

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

A STUDY ON THE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER AND SUPERINTENDENT  
RELATIONSHIP AND ITS PERCEIVED IMPACT ON A SCHOOL DISTRICT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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2017

This dissertation of Hani Joseph Youssef is approved:

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving parents. Your leap of faith to immigrate to the United States with nothing more than hopes and dreams for a better life provided opportunities for me that I would never have realized if it were not for your courage. Your love, your nurturing, and your sacrifice provided me with life lessons that shaped me into the human being I am today. My only regret is that my father, Joseph Youssef, did not live long enough to witness this accomplishment in person. Thank you mom and dad for never giving up on me and loving me unconditionally. I love you both.

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To my sister, Maggie, thank you for your never-ending support and love. You are my one and only big sister. You love me unconditionally and you watch over me regardless of the miles that separate us geographically. I look up to you and hope to continue to make you proud.

I would also like to acknowledge all of the students I have come across in my career. I firmly believe that students are my number one priority. I chose the education profession so that I can help students achieve their own hopes and dreams. As my journey through education continues, I will continue to keep students the focus of everything I do and every decision I make.

Finally, I would like to offer sincere appreciation to my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Jody Dunlap. She took a chance on me almost 20 years ago and continues to guide me today. I would not have pursued this degree if it were not for our paths crossing again in 2014. I also wish to thank Dr. Miguel Ceja and Dr. Victor Torres for serving on my committee.

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## Abstract

# A STUDY ON THE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER AND SUPERINTENDENT RELATIONSHIP AND ITS PERCEIVED IMPACT ON A SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

Hani Youssef

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to gain information and knowledge regarding the perceived impact the relationship between the superintendent and school board members had on a school district. This study also explored which characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. This quantitative study utilized survey research methods. Participants answered four demographic questions and 35 primary questions that addressed components of the research questions that frame this study. Questionnaire items were answered on a Likert-type scale that indicated the participants' level of satisfaction (items 1-25) with the school board member and superintendent relationship and level of importance (items 26-35) related to essential characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships. Survey methodology was appropriate for this particular study because the aim of the study was to investigate the perceived relationship between two defined stakeholder groups, school board members and superintendents, and those groups' perceptions of how that relationship impacts educational accountability, the instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. Participants were selected from the state of California database system that includes contact information for school board members and superintendents within the state. The researcher had access to participants because he secured

the support from the California School Board Association (CSBA) Board of Directors. The CSBA Board of Directors allowed the researcher to use their comprehensive e-mail database to contact superintendents and school board members within the state of California. In order to keep the random sample sizes as large as possible, invitations to participate were sent to 250 superintendents and 350 school board members in the CSBA database system.

## CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

Formal education in the United States has long been an important component of American culture. However, this was not always the case. Educational delivery and opportunities were unorganized and unsystematic during the early years of American colonization (Woodward, 2006). As the United States became more settled in the early years of colonization, education became more highly valued and evolved into something that was essential to the well-being of individuals and society. Moody (2011) identified the evolution of education in the United States as, “Essential to the individual, social, economic, and political well-being of society and as such was integral to community life and deserved financial support” (p. 77).

Cubberley (1948) provided historical perspective on the history of education in America by noting the importance of the Massachusetts Colony adopting landmark educational legislation requiring local chosen men assure that children were taught skills necessary to read and understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of the United States. The passage of this Massachusetts law in 1642 was significant in that for the first time in the history of the United States a legislative body was ordered to ensure all children should be educated to some degree and be taught to read. This initial commitment by Massachusetts would set the stage for the development of the American public school system. As education continued to become an increasing priority in America, the management and leadership responsibilities of public schooling shifted from the committee of select men to an appointed school committee that would eventually become the modern school board (Bjork, 2000).

Although the Massachusetts law that was enacted in 1642 played a major role in establishing a formal educational system in the United States, it was another Massachusetts law that was enacted in 1789 that was the first formal legislation to recognize a school district (Woodward, 2006). Knezevich (1984) viewed this shift in responsibility as a result of the 1789 Massachusetts law as education becoming a formal function of each state. Coincidentally, 1789 also happens to be the same year that the United States Constitution was ratified citing a time of transition for America.

Following the passage of the Massachusetts law of 1789, school committees (i.e. school boards) were appointed to manage and lead public schooling in the United States. The power of local schools was steadily changed from the religions sector and private businesses having control, to the public and civil entities (Bjork, 2000). The driving force behind the design of the school board was to keep the schools in close proximity to their people (Boyd, Kerchner, & Blyth, 2008).

As the number of students being educated in the United States increased and school governance became more involved and complex, a new position of school inspector was created by school boards. School boards found it necessary to hire someone to deal with the day-to-day operations of the schools. The school inspector was charged with the responsibility of supervising instruction, textbook selection, facilities management, and pupil examination (Moody, 2011).

The development of this school inspector position paved the way for the modern day superintendent. The very first superintendent was appointed in Buffalo, New York in 1837 and by 1890, several major cities in the United States had a superintendent of schools (Kowalski, 2005). As school boards in the United States were created out of a social need, the position of

superintendent was created by school boards to serve the needs of the board itself (Korelich & Maxwell, 2015).

Although the original and primary duties of the superintendent were to supervise instruction, select textbooks, manage facilities, and examine pupils, the responsibilities of school superintendents have increased over time. In terms of accountability and responsibility, the superintendent's job is ever-demanding (Jones, 2011). The position of superintendent has become one where the superintendent is the sole person with the qualification and the means to access the power of the school, all of the district's staff, local and state government officials, and parental groups and teacher associations. The superintendent assumes administrative responsibility and leadership for the planning, operation, supervision, and evaluation of the education programs, services, and facilities of the district. The superintendent is also responsible for the annual performance appraisal of the district's staff, managing the day-to-day operations of the district, preparing and submitting to the board of trustees a proposed budget, recommendations and overseeing of policies to be adopted, and implementing the adopted policies. The superintendent also provides leadership for the attainment of student achievement, organizing the district's central administration and performing any other duties assigned by action of the board of trustees (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2010).

As the role of the superintendent has increased and evolved over the years, so has the role of the school board. According to Korelich & Maxwell (2015) the role of the school board includes the responsibility of hiring and/or firing a superintendent, establishing working relationships with other public entities to make effective use of community resources, serving the needs of public school students in the community, adopting a vision statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent, and monitoring progress toward

those goals. The school board also seeks to ensure that the superintendent is accountable for achieving performance results, recognizes performance accomplishments, and takes action as necessary to meet performance goals. School boards also adopt policies to establish a district-level planning and decision-making process, adopt an annual budget for the district, and they monitor district finances to ensure that the superintendent is properly maintaining the district's financial procedures and records. School boards also ensure that district fiscal accounts are audited annually, and they publish an end-of-year financial report for distribution to the community. In addition, a school board conducts elections of new members as required by law, adopts a process through which district personnel, students or the parents or guardians of students, and members of the public may obtain a hearing from the district administrators and the board regarding a complaint, and they also make decisions relating to terminating the employment of district employees employed under a contract, including terminating or not renewing an employment contract (Nमित, 2008).

Given the responsibilities that school board members and superintendents have, it is critical that both entities have positive working relationships with one another. Wheatley (2006) described the world as constantly changing where “relationships are primary” and future vision is created through the process of participation (p. 68-69). Given the significance of relationships, there is greater potential for success and progress within a school district when the relationship between school board members and the superintendent is positive (Thompson, 2014). Positive outcomes may include increased student achievement, improved teacher and administrative retention, increased student enrollment, and affirmed confidence from the community in the school board and superintendent leadership.

Conversely, a poor working relationship between superintendents and school board members deters school improvement and student achievement (Petersen & Fusarelli, 2001). For example, a poor working relationship may prevent the school district from achieving its student performance goals and effective communication structures may be poor or lacking. Poor communication between superintendents and school boards may lead to school board members and the superintendent being unable to effectively agree on a direction or plan to meet the established goals. A poor working relationship may also result in a lack of confidence from the community and other stakeholders resulting in distractions that take away from achieving various goals. Such dysfunction may lead to decreased student enrollment and ultimately a decrease in funding. Such impacts may have a ripple effect that leads to a loss of jobs within a school district given an inability to financially support and sustain existing resources if student enrollment declines.

The relationship between school board members and the superintendent may affect the success or failure of a school district. This relationship is a complex one that requires the two entities to establish a relationship of trust. Various obstacles can be overcome by school board members and superintendents who have trusting and healthy relationships (Fowler, 2009). Obstacles that can be overcome by a healthy relationship may include complying with legislative mandates in a timely manner, determining budget cuts when necessary, and addressing concerns brought about by collective bargaining units. Healthy relationships allow school boards and superintendents to address such obstacles in a more effective manner than if the relationship between the two entities was dysfunctional.

