendent S as he explained, “It (the school board) represents the democratization of the governance system so that people feel comfortable there are elected school board members on there that have an oversight responsibility.” Further, he added, “If there isn’t an accountability system there is the assumption that things could be unresponsive.” While school board members may not have any specific expertise in the areas of personnel, finance or curriculum, their oversight of the educational professionals is an important role for the public school board.

The researcher argues the school board brings an abstract dimension to the public school organization that professional administration can not provide. That is, as the well-functioning school board represents the community, it embodies what the community is thinking about its local schools and issues. Superintendent L described this concept in the following. “They (the school board members) serve a great purpose in generating credibility among their peers (the public).” The school district could not afford to pay any bureaucratic department to provide the service school board members do, nor could it arguably do it as effectively. Perhaps, the school board is the best public relations firm a school district could hire. At the lest, the school board provides a reality check on the educational bureaucrats.

Further, the school board is local control, that is, democracy at its grass roots. As such, the school board is government by the people, the common person. Morone (1990) writes, “The democratic wish imagines a single united people, bound by consensus over

the public good which is discerned through direct citizen participation in community settings” (p. 7). The school board provides the opportunity for the democratic wish to come true. The researcher argues that school boards continue to be a healthy indication of local control and the survival of local democracy. That is, school boards are comprised of local community members making informed decisions regarding the public good. This is democracy in its truest sense.

The by-product of the lay school board member is loyalty. Earlier, Tyack, Kirst and Hanshot (1980) wrote, “In a democratic polity, to be able to influence an institution helps to create loyalty to it. Loyalty without voice is blind, voice without loyalty can easily lead to disillusionment and exit.” Indeed, the local public school boards are a reflection of the loyalty of the constituents within the school district. The researcher argues that school boards breed community loyalty to its school districts. Not unlike the early common schools, the local public schools continue to reflect the community values and expectations. Again, Superintendent L reminded the researcher of this loyalty. “School administrators need to remember that school board members are committed to the community.”

Indeed, the role of the school board remains significant. The school boards have a substantive role in buffering the educational organization and providing oversight of the educational bureaucracy, its teachers, principals and central office administrators. The school board has a delicate balancing act between supporting the leadership and the direction of the educational experts and representing the community’s values and expectations. The respondents’ school boards generally seemed able to meet this challenge. The superintendents were very positive toward their school boards. It was

clear that the respondents believed the school board should follow the administrative recommendations, but the superintendents understood the politics of decision-making. The feedback the school board gave the superintendent often helped shape the superintendent's recommendation. Mutual respect was the norm.

Additionally, school boards are democracies in action. Democracy is not something you read about and it becomes a part of you. Perhaps, de Tocqueville, explained the democratic experience best as told by Blits. "...True enlightenment is mainly derived from experience; and if Americans had not become accustomed to govern themselves, their book-learning would not help them much at present" (p. 24). Further, Blits adds, "... Just as participation in local government imparts a concern for public affairs, it also serves to alleviate the atomization of democratic society. It draws people out of themselves and, engaging them in common tasks, teaches them to realize their interdependence" (p.24). The researcher argues the role of the school board furthers democracy through local control of its public schools.

The Study in Relation to Previous Work

Previous studies discussed in Chapter One found that earlier school boards did many of the same things that this researcher found they continue to do in 1999. More specifically, Goldhammer (1964) found that school boards performed four different roles in relationship to the community. Goldhammer reported that school boards set school district policy, reviewed financial decisions, served as court of appeals and promoted the education function.

The I.E.L. (Institute of Educational Leadership 1986) surveyed public school board members from across the United States. The study reported continuous strong support for maintaining the role of the school board as interpreter of the community and

the protector against the excesses of professional educators. Among its findings germane to this study, the I.E.L. reported that school board members were increasingly perceived as representing special interests and not representing the whole community, and that school board members continue to grapple with tensions over the gray areas between policymaking and administrative responsibilities.

Luecker's qualitative study (1992) was completed through interviews with 15 school board members from rural and suburban school districts in northern Illinois. In her study, Luecker derived six major properties of school board role. These were oversight of finances, programs and personnel, policy, sounding board, communications, decision-making and change agents. Just as the superintendents in the researcher's study expressed positive relationships toward their school boards, Luecker's respondents reported positive relationships with their superintendents.

Each of these studies suggested that school boards were a significant link between the professional educators and the public. In this capacity, school boards represented the interests of the community while supporting the efforts of its professionals. School boards were viewed as local control of the common good. They were the "check and balance" for the administrative professionals and their educational bureaucracies.

The researcher's study has added to the understanding of school boards and what they do in the public school organization. The study's extensive narrative traced the evolution of the school board role from its New England beginnings to the present era. (The early start of public education in Michigan is of special interest.) The researcher reported how progressive legislation, seeking to centralize public education, and the professional administrator were the two most significant factors affecting the role of the

school board through the years. As such, the researcher believes he has written an instructional dissertation that will benefit his intended audience.