The relationship between school board members and the superintendent becomes key to a school district and its students given the various reforms in education and very high academic

expectations (Fusarelli, 2009). Legislative mandates such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has increased the accountability of school officials to ensure all students are meeting achievement standards (US Department of Education, 2009). Since the advent of NCLB, there has been an overriding emphasis on educational accountability (Eadie, 2008). In addition, legislation requiring public school districts to engage the community and develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that includes student achievement metrics is another example of educational reform that may increase the stress and pressure on school board members and the superintendent. This is why school boards of education desire a superintendent who is able to produce high academic results for the district (Richard & Kruse, 2008).

Accountability for school improvement is a central theme of federal and state policies (Lunenberg, 2011). Increased expectations due to federal, state, and local legislation leads to greater accountability for superintendents and school board members (Fusarelli, 2009). Examples of this include state legislation related to the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and the LCAP. Therefore, the risks are high for school boards and superintendents when it comes to educational accountability and leadership. High-achieving districts have school boards and superintendents that communicate effectively (Black, 2008). Effective communication may include establishing protocols that guide the work of the school board and district leadership team, the superintendent sharing his/her schedule for the week with the board, creating a process for addressing issues when board members stray away from agreed upon protocols, ensuring that policies are current, learning about each school board member's priorities, explore ways to publicly acknowledge the work of the board, and defining clear roles of the superintendent and school board (Sell, 2006). This study involves a comprehensive analysis of the relationship

between school board members and the superintendent and how this relationship impacts a school district.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of this study was to examine how the relationship between school board members and superintendents impacts a school district. Given the various reforms in education and very high academic expectations, the need is more critical than ever to examine the relationship between school board members and the superintendent. Reforms in education may include changes to educational funding under LCFF, developing and monitoring a district's LCAP, and shifts in academic standards such as adopting Common Core State Standards. Such reforms make it important for school board members and the superintendent to have defined roles in education. Ford (2017) found that problems arise when there is role confusion between school board members and superintendents.

The job of school board members is to set the vision for a community and school district, while the superintendent's job is to carry out that vision (Lee & Eadens, 2014). That vision involves not only the community and the school district, but it includes the individual schools along with the employees and students who occupy those schools. As discovered in research conducted by the Washington State School Directors' Association (2009) and Sell (2006), such problems also inhibit strategic planning that is necessary for district success resulting in tension between school board members and the superintendent. The problems relate to school board members who become overly involved in the process of how policy implementation is carried out within a school district. School board members who become too involved with how things are done prevent district staff from effectively carrying out the work. This type of behavior and role confusion can reduce the ability for school board members and superintendents to work

collaboratively and effectively with one another. School improvement and student achievement is deterred by a poor working relationship between superintendents and school board members (Lamkin, 2006).

When the relationship between school board members and the superintendent is not positive or stable, school districts cannot achieve or realize success in or out of the classroom (Reeves, 2000). For example, success cannot be realized if school board members and the superintendent do not agree on goals for the school district. In addition, success cannot be realized if school board members are acting outside the scope of established protocols such as responding to community inquiries by looking into a matter or trying to personally resolve a situation rather than having district staff address the concern (Eadie, 2008). Stakeholders who perceive members of the school board and the superintendent are not working in unison will be less apt to follow and trust members of the school board or the superintendent.

Superintendents rely on a team of educators to carry out the vision of the school board. This team may include the superintendent's Cabinet or school site personnel. Depending on the district structure and practice, Cabinet members may include Assistant Superintendents, Deputy Superintendents, and Directors from various departments, and key positions within a district as identified by the superintendent. This vision usually involves a process for student achievement, monitoring district goals, complying with legislative mandates, addressing community or school site concerns that may arise, and maintaining a positive school climate (Boyd et al., 2008). Such tasks are challenging for the most experienced superintendent. It could become more daunting for a superintendent, regardless of experience, when his or her relationship with school board members is negative or ineffective.

The increased pressure and demands placed on school board members and superintendents have made this relationship more important than ever before in education. School board members are looking for certain qualities, abilities, and characteristics when hiring a superintendent (Black, 2008). Superintendents desire certain qualities, abilities, and characteristics of school board members who are elected to office. Ultimately, school board members decide who will be the superintendent of the school district. Therefore, it is important that the relationship between school board members and the superintendent be one that can move a school district forward with its vision for student achievement, monitoring of district goals, compliance with legislative mandates, addressing of community or school site concerns that may arise, and the maintenance of a positive school climate as suggested by Moody (2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain information and knowledge regarding the impact the relationship between the superintendent and school board members had on a school district. Specifically, this study explored how superintendents and school board members perceive their relationship and what impact, if any, those perceptions have on a school district. This study also explored which characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has great potential to influence school districts in California and across the United States. The findings of this study will provide superintendents, school board members, and all stakeholders with information about what perceived factors of the school board member and superintendent relationship affect a school district. Educators and other stakeholders could use the collected research to address the concern within the organization regarding the relationship between school board members and the superintendent. The findings of this study

could be used to address characteristics of school board member and superintendent relationships that deter student achievement and school district success. By highlighting perceived characteristics that are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships, stakeholders may improve the working relationship between the two entities and increase the chances of success for a school district. Therefore, data collected from this study may also provide school district stakeholders with specific practices that if undertaken, may improve the relationship between school board members and the superintendent.

### **Research Questions**

1. How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship?
2. What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on concepts stemming from the principle of social capital and they include educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations (Figure 1). Social capital refers to the connections that exist between people that includes their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous cooperation (Claridge, 2004). It is most useful to people and organizations when needing to accomplish goals or addressing stressful situations (Halpern, 2005). Given the complex nature of the relationship between school board members and the superintendent, social capital allows each entity to work with one another in an environment that communicates trust, communicates respect, supports mutual cooperation, and allows for working toward common goals as will be described in Chapter 2, Literature Review.

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework*



**Overview of Methodology**

This quantitative study employed a survey instrument. This instrument consisted of a 35-item Likert scale survey that measured how satisfied school board members and superintendents were with their relationship and what characteristics do school board members and superintendents believed essential to having effective relationships with one another.

Each of the first 25 survey items was linked to a factor derived from social capital. The six factors are educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. Questions 26-35 of the survey originated from the study conducted by the Center of Public Education (2011) entitled

*Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards.* The eight characteristics of effective school boards are effective school boards have a vision for high expectations related to student achievement, effective school boards share strong beliefs about student learning, effective school boards hold one another accountable, effective school boards have collaborative relationships with staff and the community, effective school boards are data savvy, effective school boards align and sustain resources within the district, effective school boards lead as a united team, and effective school boards participate in team development and training.

For each of the first 25 primary questions, participants were asked to indicate whether they were very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. A score of 1 indicated a response of very satisfied, a score of 2 indicated a response of satisfied, a score of 3 indicated a response of neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, a score of 4 indicated a response of dissatisfied, and a score of 5 indicated a response of very dissatisfied. The lower the mean score, the higher the level of satisfaction.

For the remaining ten survey questions (questions 26-35), participants were asked to indicate the level of importance related to characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships by indicating whether they viewed the items as very important, important, moderately important, unimportant, or not important at all. A score of 1 indicated a response of very important, a score of 2 indicated a response of important, a score of 3 indicated a response of moderately important, a score of 4 indicated a response of unimportant, and a score of 5 indicated a response of not important at all. The lower the mean score, the higher the level of importance.

The study invited 350 school board members and 250 superintendents within the state of California to complete the instrument on-line. This research created a body of knowledge that

provided information about what perceived factors of the school board member and superintendent relationship influence a school district. Additionally, this study provided measures on what characteristics of school board member and superintendent relationships are essential to having effective relationships with one another.

### **Limitations**

The study includes the following limitations:

1. The study was limited to a random sample based on the California School Board Association (CSBA) database.
2. The number of voluntary superintendents who participated in the survey was unpredictable due to random sample selection.
3. The number of voluntary school board members who participated in the survey was unpredictable due to random sample selection.
4. This study will use one survey instrument to survey both population samples, superintendents and school board members.

### **Delimitations**

The delimitations of the study are:

1. Given the number of school board members and superintendents in California, the study did not include any participants outside the State of California.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Accountability:* Educational leaders are held responsible for student achievement under various district, state and federal mandates targeting student performance in formative, interim, and summative assessments.

*Achievement:* Student performance in the state standards test and meeting the proficiency goals, which is interpreted as achieving the standards.

*Community:* A group of people having a particular characteristic or interest in common while living in the same area or neighborhood.