The researcher's evidence presented previously found that the role of school boards has not changed dramatically from what the previous studies suggested. Using Thompson's theoretical open system's model as a framework, however, the researcher conceptualized the Michigan public school system into three discrete levels. Once this model was understood, the governance role of the school board was crystallized and better understood. The three levels identified by Thompson are: the technical core- teachers and building principals; the managerial level- the superintendent and other central office staff; and the institutional level- the public school board. Each of these levels has discrete responsibilities and control, but they are interdependent upon each other. That is, for the public school organization to continue, each of the entities must fulfill its role. Specifically, the school board's role of buffering allows the technical core and the managerial level to function despite the many uncertainties that buffet them. As such, the school board helps ensure organizational rationality to the public school system. Thus, the role of the Michigan public school board in the educational organization is as important as ever.

Restatement of the Thesis

Despite the increase in state control and the accompanying increase in the professional bureaucracy, the researcher argues that Michigan public school boards play a central role in the governance of the K-12 education organizations. Its role is a delicate balance between the educational professionals and their expertise and the local community and its values and expectations. The school board assists organizational rationality by buffering the professional educators from the many variables that affect it.

It provides oversight of the three critical areas of personnel, finance and curriculum in the public school system. Even more, the school board is the embodiment of democracy as its members make decisions on the public good of education.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The researcher discovered that there has been very little research completed in the area of school boards and the role that the school board has in the governance of schools. As a result, he approached the study of school board role as a novice seeking to explore virtually uncharted waters. He determined that the dilemma he experienced in developing a researchable question regarding what school boards did was part of the problem. School boards are ubiquitous to public education, yet no one is absolutely certain what they do or what authority they have. The researcher found school board membership is truly "...the most ill-defined position in local government" (Egleston p. 30). Thus, trying to determine if the role of the school board had changed due to further educational reforms of the 1990s proved to be difficult.

Since there was no one study that could be used as a comparison for a before and after-type approach, the researcher knew he had to be somewhat creative. By creating an historical perspective that traced the evolution of the school board role from its earliest beginnings to the present time, the researcher hoped to demonstrate how progressive legislation and the accompanying growth of bureaucracy had narrowed the scope of the school board's role. He believed he was successful in that end.

Further, the researcher sought to determine if the school board role had been affected by the recent educational reforms passed by Michigan's legislature and signed by its governors in the 1990s. Since he couldn't recreate the evidence of the school board role of the 1980s, he finally made a decision to interview superintendents who had been

in that position prior to the 1990s' reforms. By doing this, however, the study inherently took on the perspective of the educational professional and his experiences with school boards. Thus, this is the superintendent's story.

Initially, the "busyness" of the dissertation caused the researcher to become distracted from his original question. That is, have the public school boards been affected by the three described education reform packages of the 1990s. The superintendents interviewed were not necessarily impressed with the reforms or could they recite many changes incurred upon the school board role as a result of their passage. The experienced superintendents did talk a lot about what they did in lieu of what the school board did. The researcher came to see that as "the story" in his study. Thus, much of the data describes and explains what the school board does in concert with what these experienced superintendents do. The conclusion describes and explains how the school board, despite the presence of the experienced superintendent, has a central role in the governance of the public school district. It would be interesting to see if the same or similar conclusion would be made if different samples of respondents were included. Therefore, the following suggestions for further study are presented.

- Complete a similar study with superintendents who have been fired or forced to resign.
- Complete a study with school board members' whose school board service began in the 1980s and continues today.
- Complete a study with a random questionnaire to superintendents asking them to respond to the role of the school board and what he/she does in relationship to school board authority as presented in the conclusion. This would give the study a measure of magnitude that theoretical sampling can't.
- Complete a study with a random questionnaire to school board members asking them to respond to the role of the school board and its relationship with the superintendent as presented in the conclusion. This would give the study the perspective of the other side of educational governance.

By doing one or a combination of two of the above suggestions, the study would give a better overall perspective of the role of the school board and what it does for Michigan public school districts. Other suggested topics of study that emerged as the study was going include the following.

- Study the impact of Proposal A on voter apathy/participation in their public schools.
- Complete a case study in school districts where P. A. 289 has had an effect.

Despite the evidence that suggests school districts are run by the superintendent, the school board has a central role in the governance of its school district. With the potential looming when many new superintendents will take over school districts in the near future, the researcher recommends that graduate schools and professional organizations be more intentional and effective in developing a better understanding of the role of the school board and the professional relationship a superintendent should have with his/her school board.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

A Pilot Study

An Analysis of the Minutes of One School District

The purpose of this study is to describe and explain the role of Michigan public school boards in 1999. The researcher has argued that during the past 160 years, progressive educational reforms in the organization and administration of Michigan's local schools have continually altered the school board's role. By progressive educational reforms, the researcher means those actions that increase: (a) equity between school districts, (b) the amount of district resources, (c) the surveillance by the State over matters that were formerly left to the local districts, (d) the administrative and bureaucratic specialization that has to be devoted to enforcing state and federal mandates, (e) the uniformity and efficiency of instructional programs. The progressive nature of educational reforms has continued in Michigan with P. A. 25 and P. A. 335/336. Alternately, P. A. 289 has been described as the legislature's nervous reaction to the previous reform packages. The impact of these public acts suggests that the school board's role has changed. Thus, analyzing what school boards were doing before and after the reforms of the 1990s may demonstrate how the roles of school boards continue to change.