*School Board Member:* Elected community representative who is responsible for hiring the superintendent and approving all policies within the district. This individual is elected by voters who reside within the school district boundaries. Depending on the district size, there may be 3-7 members on one school board. They are the governing board of the district.

*Social Capital:* The social connections that exist between people that includes their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous cooperation.

*Stakeholders:* Parents, students, teachers, and community members are the groups of people who have a stake or interest in the success of education.

*Superintendent:* A person who is a hired by a school board to direct and manage a school district. This person's function is to administer the policies set forth by school board members. The superintendent functions as the liaison between school board members and the individual school sites.

### **Organization of Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, including: Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, Conceptual Framework, Significance of the Study, Methodology, and Organization of the Study. Chapter Two presents a review of literature pertaining to relevant information addressed in this study. Chapter Three describes the methodology employed, instruments used, sample utilized for the research, procedures for collecting data, data reporting, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four reports the findings of the data as they relate to the research questions guiding the

study. Chapter Five contains an analysis of the findings along with the conclusions, future implications, and recommendations as they relate to current practice and future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

The aim of this study was to gain information and knowledge regarding the impact the relationship between the superintendent and school board members has on a school district. This study explored how superintendents and school board members perceive their relationship. In addition, this study also explored what characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

The relationship between school board members and the superintendent may influence numerous aspects of a school district. Depending on the circumstances, the impact may be negative and/or positive. School board member and superintendent leadership is vital to the effectiveness of a school district and to the success of any institution (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Some of the areas within a school district that may be impacted by this relationship include student academic achievement and administrative tenure (Fowler, 2009, Lunenberg, 2011). The impact may be realized in graduation rates, dropout rates, implementation of state standards, and retention of administrators. This relationship may also impact a district's morale, district stability, credibility of administrative leadership, and trustworthiness of the superintendent and school board members (Lamkin, 2006). The influence may also be realized in collecting bargaining efforts, recruitment of employees, employee discipline, parent participation, and community partnerships. In addition, critical reform efforts may be impacted as well along with long-range planning (Kowalski et al., 2010). This impact may be realized when addressing a district's LCAP, managing a district's budget under LCFF, general operations, procuring a bond, and/or addressing legislative mandates like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 or Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015.

Educational reform and very high academic expectations have contributed to making the relationship between superintendents and school board members complex and stressful (Miller, Salsbury, & Devin, 2009, Lamkin, 2006). The role of superintendents and school board members has evolved (Candoli, 1995). A shift in responsibilities may bring about a shift in focus and increased complexities (Marzano et al., 2005). Some of the stress and complexities of the relationship are marked by increasing demands to improve student achievement, an emphasis on Career and Technical Education (CTE), changes in educational funding that impact district budgeting, and an increase in educational options that include charter schools, home schooling, and independent studies (Kowalski et al., 2010).

Public education in the United States has seen an increase in accountability since the advent of the NCLB of 2001, which was replaced with ESSA of 2015. NCLB produced legislation that holds educators responsible for the improvement of curriculum, instruction, credentials, accountability, assessments, and budgeting. Capper and Young (2015) state that, “The past two decades have witnessed significant change within the field of education. Among the most influential change is the increased emphasis on educational accountability within individual states and the nation as a whole. Policy-makers across the United States expect all schools to ensure that all children meet or exceed state academic performance standards” (p. 186). In order to meet these new demands, considerable attention has been devoted to finding ways to improve the quality of instructional leadership in schools and school systems (Murphy & Shipman, 1997; Thomas, 2007).

The United States Department of Education (2015) introduced ESSA as replacing NCLB. This shift in law has resulted in school boards and superintendents having to become familiar, yet again, with new provisions as dictated by another educational law, ESSA. This shift from

NCLB to ESSA is another contributor to the complexities of the superintendent and school board member relationship. School board members and superintendents must now address provisions of ESSA that emphasize addressing the needs of disadvantaged students, the teaching of standards that prepare students for college and careers, new statewide assessments that are aligned to the new standards, a greater infusion of technology into education, and an emphasis on early childhood education that focuses on preschool and transitional kindergarten (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Given the complexity and significance of the relationship between school board members and superintendents, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship?
2. What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?

Concepts related to the principle of social capital provide the conceptual framework for this study. The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value (Claridge, 2004). Social capital refers to the connections that exist between people that includes shared values and norms of behavior, which enable relationships between people to function effectively. It is about active, social choices that connect people. Social capital allows people to accomplish things that matter to a community or organization and solve everyday problems. Social capital is stored in relationships. It works as a collective good. Halpern (2005) noted when a system as a whole functions better because of the ties among people, which make it up, the collective and effective aspects are realized. For this study, the concepts stemming from the principle of social capital include educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations.

## **Educational Accountability**

Due to the various reforms in education and very high academic expectations, the relationship between school board members and the superintendent becomes key to a school district and its students. The superintendent and the school board are recognized as key players in implementation and governance of educational reform movements (Boyd et al., 2008). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law in 1965 by President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who believed that "full educational opportunity" should be "our first national goal" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESEA offered new grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income college students. Additionally, the law provided federal grants to state educational agencies to improve the quality of elementary and secondary education.

Of particular importance has been the overriding emphasis on educational accountability, often to the exclusion of other purposes, initiatives, and priorities of education (Capper & Young, 2015). Lunenberg (2011) identified the increase in academic accountability and achievement resulted in a greater emphasis on test scores rather than the process of teaching and learning. The priority became the score on state and federally mandated summative assessments. Ravitch (2010) cited, "The rise and fall of test scores in reading and mathematics became the variable in judging students, teachers, principals, and schools" (p. 15). Low performing schools and districts were having to publicly (media and the community) explain and privately (staff and district level meetings) explain, and in some cases defend, test results (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014).

In 2001, NCLB increased the accountability of school officials to ensure all students are meeting achievement standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). NCLB put in place measures that exposed achievement gaps among traditionally underserved students and their peers and spurred an important national dialogue on education improvement. This focus on accountability has been critical in ensuring a quality education for all children, yet also revealed challenges in the effective implementation of this goal. This heightened focus on accountability has caused intense pressure on the relationship between school board members and superintendents (Reeves, 2000).

Ravitch (2010) cited, “In this new era of NCLB, school reform was characterized as accountability, high-stakes testing, data-driven decision making, choice, charter schools, privatization, deregulation, merit pay, and competition among schools” (p. 21). Complying with these state and federal legislations became a daunting task for school boards of education as they attempted to work cooperatively with superintendents. The reason these tasks may be daunting is because of the financial or staffing penalties that may result from a lack of compliance. Ravitch (2010) noted, “The most toxic flaw in NCLB was its legislative command that all students in every school must be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014...And if they are not, then their school and teachers will suffer the consequences” (p. 102).

The relationship between school board members and superintendents within a school district becomes magnified when the relationship is poor. As a result, social capital may be compromised. Superintendents and school board members who do not have positive relationships will not deal effectively with challenging circumstances such as educational accountability. Because of the high stakes related to student achievement and academic success, role confusion and role ambiguity between school boards and the superintendent may result in an

uncertain working relationship between school superintendents and school boards, which may lead to conflict (Townsend, Johnston, Gross, Lynch, Garcy, Roberts, & Novotney, 2010).

Kowalski et al. (2010) found that nearly two-thirds of superintendents they surveyed for their study said that the detriments associated with NCLB have been far greater or slightly greater than the benefits.

These detriments and the stress brought about by the accountability system may surface and lead to an unstable relationship between school board members and the superintendent. The detriments of NCLB include, but were not limited to, the federal government never really fully funding the program, student achievement was only measured by annual performance on a multiple choice test in mathematics and English, teachers were increasingly teaching to the annual test in fear that students would perform poorly on the test, and due to the emphasis NCLB placed on assessing math and English, fewer resources and time were spent on other subject matters such as physical education, art, science, and social studies (Townsend et al., 2007). Ravitch (2010) cited, “The goal of testing was higher scores, without regard to whether students acquired any knowledge of history, science, literature, geography, the arts, and other subjects that were not important for accountability purposes” (p. 30).

This climate of student achievement and educational accountability rests at the door of the superintendent. There is a heightened sense of responsibility for superintendents that is evident through the communication and relations with school board members and the community. School boards of education desire a superintendent who is able to produce results for the district that involves high academic achievement, increased graduation rates, and fiscally responsible management (Richard & Kruse, 2008). The superintendent has been thrust into a more visible and more accountable position that includes more media coverage, more

accountability for test results, and more responsibility for finance (Capper & Young, 2015). The organizational structure of a school district is affected by the increased focus on accountability, as the superintendent must coordinate all stakeholders, which includes students, parents, staff, school administration, district staff, and community members, to achieve common goals and outcomes.