Units of Analysis

To determine how the role of the school board has changed, the researcher used school board minutes. School board minutes provide the legal "lens" to see what official actions a Board took to educate the students of their district. Nowakowski and First (1989) argue, "It is through minutes that a Board speaks, and minutes become official when formally approved by the Board" (p.391). While they are quick to point out the limitations of board minutes since much of the activity of the district occurs by administrative directive and informal discussion, they believe school board minutes are a

reliable and valid measure of what school boards do. Learning what school boards do should help explain the role school boards have.

The first set of Board minutes was from a mid-Michigan school district in the 1987-88 school year. This was two years before Michigan's first major educational reform, P. A. 25 of 1990. The second set of minutes for the same Michigan district was from the 1997-98 school year. This was two years after the third major educational reform, P. A. 289, the Revised School Code. (Specifically, this reform was meant to grant school boards more authority by making Michigan a "general powers" state.) The researcher believes the two-year period was an adequate amount of time after the education reforms were passed for any changes in the role of the school board to be implemented and the resultant change in role recognized in the school board minutes.

The Lens for Analysis

An analytic framework similar to the one successfully used by Nowakowski and First (1987) was adopted to quantify each school board action (see Table 2). (Nowakowski and First used the framework to analyze the board minutes of twelve Illinois school districts over a three-year period to measure the impact and implementation of Illinois Educational Reform Act of 1985 on local school boards.) The researcher believed that by assigning each motion to a type category he would be better able to measure a change in the role of Board by seeing what the Board's official actions were. (By chance, the district chosen to analyze was in the midst of a building project as reflected by the minutes of each respective school year. This provided the potential for more consistent motions since the Board was dealing with a similar project. Having a

bond project in one set of minutes and not in the other would have distorted the percentage of motions made in each category.)

Table 2- Motion Analysis Framework

MOTION CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION OF MOTIONS
1. Procedural	Approval of agenda Approval of minutes Approval of standing committee format Election of Board officers Move to and from closed (executive) session Extend meeting time past 10:00 p.m. Adjournment
2. Report Approval	Personnel Committee Finance and Facility Committee Policy and Program Committee State of schools report by superintendent
3. Personnel	▪ Hires ▪ Coaching/driver's education positions named ▪ Posting of extra duty positions ▪ Retirements/resignations ▪ Leaves ▪ Lay-offs ▪ Approval of new position(s) ▪ American Education Week proclamation ▪ Recognition of coach of the year ▪ District teacher of the year award ▪ Citizen of the year award ▪ Pay adjustment for Board secretary ▪ Approval of superintendent's goals ▪ Grievance hearings
4. Students	Tuition students Release students to another school district Student club funds transfer to another student club Expulsion of student Student field trips Early graduation request by student Academic hall of fame Reversal of expulsion
5. Finance/Business Management	Bills approval Annual budget Public hearing budget State aid resolution Tax levy/summer

	Bond resolution Building fund data Auditor selection/approval Auditor report approval Borrow money approval Bids for contracts and other agreements Purchases of equipment or property Legal counsel approval Food service budget approval Lunch fee approval Athletic fee approval/season passes fee Site study by architect Sale/purchase of used equipment/buses List of signatories for bank accounts Agreement to pay one half the cost of employee healthstyles program Approval of a Foundation to serve as the sponsor of space technology Snow/ice removal agreement with city Rental of space for adult education Asbestos study payment Resolution to set annual school election/officers Revise boundary description for the sale of property Headlee rollback language added to millage resolution Approval of plat for new subdivision Easements for utility companies Truth in taxation hearing Approval for administration to continue researching the cost of a new press box Approval of new press box Approval of new cross country course Facilities usage Sub-contracting employee to another school district Investing bond proceeds Employee contracts Post-prom funds
6. Policy	Policy readings Approval of policies Adoption of Board goals Adoption of school calendar Adoption of mission statement Adoption of textbook purchase recommendation Communication/decision-making flow chart regarding bond project Approval of community/adult ed programs/description of courses