Current conditions that prevail in our public schools such as increased accountability for academic achievement, increased parent and community participation, and increased media attention have created visible and escalating challenges for superintendents (Lamkin, 2006). Visible and escalating challenges are realized as transparency has increased. For instance, school board meetings are live broadcasts and are public meetings as mandated by the Brown Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). These live meetings that are also archived for later reference and viewing may result in school board members feeling pressured to appease certain members or groups of the community who may be watching or in attendance (Shatzer et al., 2014).

School board members hold superintendents to a very high standard for student academic achievement. This is primarily due to accountability for school improvement being a theme of federal and state policies (Lunenberg, 2011). School board members and superintendents understand the importance of student achievement and the need for superintendents to focus and lead for improved academic achievement (Moffett, 2011). Punitive state and local measures for poor academic results has resulted in making this relationship between school board members and superintendents more complex (Miller et al., 2009 & Sell, 2006).

Punitive measures that created strains between school board members and the superintendent included schools identified as a School In Need of Improvement (SINI) or

Program Improvement (PI) for not meeting 100% proficiency for all subgroups. Ravitch (2010) described that in the first year as a SINI school, the school would be put on notice. In the second year, the school would be required to offer all its students the right to transfer to a better performing school. In the third year, the school would be required to offer free tutoring to low-income students, also known as Supplementary Educational Services (SES), that was paid for by the district's general fund. In the fourth year, the school would be required to take corrective action, which result in curriculum changes, staff changes, a longer school day, or longer year. If a school missed its target for any subgroup for five consecutive years, it would be required to restructure, which meant it could convert to a charter school, replace the principal and staff, or relinquish control to private management, turn control over to the state.

### **Instructional Program**

Because school board members hold the superintendent accountable for student achievement, superintendents can be characterized as “instructional leaders.” This requires the focus of the superintendent to be on teaching and learning practices within the district. The superintendent is in charge of evaluating instructional programs and policies to ensure success or facilitate improvement if needed (Thompson, 2014). Therefore, the risks are high for a superintendent when it comes to instructional leadership. Whether a school district operates effectively or not, increases or decreases a student's chances of academic success (Marzano et al., 2005). A negative instructional or academic decision by a superintendent may have devastating effects on a school district.

Examples of such a decision could include recommending to the board curriculum that is poorly aligned to state standards, spending large amounts of money on professional development for teachers that is ineffective, and adjustments to the instructional day that produce decreased

student achievement rather than improves student achievement. A poor instructional or academic decision may also take a significant amount of time to remediate. Superintendents are no longer simply tasked with school management; their duties have expanded into areas of specialization and accountability, including student learning outcomes (Capper & Young, 2015).

Superintendents who make a wrong instructional or academic decision are held accountable by school boards of education. Such accountability contributes to the complicated relationship between school boards and superintendents. High expectations from school board members place greater pressure on the superintendent to increase student learning at all levels (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). How elected school board members and superintendents work together is vital to the quality of schools (Rammer, 2010). Black (2008) cited, “The best boards target policies and resources to promote achievement for all students. They concentrate on high standards, a rigorous curriculum, and high-quality teachers. They make decisions based on the core business of schools, which is student achievement” (p. 34). Given that the level of accountability is so great, school members and superintendents who work well together can better manage stressful experiences that may arise.

Petersen and Fussarelli (2001) found, “Research literature focused on district leadership indicates that the relationship between the superintendent and board of education has a significant impact on the quality of a district’s educational program” (pg. 3). Dervarics and O’Brien (2011) found that there tends to be a direct correlation between school districts where students perform well academically and the local school board of education exhibits effective and healthy characteristics. Korelich and Maxwell (2015) also identified districts that had strong superintendent-school board relations as having better student achievement than those districts that had weaker superintendent-school board relations.

The Center for Public Education (2011) found that school boards in high-achieving districts are significantly different in their knowledge and beliefs than schools in low-achieving districts. In addition, Ford (2017) reported that districts that are indicative of a strong board-superintendent relationship had better student achievement than those that did not. School boards in high-achieving districts exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in low-achieving districts (Black, 2008).

Dervarics and O'Brien (2011) identified that school boards in low achieving districts demonstrate an inability to agree on goals, they do not communicate high expectations for students, and they do not utilize data to drive decisions. School boards in low achieving districts do not have effective channels for communicating with the superintendent, which makes it challenging to address any adversity that may arise and they do not have a trusting relationship with the superintendent. School boards in low achieving districts get involved with the process of implementing policies rather than allow district staff to do so.

School boards in high achieving districts demonstrate the ability to set goals that communicate high expectations and they are able to monitor their goals (Eadie, 2008). They utilize data to drive decisions that are in the best interest of the district and students. They also demonstrate detailed knowledge of the district and the community. Richardson (2005) identified effective school board members have developed a positive working relationship with the superintendent, teachers, and administrators based on mutual respect, collegiality and a joint commitment to student success. Effective school boards also lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust (Richardson, 2005).

Researchers of the Hanover Research study (2014) identified common strategies that represent an overview of effective school board and superintendent relationships in high-achieving districts. The study cites districts where student achievement is high, school members and the superintendent are consistently able to identify practices that are aligned with board-stated goals (p. 18). The study also indicates that high-achieving districts have school boards and superintendents that keep regulation to a minimum and the two entities communicate as one body and interact in a similar manner (p.18). In addition, the Hanover Research study (2014) found that, “Research on the dynamics between superintendents and school boards unanimously agrees that effective communication contributes significantly to successful governance” (p. 10). Such common, healthy, and effective strategies contribute to high-achieving districts maintaining successful and positive student outcomes and instructional programs.

### **Leadership Roles**

When a healthy and trusting relationship between school board members and the superintendent exists, the chances of friction and role confusion decrease. Especially with various shifts in educational accountability and legislation, the roles of superintendents and school board members may become confusing. Therefore, it is important that school board members and the superintendent have defined roles in education. The function of the school board is to develop policy and the function of the superintendent is to administer policy, but there often is overlap between the roles of the two entities (Lee & Eadens, 2014). As far back as 1982, the Montana School Boards Association identified the role of the school board as one that develops policy and the role of the superintendent is to administer policy. Moody (2011) stated, “...that a positive and stable relationship between boards of education and school superintendents is directly related to positive school outcomes” (pg. 76). Establishing clear roles

between the two entities contributes to a positive and stable relationship between school board members and the superintendent.

As the superintendent works to administer policy, he or she also serves as the liaison between the school board and the individual school sites. Because the superintendent is the liaison between school boards and individual school sites, a poor relationship between superintendents and school boards deters school improvement and student achievement (Sell, 2006). School boards assign the day-to-day responsibility of managing and leading a school district to the superintendent (Marzano et al., 2005). An unhealthy and negative relationship between the two entities serves as a deterrent to the education of children (Miller et al., 2009). Moody (2011) stated, "...that problems between boards of education and superintendents tend to surface when some board members attempt to assume a more active role in the operational aspects of schooling than the superintendent is willing to accept" (pg. 80). Such micromanaging by board members takes patience and time for the superintendent to work with and eliminate. Micromanagement behaviors of individual board members is made more difficult by board members who make promises to members of their communities that are outside their ability to control.

Most superintendents have some degree of influence in the development of policy and most school boards have some influence in policy administration (Townsend et al., 2007). An unhealthy and negative relationship between school members and superintendents exacerbates role confusion and role ambiguity between the entities (Rammer, 2010). Hanover Research (2014) reported that, "Role confusion between school boards and superintendents occurs when the two parties encroach on each other's responsibilities, reducing district efficiency, inhibiting necessary strategic planning, and causing tension" (p. 6). The study also reported, "The most

common type of role confusion in districts involves superintendents focusing too heavily on policy and school boards extending too far into administrative functions” (p. 6). This type of behavior can reduce the ability for school board members and superintendents to work collaboratively and effectively with one another.

The Washington State School Directors’ Association conducted a study in 2009 entitled “Serving on Your Local School Board: A Guide to Effective Leadership.” A key point and running theme throughout the study is that, “School boards govern, administrators implement” (p. 7). The study cited that school board members fulfill their governance role in four ways: vision, structure, accountability, and advocacy. Vision is demonstrated when a school board with input from the community and district staff, envisions the community’s educational future and then formulates the goals, defines the outcomes, and sets the course for its public schools. A proper and healthy structure includes the board employing a superintendent, engages in a strategic planning process to adopt a mission and goals aligned with its vision, develops and approves policies, formulates budgets, and sets high instructional standards for students. An accountable board is one where the board monitors student achievement and ensures program adjustments are made when necessary and that the public is informed about programs and progress. An accountable school board also ensures professional development is provided for staff and the board. It also ensures governance and legal responsibilities are fulfilled. A school board also serves a crucial role as an advocate in the community for public education on behalf of students and schools. School boards can also play a significant role as an advocate in representing the needs and interests of their students to state and national policymakers.