	District participation in CHAMP program at MSU Approval of exceeding the number of students in two middle school classes Set graduation date for HS/adult ed Operation of driver's ed with additional costs to consumer Approval of K-12 courses Schools of choice Approval of smoking permitted area Continue to hold baccalaureate Job descriptions Increase in the number of credit hours from 21-22 to graduate from H.S. Approval of prom ending at 12:00 a.m. K-12 curriculum approval Adoption of DARE program
7. Professional Linkages	MASB membership/representative/affiliation MHSAA
8. Bond (Building)	Construction bids sought/awarded Construction manager Project coordinator Site work approval Facility plan approval Revisions of bid specifications to adjust for cost overruns Requests for architect to find alternative options Amending bid awards Termination of contract with architect after Phase I and II are completed Hired new architect

The above framework of analysis was used as the basis for assigning each similar type motion to the same category. This was done for each motion for the first and last years included in the ten-year period. Table 3 allowed for a comparison to be made between the school board actions in 1987-88 and the school board actions of 1997-98. A significant change in these actions would indicate that the role of the school board had changed.

Table 3- Comparison of 1987-88 and 1997-98 School Board Motions

CATEGORY OF MOTIONS	NUMBER OF MOTIONS 87-88	PERCENT OF MOTIONS 87-88	NUMBER OF MOTIONS 97-98	PERCENT OF MOTIONS 97-98
Procedural	83	25%	62	27%
Report Approval	3	1%	10	4%
Personnel	70	21%	28	12%
Students	8	2%	9	4%
Finance/Business	90	27%	78	33%
Policy	36	11%	22	9%
Professional Linkages	9	3%	4	2%
Bond Issues	34	10%	21	9%
Total	333	100%	232	100%

Findings: The Role of the School Board

The largest percentage of motions of both of years of minutes was in the Finance/Business Management category. This is a broad category that covered a wide range of motions. This category included bill approvals, various fee approvals, resolutions for bonds, millages, and annual school elections, annual budgets and beyond. Frequently, these motions followed the recommendation of the administration, but there were exceptions. Thus, the school board provided administrative oversight, especially in the areas of school budgets and expenditures. These were closely monitored on a regular basis. This supports Golhammer's assertion that the role of the school board is as a "conservator of finances" (1965).

For example, early in the 1987-88 school year (September), the new superintendent had the business manager prepare a one page summary as a treasurer's report that included the beginning balance, investments, disbursements, and balances to replace the full activity report. This would make the budget report far less cumbersome

for the board members to handle each month. School board oversight was provided in that the full activity report was to be reviewed and initialed by one board member each month. By the January 11 (1988) meeting, the Board president expressed his wish to meet with the superintendent and the business manager to review a different format for the treasurer's report to provide more information (p. 1). During the treasurer's report of the February 8 board meeting, the Board treasurer asked the board members to review the new report format that provided a "more meaningful and informative report" (p. 1). This action makes it clear the Board viewed its role as watching the purse strings of the district. In effect, the school board did not trust the superintendent or business manager to spend the district's money without its review and blessing.

Further, at the June 6, 1988 budget appropriations hearing for the following fiscal year, the Board made an initial statement that "due to the uncertainty of the state aid, Board members did not wish to add any new positions until actual enrollment is known" (p. 1). Later in these same minutes, it is noted that the superintendent "withdrew the administration's recommendation for an additional position at the middle school" (p. 2).

The 1997-98 school board practiced fiscal responsibility in protecting the public interest by requesting in a motion at their March 9, 1998 meeting that the superintendent develop a balanced budget for the 1998-99 school year without spending any fund equity. The motion added that, "this may require the elimination of some programs" (p. 4). It was interesting to note that each set of school board minutes had a motion that approved the spending of money for post-prom activities. The researcher believes actions such as these come very close to micromanaging, not policymaking. Further, the motions involving each of the building projects were similar in content and percentage. Being a conservator

of finances is a role these school boards seemed to take seriously. The researcher saw no evidence that the role of the school board regarding financial and business management practices had changed over the ten-year period.

The largest variances between the 1987-88 and the 1997-98 categories were in the personnel category. This might suggest that there was a change in the role described by Goldhammer (1965) "as the court of higher appeals." Most often, however, Board actions of this type concerned employee hiring, lay-off, retirement/resignation and recognition. All issues relating to personnel were ultimately assumed by the school board since they are the ones with whom individuals contract. The January 12, 1998 minutes reflect that the school board's role continued to serve as a court of appeals. Two motions at that meeting regarding employee grievances were resolved. In the first grievance, the Board found resolution by approving the number of copies permitted at the middle school to be "an equivalent to the year before plus an additional 54,290 copies" (p. 2). The other grievance resolution motion stated, "in the future, the Board of Education and administration will do better communicating and resolving grievances in a timely manner" (p. 2). Both of these actions suggest the quasi-administrative role that the researcher saw the Boards adapt at times.

The researcher saw no evidence to explain the difference in the number of motions regarding personnel except that a new superintendent was hired during the 1987-88 school year. She proceeded to realign staff and position responsibility. These actions were individually approved by that school board. This accounts for some of the variance (10%) between the number of motions regarding personnel of the two school boards. Other than more staff changeover, no other single event accounts for the difference. The

researcher concluded that the role of the school board as a court of higher appeals has not changed over the past ten years.