As is consistent with the Montana School Board’s Association (1982) assertion, the Washington State School Directors’ Association also identified the school board’s role as

developing policy, not implementing or carrying out policy. The report found, “One of the board’s major functions, and the foundation upon which the district’s structure is built, is the setting of policy. The board develops and adopts district policy governing all facets of school operations...” (p. 9). A board delegates the implementation of policies to the superintendent. The superintendent is responsible for ensuring that policies are implemented.

### **Board-Superintendent Conflicts**

School board members and superintendents who have trusting and healthy relationships can overcome various obstacles like those related to role confusion. They are able to utilize social capital for the collective good of the educational organization and community. Social capital that allows for overcoming obstacles include garnering social support from various stakeholders (Krishna, 2002). This becomes more valuable when those stakeholders represent different races and classes of the community. Claridge (2004) found utilizing social leverage is another component of social capital that allows for overcoming obstacles. Social leverage includes being able to employ networks of people and groups of people to garner support toward a common goal or addressing an adverse situation. In both cases, school board members and/or the superintendent communicate to people that it is the collective good of the organization that matters.

Given the complex nature of the relationship between school board members and the superintendent, the first order of business between the entities is to establish a relationship of trust (Boyd et al., 2008). Each entity must learn to work with one another in an environment that communicates trust and respect. When trust and respect exist between superintendents and school board members, there is greater potential for success and progress (Fowler, 2009). Halpern (2005) identified trust as a key component in whether or not school board members and

superintendents can function as a team. In addition, Krishna (2002) recognized that trust and confidence result from good team relationships and are sustained by open and candid communication.

Open and ongoing communication can take place in various arenas according to Sell (2006). One arena is during the evaluation process. School boards and superintendents who have healthy relationships are able to be candid with one another during the evaluation process. In receiving feedback from the board, the superintendent who has a trusting relationship with the board will work to employ the suggestions and feedback that was received. The information will be viewed as constructive and in the best interest of the superintendent and the organization. The same holds true in public arenas. School board members and superintendents who are communicating the same message(s) in public appear to be in sync with one another and have a healthy relationship. Conversely, bickering between superintendents and school board members harms many careers and serves as a deterrent to the education of children (Rammer, 2010). In order for an educational program to succeed, the relationship between superintendents and school board members must be positive and based on trust.

Establishing a trusting and collaborative relationship between school board members and the superintendent is one of the highest and most essential priorities for the superintendent of any district (Townsend et al., 2007). Stephen Covey (2009) claims that the first job of any leader is to inspire trust. The superintendent is to build trust throughout the organization starting with the school board. In order for superintendents to guide school board members through navigating legal mandates, instructional expectations, and the myriad of educational policies, a foundation of trust must be developed and sustained between school board members and the superintendent. Thompson (2014) identifies the relationship between school board members and the

superintendent as a unique one that must be based on teamwork and a partnership in order to succeed.

## **Teamwork**

It is vital that superintendents and school board members view themselves as a team and not separate entities (Ford, 2017). In order to build a foundation of teamwork, school board members and superintendents must have a collaborative and trusting relationship (Miller et al., 2009). A trusting and collaborative relationship is an ongoing process that is developed over a period of time. Trusting relationships are key to fostering and accessing social capital (Halpern, 2005). Developing and sustaining a trusting relationship is a collective team effort between the superintendent and school board members. Social capital is a powerful resource because it facilitates cooperation (Claridge, 2004). To maximize the benefits of social capital, teamwork is not a one-sided relationship.

Working as a team is based on shared understanding. Board members and the superintendent should work to develop common goals, a common language, and common expectations (Lee & Eadens, 2014). Those are signs of working as a team. Without mutual respect and clearly defined roles, that understanding of a team cannot be achieved. According to Namit (2008), if the board and superintendent have not paid proper attention to their relationship and ability to work together as a team, they may well end by suspecting each other of duplicity, incompetence, and downright meanness. Neglect of appropriate communication threatens first the understanding of each other's proper roles, and ultimately the ability to work together.

The best leaders begin by framing trust for their companies and organizations (Covey, 2009). As leaders, superintendents and school board members might have great skills and talents

and a good record of achievement, but if he or she is not considered trustworthy, one will not follow the superintendent or school board member or view them as leaders. Trust matters to management and leadership as well as to those being lead. It affects the quality of every relationship, every communication, every work project, every business venture, every effort in which people are engaged (Covey, 2009).

### **School-Community Relations**

In addition to school board members and superintendents having to build trust with one another, they must also build trust with members of the community. Superintendents are advised to encourage community involvement in public schools (Kowalski et al., 2010). Theoharis and Scanlan (2015) found that boards and superintendents experienced pushback from the public they serve when reforms are created and implemented without community consent, involvement, and support. Jones (2011) identified that superintendents felt it was important to be visible in the community, not only on each campus, but also at various extra-curricular events and around the community in general. By attending school events and activities during the day and evening, the superintendents felt they were building the trust of the board and the community.

Superintendents felt that listening to the community during events and activities was an important component of their position. Events and activities in the community include Rotary luncheons that allow for networking with the business community, City Council meetings that allow for networking with community leadership, chamber meetings, and ethnic leadership events.

About superintendents and their first ninety days on the job, Jones (2011) stated, “I think the first 90 days you set your expectations for your staff, what they expect of you, and then you develop relationships with the community” (p. 11). Jones (2011) also stated, “First impressions

are lasting impressions, especially when you go into a new district and they have got to be able to trust you” (p. 11). Superintendents believe it is critical to build a positive relationship with community stakeholders because individuals or special interest groups can support or challenge a superintendent’s agenda or even the superintendent’s job security (Lee & Eadens, 2014). It is for this reason that community stakeholders also have influence over superintendents.

Theoharis and Scanlan (2015) concluded that school boards and superintendents must develop processes and practices to connect with their school communities. Eadie (2008) considered community involvement in public schools as essential in relation to forging district missions and visions. Thomson (2014) also concluded that, “The concept of effectively connecting with the community holds the prospect for significant benefits, which will result in student achievement” (p. 75). Effectively connecting with the community may include embracing community values, partnering with community organizations, building trust with community members and groups, and engaging the community by attending events (Krishna, 2002).

Just as superintendents must build trust with the community, school board members must do the same. Community members elect school board members. They are the individuals entrusted by a community to support education. Marzano et al. (2005) noted in a community, education is supposed to level the playing the field amongst social classes. Through the very process of being elected, school board members are building trust with community stakeholders. In essence, the elected school board members garner a great deal of social capital.

Black (2008) described school board members as an elected body that represent the community's beliefs and values, “The best boards develop partnerships with parents and residents. They invite constituents to help determine the district’s vision, values, and short-term

and long-term priorities” (p. 34). Sell (2006) stated the school board is an advocate for the community when it comes to decisions in public education. As with various elections, members of the community vote for the school board member that best represents what they would like to see in their own school systems and school districts. “The board is the community’s education watchdog” (Sell, 2006, p. 75).

The political influence that school board members wield and the political influence that influences them affect a school district (Miller et al., 2009). Hanover Research (2014) identified, “As elected officials, school boards members inevitably face political hurdles when attempting to improve district performance. Special interest group activism, ideological divides in the community, and the public’s general loss of confidence in a district’s educational leaders can place school board members in political, reform-inhibiting binds” (p. 20).

School board members are the elected representatives of a school community. School boards by their very nature are made-up of lay members that generally are elected rather than appointed (Fowler, 2009). These lay members who are elected to their positions rather than appointed may feel political pressure. “When stakeholders groups exerted legitimate power against them, superintendents’ decisions were impacted, such as having their decisions overturned by their boards or having a student suspension appealed and/or changed through a parent’s actions” (Miller et al., 2009, p. 32). School boards reversing the decision of a superintendent based on community or parental pressure may be an indicator of a poor working relationship between the school boards and superintendents.

According to Eadie (2008), many school board members feel more committed to dealing with the needs and interests of particular constituencies than to the concept of the board as a collective governing entity. This causes the board to be dysfunctional and board members will

begin to lack trust in one another. Because the relationship between school board members and the superintendent impacts various facets of a school district, community stakeholders such as Educational Foundations, Parent and Teacher Organizations, Rotary Clubs, and youth Park and Recreation organizations are impacted, either directly or indirectly, by the relationship of school board members and the superintendent.