The researcher found it interesting to note that while most (89%) board members and their superintendents view the school board's role as policymaking (Adamkiewicz), this distinction only consumed about one tenth of the actions made by the school board in both of the years analyzed. The motion analysis framework (see Table 2) includes several descriptors of types of motions made under this heading. It is a rather broad category that includes everything from policy approvals to textbook adoptions/purchases. It is intended that these policy issues reflect the community the Board members represent.

Goldhammer characterized these roles as, "a pulse of the community" and "a promoter of the education function." To do this in a formal manner, each of the minutes reflected a time for public comment. Table 4 includes all of the comments documented in the minutes. While these don't qualify as Board actions, the input did give each of the Board members a measure of the public pulse. These assisted the Board in making decisions that reflected community values.

Table 4- Public Comments

1987-88	1997-98
• Concerned parents about daughter being cut from the Varsity basketball team • Citizen states that the district should promote its academic excellence • Heard a statement read by a parent that the four girls cut from the Varsity basketball team be reinstated since the coach resigned • Mother felt daughter cut from basketball team had skills comparable to those who made the team • J.V. coach read a statement concerning the girls cut and the Varsity coach's resignation • PTA president thanked the Board members who had participated in the PTA carnival	• Question of whether the district was a primary or secondary litigant in the Durant case (special ed) • Concern about the Board/admin regarding public relations with staff, budget restraints, grievances • Concern about a construction company approved by the Board and the work they have done in the past • Negotiations • Concerns about the relationships between the education association and the Board • Concerned teacher on behalf of teacher union and negotiations • Parent requests a call from the superintendent/Board in response to a letter she had sent • Comment that since the new contract had been ratified, there had been a substantial change in work place attitude • Many concerns voiced regarding construction company- many of these came from people who were not necessarily residents of the district, but union workers from different locales. Concerned about the quality of the work/employees since they were non-union. • Concerns regarding custodial lay-off • Concerned that support staff retirees' positions are filled, not left unfilled.

A close examination shows how personal many of the issues are that the public brings to the school board. Sorting out what is in the best interest of the community from what is in the interest of the individual(s) is a role that Board members were challenged to decide on a regular basis.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the board minutes of one mid-Michigan school district from 87-88 and 97-98 provided little reason to believe the role of the school board had been affected by the three major education reforms of the 1990s. Perhaps, one of the biggest differences, not included in Table 3, was the fact there were twenty-nine (29) school board meetings in 1987-88 and nearly half that number, sixteen (16), in 1997-98. Thus, the number of motions in the earlier school year reflects a proportional additional amount. This may represent a more efficient school board in 1997-98, but not necessarily a different role for the Board. Given the ten-year gap between the minutes' analysis, it doesn't appear that the role of the school board has changed as reflected by the minutes studied. (Since only one school board member was on both of the school boards it shouldn't be attributed to the individuals on the school board.) The school board in 1997-98 seemed to be making similar motions and spending their time on similar issues as the one in 1987-88. The four roles Goldhammer found Boards having in The School Board held true in 1997-98 in the school district analyzed. Thus, the researcher concludes that the three education reforms of the 1990s have had little impact on the role of school boards.

APPENDIX B

Interview Plan Outline

Interview Plan

- I. Tell me about your school board. What does it do for public K-12 education in your community?
- II. What does the board do relative to:
 - Policy? Who writes the policy? Are policies dictated by state concerns?
 - Communications? Special interests of the community? Political?
 - Decision-making? Who makes the recommendations?
 - Change agents? Where does it begin?
 - Sounding boards? What do they do?
 - Oversight of:
 - District finances-fund balance?
 - Personnel- hiring a superintendent
 - Programs- curriculum?
- III. What authority do board members feel they have relative to the school's bureaucracy--- teachers, curriculum experts, teacher unions, administrative professionals?
- IV. Secure a copy of a recent school board meeting of the superintendent being interviewed. (Try to get this in advance.) Ask the superintendent to discuss what was happening during specific instances recorded in the minutes.
- V. Has what school boards changed due to:
 - A. P. A. 25? Examples-
 - B. P. A. 335 (Proposal A)? examples- How about state bureaucrats, and legislative policymakers? (For instance, the state has decided that all students must attend school in the 1998-99 school year for 1047 hours spread over 181 attendance days. If these criteria are not met, the district does not receive the full foundation grant allotted for each student. What has schools of choice done?
 - C. P. A. 289 (Revised School Code)? examples- General powers extended school board authority?
- VI. What do school boards do relative to the state? Do board members talk to city government? State government?
- VII. Tell me about MEAP testing. How has this affected local control? What about local control in general? Is there as much as there was 10 years ago? Why or why not?
- VIII. Are public schools more bureaucratic organizations than they were 10 years ago?
 - Has your district increased central administrative/administrative support in the past 10 years? Why was this necessary?
 - Has your district used legal counsel more? Why was this necessary?

- IX. What do you as the superintendent do relative to what your school board does?
Has this role changed in the past ten years? Examples
- Have the behaviors relative to each other changed in the past 10 years? That is, has the superintendent or the board increased the scope of authority? Examples?
- X. Is it harder to be a board member today than it was 10 years ago?
- XI In conclusion, can you tell me what your school board does for your school district?

APPENDIX C

Application for the Approval of a Project Involving Human Subjects

**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF A PROJECT INVOLVING HUMAN
SUBJECTS**

INITIAL REVIEW (and 5 yr. renewal)

UCRIHS

University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

David E. Wright, Ph.D., Chair

246 Administration Building Michigan State University

East Lansing, MI 48824-1046

PHONE (517) 355-2180 FAX (517) 353-2976 E-Mail -

UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu

http://pilot.msu.edu/unit/vprgs/ucrihs/

Office Hours: M-F (8:00 A.M.-Noon & 1:00-5:00 P.M.)

DIRECTIONS: Please complete questions on this application using the
instructions and definitions found on the attached sheets.

1. Responsible Project Investigator
(Faculty or staff supervisor)

Name: Dr Philip Cusick

Social Security #:

Department: Education Administration

I believe the research can be safely
completed without endangering human
subjects. Further, I have read the
enclosed proposal and I am willing to
supervise any student investigators.

Signature: _____

Additional Investigator(s)

Name: Michael V. Johnson

SS or Stu. ID: A12012289

Name:

SS or Stu. ID#:

Name:

SS or Stu. ID#:

2. Address

418 Erickson Hall

East Lansing, MI 48824

Phone #: 355-4539

Address

12825 Chippewa Drive

Grand Ledge, MI 48837

Phone #: 627- 1845

Fax #:

Fax #: 627-1147

E-mail:

cusickpa@pilot.msu.edu

E-mail:

johnsm@glps.k12.mi.us

3. Title of Project The Emerging Role of K-12 Michigan Public School Boards in 1999

4.

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Subcommittee _____

Agenda _____

4. Have you ever received **Preliminary Approval** for this project? No ☒ [X]
Yes ☐ []
If yes, what IRB # was assigned to it? _____

5. Funding (if any) Not Applicable

6.

MSU Contracts and Grants app. # _____ if applicable

6. Does this project utilize an **Investigational Drug, Device or Procedure**?
No ☒ [X] Yes ☐ [] If yes, is there an IND #? No ☐ [] Yes ☐ [] IND #

7. Does this project involve the use of **Materials of Human Origin** (e.g., human blood or tissue)?
No ☒ [X] Yes ☐ []

8. When would you **prefer** to begin data collection? As soon as approval is granted.

Please remember you may not begin data collection without UCRIHS approval.

9. Category (Circle A, B or C below. See instructions pp. 5 & 6)

- a. This proposal is submitted as **EXEMPT** from full review.
Specify category or categories. 1C
- b. This proposal is submitted for **EXPEDITED** review.
Specify category or categories. _____
- c. This proposal is submitted for **FULL** sub-committee review.

10. Is this a full review multi-site project? No ☒ Yes ☐
If yes, do the other sites have a Multiple Project Assurance IRB that will also review this project?
☐ No. Please contact the UCRIHS office for further information about meeting the PHS/NIH/OPPR regulations.
☐ Yes. Please supply a copy of that approval letter when obtained.

11. Project Description (Abstract): Please limit your response to 200 words.

The history of Michigan public school boards has been traced to their earliest beginnings. The researcher gives ample support in his argument that New England style grass roots local control has been eroded by progressive state legislation and administrative bureaucracy. The net effect is that education is more centralized than ever in Michigan and the role of the school board has been altered. Three education reform policies passed in the 1990s were examined. The researcher is attempting to learn if these policies have further altered the role of school boards. To gain this information, the researcher is proposing to interview current school superintendents whose career in that position has transcended the last ten years.

12. Procedures: Please describe all project activities to be used in collecting data from human subjects. This also includes procedures for collecting materials of human origin and analysis of existing data originally collected from human subjects.

The project will include interviewing qualifying superintendents who agree to the interview and tape recording their conversation. The researcher believes 20-30 interviews will be necessary. Two basic questions will be asked. The first, "Is the role of the school board different in 1999 than it was 10 years ago?" The second is, "Can progressive ideals and administrative bureaucracy account for this change? The interviews will be transcribed, analyzed and categorized by responses. The researcher intends to develop a theoretical model of the school boards role in 1999.