Students are the largest stakeholder group in a school district and teachers are the largest employee group in a school district. Both stakeholder groups are impacted by the relationship between superintendents and school board members. School board members and superintendents are able to interact most with students and teachers when at school sites. In the worst school districts, the superintendent was nowhere to be found, seldom in his office, in schools or classrooms, or in contact with teachers and students (Black, 2007). Moffett (2011) found that visiting classrooms gives school board members an opportunity to expand their understanding of relevant issues in their schools. In addition, school board members who attend school events is significant in building positive relationship with students and teachers (Jones, 2011).

Superintendents and school board members who are more visible at school meetings, events, and activities will build trusting relationships with staff members (Eadie, 2008). Such presence at school sites generates greater visibility. By attending meetings, events, and activities at school sites, school board members and superintendents will be seen by students, teachers, and other stakeholders. When superintendents and school board members attend school meetings and events together, their image and good will may be perceived as positive by those at the sites and in the community (Sell, 2006). Such visibility may build familiarity and positive relationships with stakeholder groups. Such visibility may also build confidence and trust with

stakeholder groups (Jones, 2011). A superintendent and school board who attend school events have a better understanding of the critical issues in collective bargaining contracts.

In *Power and the Role of the Superintendent*, Miller et al. (2009) identified seven types of power that superintendents use to exert power and influence in their positions. The seven types of power are Reward power, Coercive power, Legitimate power, Referent power, Expert power, Informational power, and Connectional power. Of the seven types of power, “Connectional power was the power most frequently involved in actions superintendents mentioned” (Miller et al., 2009, p. 31). Connectional power is related to influence and support from stakeholders who are around superintendents. Many of these stakeholders include students and teachers at the school sites. “Trustees and superintendents must stop mouthing the word ‘partnership’ and start taking steps to implement it instead” (Zlotkin, 1993, p. 25). Ford (2017) found that school board members and superintendents must enter into real partnerships with staff and students in order to achieve any kind of success. Making such connections with students and teachers contributed to greater success when superintendents proposed initiatives or made suggestions.

### **Conclusion**

The review of literature revealed that the research questions are valid because there is an apparent gap in the literature as it pertains to investigating the affect of the superintendent’s relationship with school board members. Previous literature on the subject suggest a number of factors related to this relationship that impacts a school district. The review of literature focused on six concepts that stem from social capital that relate to the relationship between school board members and the superintendent:

1. Educational accountability resulting from federal, state, and local mandated legislation influences the school board member and superintendent relationship.

2. The impact of the school board members and superintendent relationship on the instructional program.
3. The defined roles of school board members developing policy and the superintendent administering policy.
4. School board members and superintendents overcoming conflicts with one another.
5. The positive impacts on a school district result from school board members and superintendents working as a team.
6. School board members and superintendents must not only build trusting relationships with another, they must also build trusting relationships with community members.

A review of relevant literature suggests that the school board member and superintendent relationship is grounded on social capital. Social capital allows for the relationship between school board members and superintendents to function effectively. The literature also suggests that the relationship between superintendents and school board members influences student academic achievement. There tends to be a direct correlation between school districts where students perform well academically and the local school board of education exhibits effective and healthy characteristics. In addition, cultivating trusting and collaborative relationships between school board members and the superintendent will have positive effects on a school district. School board members and superintendents must also build trust and work collaboratively with students, employees, and community members.

The reviewed literature also revealed that the school board member and superintendent relationship is influenced by politically mandated legislation. As uncovered through reviewed literature, the relationship between school board members and the superintendent affects a school district. Although this relationship is a complex one, literature also suggests that the relationship

between school board members and superintendents is a pivotal one to the success or failure of a school district.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

This study explored how superintendents and school board members perceive their relationship and what impact, if any, those perceptions have on a school district. This study also explored which characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe this study's methodology. This chapter describes the research design, research setting, and research sample for this study. The instrument and procedures for collecting data are also discussed. In addition, the methods for collecting data and analyzing data are explained. Finally, the role of the researcher is described.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This dissertation sought to gain information and knowledge regarding the impact of the relationship between the superintendent and school board members on a school district. The study is pertinent to education as the relationship between school board members and the superintendent is critical to student achievement (Devarics & O'Brien, 2011; Korelich & Maxwell, 2015). In fact, school board members and superintendents are expected to respond to increasing state and federal accountability measures making the process of teaching and learning more dynamic and rigorous. The impact of the relationship between school board members and superintendents is also critical to the district budget, relationships with students, employee morale, the development of policy, and the administration of policy (Lee & Eadens, 2014). There is greater potential for success and progress within a public school district when the relationship between school board members and the superintendent is positive (Townsend et al., 2007). Lamkin (2006) provided necessary background for research related to how educational

reform and very high academic expectations have contributed to the relationship between school board members and superintendents.

To further knowledge on this topic, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship?
2. What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?

### **Research Design**

This study utilized quantitative research design. Quantitative research is defined as studies in which the researcher seeks to establish the overall tendency of responses from individuals and note how this tendency varies among people (Creswell, 2008). A quantitative survey research method was appropriate because the aim of this study was to investigate the trends in attitudes between school board members and superintendents on levels of satisfaction in the factors of educational accountability, instructional programs, leadership roles, school board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. In addition, the study sought to investigate attitudes between school board members and superintendents on the levels of importance related to characteristics that are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

A questionnaire was designed to collect data (Appendix A). Participants answered four demographic questions and 35 primary questions that addressed components of the research questions that frame this study. Questionnaire items were answered on a Likert-type scale that indicated the participants' level of satisfaction or importance with each of the items. For each of the first 25 primary questions, participants were asked to indicate whether they were very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied or dissatisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied. A score of 1

indicated a response of very satisfied, a score of 2 indicated a response of satisfied, a score of 3 indicated a response of neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, a score of 4 indicated a response of dissatisfied, and a score of 5 indicated a response of very dissatisfied. The lower the mean score, the higher the level of satisfaction.

For the remaining ten survey questions (items 26-35), participants were asked to indicate the level of importance related to characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships by indicating whether they viewed the items as very important, important, moderately important, unimportant, or not important at all. A score of 1 indicated a response of very important, a score of 2 indicated a response of important, a score of 3 indicated a response of moderately important, a score of 4 indicated a response of unimportant, and a score of 5 indicated a response of not important at all. The lower the mean score, the higher the level of importance.

### **Dependent Variables**

Dependent variables were identified in this study. The dependent variables were the six factors that were the construct for the instrument. The dependent variables were: (a) educational accountability, (b) instructional program, (c) leadership roles, (d) board-superintendent conflicts, (e) teamwork, and (f) school-community relations.

### **Independent Variables**

Independent variables were identified in this study to analyze the data. The independent variables were (a) gender of the subjects within the study, (b) student enrollment within each participant's district, and (c) years of experience in the position as a school board member or superintendent.

## **Data Source and Population**

Participants were selected from the state of California database system that includes contact information for school board members and superintendents within the state. The researcher had access to participants because he secured the support from the California School Board Association (CSBA) Board of Directors. The CSBA Board of Directors allowed the researcher to use their comprehensive e-mail database to contact superintendents and school board members within the state of California to create a random sampling of participants. In order to keep the random sample sizes as large as possible, invitations to participate were sent to 250 superintendents and 350 school board members in the CSBA database system.

The population of interest for this study is school board members and school superintendents within the state of California. Although invitations were sent to 250 superintendents and 350 school board members, the total size of the population is approximately 6,000 people with school board members comprising approximately 5,000 members and superintendents comprising approximately 1,000 members. Therefore, given the expected response rate of 50%, the researcher expected 175 responses from school board members and 125 responses from superintendents. An electronic survey was sent to the identified populations in the State of California public school district database compiled by the CSBA in order to maximize the final sample size for analysis.

Participants in the study belonged to one of the two categories of research targets: school board members or superintendents. During the period of October through December 2016, participants were sent an invitation to participate via electronic mail survey. The survey was sent to 350 school board members and 250 superintendents for a total of 600 invitations. Of these invitations,  $N = 105$  school board members completed a survey and  $N = 90$  superintendents

completed a survey. The response rate for the survey was roughly 30% for school board members and 36% for superintendents yielding an overall response rate of 33% (Table 3.0). The number of responses did not meet the expected response rate of 50% for either population.

Table 3.0

*Sample Demographic and Response Rate*

Variable	Participants	
	%	<i>N</i>
<b>Sample Size</b>		
School Board Members	58%	350
Superintendents	42%	250
Total	100%	600
<b>Survey Population Size</b>		
School Board Members	55%	105
Superintendents	45%	90
Total	100%	195
<b>Response Rate</b>		
School Board Members	30%	
Superintendents	36%	
Overall Rate	33%	

The overall number of respondents included 91 females, representing 47% of the respondents and 104 males, representing 53% of the respondents. Of the total number of 105 school board members who responded, 61 were female representing 58% of school board member respondents and 44 were male representing 42% of school board member respondents. Of the total number of 90 superintendents who responded, 30 were female representing 33% of superintendent responses and 60 were male representing 67% of superintendent responses (Table 3.1).