13. Subject Population: Describe your subject population. (e.g., high school athletes, women over 50 w/breast cancer, small business owners)

Education professionals (school superintendents)

- a. The study population may include (check each category where subjects may be included **by design or incidentally**):

Minors	☐
Pregnant Women	☒
Women of Childbearing Age	☒
Institutionalized Persons	☐
Students	☐
Low Income Persons	☐
Minorities	☒
Incompetent Persons (or those with diminished capacity)	☐

- b. Number of subjects (including controls) 20-30

How will the subjects be recruited? (Attach appropriate number of copies of recruiting advertisement, if any. See p. 13 of UCRIHS instructions)

A list of qualified subjects will be made. The list will represent superintendents representative of the four athletic classifications and type of school district community (e.g. rural, urban, suburban.) From this list, the researcher and/or his advisor will call and ask permission of the superintendent to interview him/her.

If you are associated with the subjects (e.g., they are your students, employees, patients), please explain the nature of the association. The only possible association the researcher may have is one of friendship.

- e. If someone will receive payment for recruiting the subjects please explain the amount of payment, who pays it and who receives it.

Not applicable

- f. Will the research subjects be compensated? ☒ No ☐ Yes. **If yes**, details concerning payment, including the amount and schedule of payments, must be explained in the informed consent.
- g. Will the subjects incur additional financial costs as a result of their participation in this study? ☒ No ☐ Yes. **If yes**, please include an explanation in the informed consent.
- h. Will this research be conducted with subjects who reside in another country or live in a cultural context different from mainstream US society? ☒ No ☐ Yes.

- (1) **If yes**, will there be any corresponding complications in your ability to minimize risks to subjects, maintain their confidentiality and/or assure their right to voluntary informed consent as individuals? ☐ No ☐ Yes.
- (2) **If your answer to h-1 is yes**, what are these complications and how will you resolve them?

14. How will the subjects' privacy be protected? (See Instructions p. 8.)

The taped interview will not include the subjects first and last name. These tapes will be transcribed into written form by a third party. After that has occurred, the tapes will be destroyed. The simple distinction of Interview I, Interview II, etc. will be placed on the transcribed documents. The researcher will keep all responses confidential and will not include any names in his research report.

15. Risks and Benefits for subjects: (See Instructions p. 8.)

This is a very low risk proposal for the subject. It is a conversation between two educational professionals regarding public school boards and their role in 1999. On the other hand, the results of the study should clarify the school boards role in 1999 from the perspective of superintendents. This perspective could prove very beneficial for both school boards and superintendents.

16. Consent Procedures (See Instructions pp. 9-13.)

See attached consent form. This would be signed before the interview began.

CHECKLIST: Check off that you have included each of these items. If not applicable, state N/A:

- ☒ Completed application
- ☒ The correct number of copies of the application and instruments, according to the category of review (See instructions p. 13.)
- ☒ Consent form (or script for verbal consent), if applicable
- ☐ Advertisement, if applicable
- ☒ One complete copy of the methods chapter of the research proposal

APPENDIX D

Letter of Introduction and the Scope of the Interview

June 2, 1999

«FirstName» «LastName»
«JobTitle»
«Company»
«Address1»
«City», «State» «PostalCode»

Dear «Salutation» «LastName»:

My name is Mike Johnson. I am currently an administrator with the Grand Ledge Public Schools. I am also a graduate student at Michigan State University. Dr. Philip Cusick is the Chair of my Dissertation Committee. As part of my doctoral study, I am planning to interview public school superintendents in Michigan whose career as a superintendent has transcended the past ten years. I believe you match the profile for this study. Thus, I am writing you to inform you that I will be personally contacting you in the next few weeks regarding this task. Please consider adding to the richness of this study by setting aside 30-45 minutes to complete an interview with me. I will come to your office at a pre-arranged time.

The topic for the interview is "school boards," an important stakeholder in your school community. The interview will consist of several open-ended questions to better help me describe and explain school board behaviors. Part of the interview will include a reflection on one of your school district's recent school board meetings as recorded in the minutes of that meeting. (When I call you, I can give more details regarding this part of the interview.) Another important aspect of the study includes your role as the superintendent relative to the role of the school board.

The interviews will be transcribed and the audio tape recording destroyed. Information gained will be treated with strict confidence. Per request, a copy of the completed study will be given to you.

Once again, please welcome me to seek your input on a very important part of the public school superintendent's life. You have a unique perspective of your school district, its Boards of Education and the education reforms of the past ten years. What you have to say regarding this experience is important.

Please call me at 517/627-4888 during normal business hours or at my home in the evening at 517/627-1845 if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Michael V. Johnson
MSU Doctoral Student

APPENDIX E

Thank You Letter

{Date}

«FirstName» «LastName»
«JobTitle»
«Company»
«Address1»
«City», «State» «PostalCode»

Dear «Salutation» «LastName»:

I really appreciate the time you allowed from your busy schedule to meet with me and answer questions about your experience with school boards. I believe our dialog was very worthwhile. The information you shared will be invaluable to me as I write my dissertation. I will send you my findings as they become available.

Additionally, thank you for accommodating the request for your School Board minutes of the February meetings. These proved helpful, too.

Your tenure demonstrates how well you work with school boards. I believe your success is due in part to your consideration of the role school boards have in K-12 public education and the individual respect you demonstrate toward each board member.

Thank you again for meeting with me. My best wishes on continued success in your school district.

Sincerely,

Michael V. Johnson

APPENDIX F

Respondent's Consent Form

Consent Form

Description of the project:

The history of Michigan public school boards has been traced to their earliest beginnings. The researcher gives ample support in his argument that New England style grass roots local control has been eroded by progressive state legislation and administrative bureaucracy. The net effect is that education is more centralized than ever in Michigan and the role of the school board has been altered.. Three education reform policies passed in the 1990s were examined. The researcher is attempting to learn if these policies have further altered the role of school boards. To gain this information, the researcher is proposing to interview current school superintendents whose career in that position has transcended the last ten years.

Time required:

The amount of time may vary, but the onetime interview should take between 30-45 minutes.

Voluntary participation:

The subject knows that he/she is voluntarily participating in this interview. The subject may choose not to participate at all, may refuse to answer certain questions, or may discontinue the interview at any time.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

All results will be treated with strict confidence and the subjects will remain anonymous in any report of research findings. Per request and within these restrictions, results may be made available to subject.

Your signature signifies you understand the purpose of the interview and your rights as a participant You are being asked to voluntarily participate in an interview with the researcher who is attempting to answer the question, "What is the role of the public.

Consent statement and signature:

I, _____, give my consent to be interviewed by Michael V. Johnson on _____(date) regarding my perspective on the role of public school boards in Michigan in 1999.

Participant's Signature _____

APPENIDIX G

Letter to Dissertation Committee Members

Michael V. Johnson 12825 Chippewa Drive
Grand Ledge, MI 48837
April 26, 2000

Dr. Philip Cusick
Professor and Chair, Educational Administration
Michigan State University
404 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824

Dear Dr. Cusick:

Thank you for your participation, your suggestions and your time during my recent dissertation defense. Let me take a minute and respond to your concerns. You are right about some things. The story is really the successful superintendents' story of their school boards. Further, much of the story is how this set of superintendents manages their school board. I can address those concerns in the second chapter when I discuss the decision to interview long-term superintendents. Beginning there and carrying through the summaries for chapters three and four and the conclusion, I'll stress the point that the story is from the superintendents' view and is, in part, a story of how successful superintendents manage their boards. I believe this is fair.

On the other hand, from the beginning, this was not a study of the school board role, per se (the title notwithstanding.) Through the 52 pages of the chapter one, in which I described the history of school boards and the growth of school bureaucracies, it was a study designed to see if the recent reforms by the state, reforms that followed along progressive lines, had altered or possibly diminished the role of the public school board. I traced the decline of the responsibilities of the board over 150 years, the professionalization of the school bureaucracy, and I asked, "Is this two sided trend continuing or has it been accelerated by recent state laws?" I specified three educational reforms that took place in Michigan in the early 1990s. I argued that the reforms were of sufficient duration to possibly influence school board behavior. The conversation at our meeting was about the role of the school board and my presentation of that role. Frankly, I was unable to get the conversation off that topic of board-role, per se, and onto the topic that I thought was at issue. That is, the steady march toward the professionalization of organizational responsibilities.

My question about the changes to school board role wrought by the state education reforms was not of much interest to interviewees. The 25 superintendents - 24 of them - said little about the changes wrought by the state efforts. Instead, they talked about the role of the school board in general. I used theoretical sampling and interviews but when one goes into an interview and finds the interviewee dismissing what the interviewer thought was the issue, then the interviewer follows the matter where it goes. That is what happened here. The superintendents said that even with the funding changes, the role of

their school boards had not changed. I know Dr. Plank disagreed and asserted that the funding changes were "huge" but that is not what the respondents said. With the exception of the gentleman who said that his board was attuned to PA 289, the general powers act, the superintendents said the role of their school board had not been affected by the education reforms of the 1990s.

With that and following this exploratory study I went back to my issue of the school board, the steady march of progressive professionalization and came up with what I thought was the most interesting finding. Even in the school districts where the superintendents carefully manage the board, the board does things that are essential, that "buffer" the organization in the ways Thompson talks about. I argue these cannot be preempted by the school bureaucrats. There are places where bureaucratic progressivism will not take us. Democracy - in de Toqueville's sense of the term - at the local school level is alive and well.

I am not surprised you lost what I thought was the point. The thesis was too conceptually busy, e.g. progressivism, bureaucracy, roles, state reforms, effects of state reforms, buffering, democracy, etc. As an intellectual journey, it was a little confusing. I will change some things in the second chapter, preparing the thesis for a change in direction. I will also change some things in the summaries and some things in the conclusion. The changes will reflect your concerns about limits, about sample and about what can and cannot be said. I will be clearer about what I intended as my main point. Again, thank you for your time and your input.

Sincerely,

Michael V. Johnson
MSU Graduate Student

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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