In addition, data was also collected on years of experience for both sample populations was also collected. Categorically, of the 105 school board members who responded, 46%, or 48

have been a school board member for 0-5 years; 30%, or 31 have been a school board member for 6-10 years; 11%, or 13 have been a school board member for 11-15 years; 7%, or 7 have been a school board member for 16-20 years; and 6%, or 6 have been a school board member for 21 or more years. Categorically, of the superintendents who responded, 61%, or 55 have been a superintendent for 0-5 years; 25%, or 22 have been a superintendent for 6-10 years; 10%, or 9 have been a superintendent for 11-15 years; 1%, or 1 has been a superintendent for 16-20 years, and 3%, or 3 have been a superintendent for 21 or more years (Table 3.1).

Data was also collected on district size in terms of student enrollment. Respondents were asked to indicate the total student enrollment for the district in which they served at the time they were completing the survey. Categorically, of the 105 school board members who completed the survey, 53%, or 55 served in a district where enrollment was between 1-4,999 students; 21%, or 22 served in a district where enrollment was between 5,000-9,999 students; 9%, or 9 served in a district where enrollment was between 10,000-14,999 students; 5%, or 5 served in a district where student enrollment was between 15,000-19,999 students; and 12%, or 13 served in a district where student enrollment was over 20,000 students. Categorically, of the 90 superintendents who completed the survey, 68%, or 61 were from a district where enrollment was between 1-4,999 students; 11%, or 10 were from a district where enrollment was between 5,000-9,999 students; 10%, or 9 were from a district where enrollment was between 10,000-14,999 students; 6%, or 5 were from a district where enrollment was between 15,000-19,999 students; and 6%, or 5 were from a district where enrollment was over 20,000 students (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

*Demographic Data of Participants*

Variable	Participants	
	%	<i>N</i>
School Board Members		
Gender		
Female	58%	61
Male	42%	44
Total	100%	105
Years of Experience		
0-5 years	46%	48
6-10 years	30%	31
11-15 years	11%	13
16-20 years	7%	7
21+ years	6%	6
Total	100%	105
Student Enrollment		
1-4,999 students	53%	55
5,000-9,999 students	21%	22
10,000-14,999 students	9%	9
15,000-19,999 students	5%	5
20,000+ students	12%	13
Total	100%	105
Superintendents		
Gender		
Female	33%	30
Male	67%	60
Total	100%	90
Years of Experience		
0-5 years	61%	55
6-10 years	25%	22
11-15 years	10%	9
16-20 years	1%	1
21+ years	3%	3
Total	100%	90
Student Enrollment		
1-4,999 students	67%	61
5,000-9,999 students	11%	10
10,000-14,999 students	10%	9
15,000-19,999 students	6%	5
20,000+ students	6%	5
Total	100%	90

## **Instrumentation**

The study used survey methodology as the primary investigative approach. Participants answered four demographic questions and 35 primary questions that addressed components of the research questions. The factors of the survey questions also corresponded with the factors established in the literature review that are associated to social capital and they include educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations.

The instrument used in this study is based on the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) by Eugene R. Smoley and findings from a study conducted by the Center for Public Education (2011) entitled *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*. The first 25 questions influenced by the BSAQ was used to answer the first research question: How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship? The findings from the study conducted by the Center of Public Education (2011) influenced the remaining ten questions and were used to answer the second research question: What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?

The BSAQ developed by Smoley consists of 73 statements that required respondents to rate each statement with strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. For the purpose of this study, all 73 statements from Smoley's original BSAQ were reviewed. BSAQ statements were identified that were relevant to the factors of this study. The identified statements that were selected corresponded with the factors established in the literature review to answer the research question related to how satisfied school board members and superintendents are with their relationship. Of the 73 statements from the BSAQ, four were identified to address the factor of

educational accountability, four were identified to address the factor of instructional program, four were identified to address the factor of leadership roles, five were identified to address board-superintendent conflicts, four were identified to address teamwork, and four were identified to address school-community relations.

Each of the first 25 survey items was linked to a factor derived from social capital. The six factors are educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. A score of 1 indicated a response of very satisfied, a score of 2 indicated a response of satisfied, a score of 3 indicated a response of neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, a score of 4 indicated a response of dissatisfied, and a score of 5 indicated a response of very dissatisfied. The lower the mean score, the higher the level of satisfaction. The factors and the survey questions they are associated with are represented in a construct map in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

*Construct Map for Survey Items 1-25:*

Factor	Question
Educational Accountability	Q1. This board and superintendent set aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts like the one we govern.
	Q7. This board and superintendent request adequate information before making a decision.
	Q13. This board and superintendent accept responsibility for addressing some important issues facing the school district.
	Q19. This board and superintendent are consistently able to hold confidential items in confidence.

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Instructional Program	<p>Q2. This board and superintendent set clear instructional priorities for the academic year.</p> <p>Q8. This board and superintendent work closely together in making decisions that are important to the future of education in our district.</p> <p>Q14. Within the past year, this board and superintendent reviewed the school district’s strategies for attaining its long-term instructional goals.</p> <p>Q20. This board and superintendent have participated in discussions about the effectiveness of the district’s instructional program.</p>
Leadership Roles	<p>Q3. This board and superintendent rely on observation and informal discussions to learn about their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Q9. This board and superintendent have participated in discussions about their roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Q15. This board and superintendent effectively and often discuss roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>Q21. This board and superintendent have conducted an explicit examination of its roles and responsibilities.</p>
Board –Superintendent Conflict	<p>Q4. This board and superintendent have participated in discussions about what it should do differently as a result of a mistake a board member or superintendent has made.</p> <p>Q10. When faced with an important issue, the board and superintendent often “brainstorms” and tries to generate a whole list of creative approaches or solutions to the problem.</p> <p>Q16. This board and superintendent confer so that differences of opinions are identified.</p> <p>Q22. This board and superintendent discuss the values of the district in reaching a conclusion to a problem.</p> <p>Q25. This board and superintendent are able to speak their minds on key issues without fear that they will be ostracized by some members of the board.</p>

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Teamwork	Q5. This board and superintendent work to reach consensus on important matters.
	Q11. This board and superintendent don't say one thing in private and another thing in public.
	Q17. This board and superintendent typically goes out of their way to make sure that all members have the same information on important issues.
	Q23. Once a decision is made, this board and superintendent work together to see that the decision is accepted and carried out.
School -Community Relations	Q6. This board and superintendent have formal structures and procedures for involving the community.
	Q12. This board and superintendent maintain channels of communication with specific key community leaders.
	Q18. Explicit attention is given to the concerns of the community during board meetings.
	Q24. This board and superintendent have formed effective ad hoc committees or task forces that include staff, board members, and community representatives.

The findings from the study conducted by the Center of Public Education (2011) were used to develop questions 26-35 of the survey instrument. The study, *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*, conducted a meta-analysis review of studies that consisted of bodies of research that examined the characteristics and practices of effective school boards. The study defined effective school boards as "...those operating in high-achieving districts, particularly those that are making significant strides despite serving large numbers of disadvantaged students" (Center for Public Education, 2011, p. 1). The pertinent studies identified for meta-analysis fell into three general areas. The first being studies with a focus on the practices of school boards, superintendents, and other school leaders. The second being case studies of high-

achieving districts with a focus on the evolving role of school boards. The third being studies that compare school board practices in districts with similar demographics but substantially different student outcomes as reflected by annual assessments and other factors.

In *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*, the Center for Public Education concluded that school boards in high-achieving districts look different, and they often feature characteristics and approaches that differ from those in lower-achieving districts. The findings included eight characteristics of effective school boards. To develop questions 26-35 of the survey used for this study, the findings from *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards* were used. A score of 1 indicated a response of very important, a score of 2 indicated a response of important, a score of 3 indicated a response of moderately important, a score of 4 indicated a response of unimportant, and a score of 5 indicated a response of not important at all. The lower the mean score, the higher the level of importance.

The eight characteristics of effective school boards that were identified by the Center for Public Education include:

1. Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision.
2. Effective school boards have strong-shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.
3. Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

4. Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communication structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals.
5. Effective school boards are data savvy; they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement.
6. Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development to meet district goals.
7. Effective school boards lead as a united team with the superintendent, each form their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust.
8. Effective school boards take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement roles.

## **Procedures**

The participants were selected using random sampling. Participants were selected from the state of California database system that includes contact information for school board members and superintendents within the state. The researcher had access to participants because he secured the support from the CSBA Board of Directors. The CSBA Board of Directors allowed the researcher to use their comprehensive e-mail database to contact superintendents and school board members within the state of California. In order to keep the random sample sizes as large as possible, invitations to participate were sent to 250 superintendents and 350 school board members in the CSBA database system.

Superintendents and school board members within the state of California received an e-mail communication (Appendix B) that outlined the study. This e-mail also contained a link to

the questionnaire. As part of the questionnaire, participants were required to read an informed consent statement before beginning the survey. By continuing with the questionnaire and completing the survey, participants gave informed consent to participate in the study. Participants were asked to respond to a survey questionnaire that should have taken approximately 10 minutes to complete.

The study and its purpose were explained in the questionnaire that invited participants to take part in a survey. Participation was entirely voluntary and participants were able to discontinue their participation at any time. The identity and responses of all participants remained anonymous given participants were not required to identify their name or school district.

Participants were required to respond to four demographic questions prior to beginning the survey. Participants were asked to identify themselves as either a school board member or a superintendent or both. They were then required to identify their gender as male or female. The third demographic question required participants to select the number of years they have been a school board member or superintendent. The fourth and final demographic question required participants to indicate the enrollment size of their district in terms of student population. Once all four demographic questions were answered, participants were able to proceed with responding to the 35 questions in the survey.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected for this study via an electronic survey, which was e-mailed to participants. Because participation in the study was entirely voluntary, participants were able to discontinue their participation at any time. The survey was created via Survey Monkey. Upon completion of the survey, participants selected a *done* button that allowed them to submit their

responses. Responses, once received, were automatically imported to the Survey Monkey program and converted to an Excel spreadsheet. That Excel spreadsheet was in turn exported to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software allowing the researcher to organize and analyze the data.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the surveys was captured through the Survey Monkey program. The data was then converted to an Excel spreadsheet. The items were coded for the six factors derived from social capital that include educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. The Excel spreadsheet was exported to Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software allowing the researcher to organize and analyze the data. This study used a correlation design in order to analyze the relationships between participants' role in the study and their attitudes towards variables that contribute to forming perceptions of satisfaction and level of importance.

First, descriptive statistics for all variables were run and scales were calculated to identify patterns that may have emerged from the data. Descriptive statistics allows a researcher to organize data by summarizing the mode and median of participant responses (Salkind, 2014). Second, factor analysis of the participant responses was completed to identify emerged factors. Salkind (2014) defined factor analysis as a technique based on how various items are related to one another and form clusters or factors that represent several variables. Detailed results of factor analysis are found in Chapter 4. Third, Chronbach's Alpha analysis of the data was conducted in order to confirm the consistency and reliability of the instrument questions and the six factors associated with the framework of this study. Cronbach's alpha is used in statistics to measure the internal consistency among samples (Wagner, 2011). Finally, multiple regression

analysis was done to look for correlations among variables. Regression analysis was appropriate because it is a method of data analysis in which the relationship among variables is represented in the form of an equation (Babbie, 2013).

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher did not know the identity of respondents. Therefore, participation in the study was anonymous. In order to protect the identity of participants, names of superintendents and school board members were not included in the findings and unknown to the researcher. Participation in the study was completely voluntary as well. Participants could discontinue participation at any time. The participants were informed of these rights before the survey began via the informed consent message that was included in the first paragraph on the first page of the electronic survey. By continuing with the questionnaire and completing the survey, participants gave informed consent to participate in the study.

### **Summary**

The information regarding the methodology offered in this chapter will attempt to provide a body of knowledge about how satisfied school board members and superintendents are with their relationship. This information will also attempt to provide knowledge on which characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore, collect, analyze, and report how superintendents and school board members perceive their relationship and what impact, if any, those perceptions have on a school district. The study also aimed to examine which characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. This chapter will detail the statistical tests conducted on the data as well as report relevant statistical data and tables.

### **Research Questions**

The findings of this quantitative study were analyzed as they pertain to the study's research questions:

1. How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship?
2. What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?

### **Study Description**

Once the data collection was complete, descriptive statistics for all variables were conducted and scales were calculated to identify patterns that may have emerged from the data. Factor analysis of the participant responses related to level of importance (items 26-35) was completed to identify factors that may have emerged. Chronbach's Alpha analysis of the data was also done in order to confirm the consistency and reliability of the instrument questions and the six factors associated with the framework of this study. The level of significance of the study

was .05. An Alpha score of  $a < .05$  for any question was deemed unacceptable. Finally, regression analysis was performed to look for correlations among variables.

### **Descriptive Analysis**

The population of interest for this study was public school board members and public school superintendents within the state of California. The total size of the population in the state of California is approximately 6,000 people with school board members comprising approximately 5,000 members and superintendents comprising approximately 1,000 members. Participants were selected from the state of California database system that included contact information for school board members and superintendents within the state. In order to keep the random sample sizes as large as possible, invitations to participate were sent to 250 superintendents and 350 school board members in the CSBA database system.

Participants in the study belonged to one of the two categories of research targets: school board members or superintendents. The survey was sent to 350 school board members and 250 superintendents for a total of 600 invitations. Of these invitations,  $N = 105$  school board members completed a survey and  $N = 90$  superintendents completed a survey. The overall number of respondents included 91 females, representing 47% of the respondents and 104 males, representing 53% of the respondents (Table 3.1).

The response rate for the survey was roughly 30% for school board members and 36% for superintendents yielding an overall response rate of 33% (Table 3.0). Data on years of experience for both sample populations and district size in terms of student enrollment were also collected (Table 3.1).

The participants were given 35-survey response questions to which they were asked to rate their perceived level of satisfaction and perceived level of importance. The question

response choices were posed using a 5-point Likert-type scale and ranged from very satisfied to very dissatisfied and very important to not important at all. Table 4.0 provides the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the six factors for each sample group. Table 4.1 provides the mean scores and standard deviations of level of agreement for each of the 25 questionnaire items relating to levels of satisfaction. Table 4.2 provides the mean scores and standard deviations of level of agreement for each of the ten questionnaire items relating to levels of importance.

Table 4.0

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Six Factors Related to Levels of Satisfaction*

Factor	School Board Members			Superintendents		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Educational Accountability	105	1.90	.89	90	1.88	.78
Instructional Program	105	1.91	.95	90	1.75	.72
Leadership Roles	105	2.04	.97	90	2.07	.89
Board- Superintendent Conflicts	105	2.17	.94	90	2.10	.87
Teamwork	105	1.85	.88	90	1.66	.70
School- Community Relations	105	2.04	.90	90	1.86	.74

*Note: (1) Very satisfied; (2) Satisfied; (3) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; (4) Dissatisfied; and (5) Very dissatisfied*

School board members and superintendents are equally satisfied in the factor of educational accountability with 81% ( $M = 1.90$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) of school board members either being very satisfied or satisfied and 82% ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) of superintendents either being very

satisfied or satisfied. The data also indicated marginal significance in the level of satisfaction between school board members and superintendents in the factor of instructional program with 79% ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) of school board members being slightly less satisfied than 86% ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) superintendents. School board members and superintendents are equally satisfied in the factor of leadership roles with 75% ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) of school board members being satisfied and 75% ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = .89$ ) of superintendents being satisfied. The findings also revealed school board members and superintendents are equally satisfied in the factor of board-superintendent conflicts with 72% ( $M = 2.17$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) of school board members being satisfied and 73% ( $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) of superintendents being satisfied. In addition, the data indicates school board members and superintendents are equally satisfied in the factor of teamwork with 85% ( $M = 1.66$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) of superintendents being satisfied and 83% ( $M = 1.85$ ,  $SD = .88$ ) of school board members being satisfied. The data also indicates marginal significance in the level of satisfaction between school board members and superintendents in the factor of school-community relations with 76% ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) of school board members being slightly less satisfied than 83% ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) of superintendents.

Table 4.1

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Survey Items 1 – 25 Relating to Levels of Satisfaction*

<i>Questionnaire Item: Please indicate to what extent you are satisfied with the following statements in regards to the relationship between school board members and the superintendent from 1 (Very satisfied) to 5 (Very dissatisfied): This board and superintendent...</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q1. set aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts.	2.06	1.01
Q2. set clear instructional priorities for the academic year.	1.86	.94
Q3. rely on observation & informal discussions to learn about roles/responsibilities.	1.98	.99
Q4. participated in discussions about what to do differently as a result of a mistake.	2.24	1.06
Q5. work to reach consensus on important matters.	1.69	.89
Q6. have formal structures and procedures for involving the community.	2.04	.94
Q7. request adequate information before making a decision.	1.81	.91
Q8. work together in making decisions that are important to the future of education.	1.75	1.04
Q9. have participated in discussions about their roles and responsibilities.	2.02	1.11
Q10. “brainstorms” and tries to generate a list of creative approaches/solutions.	2.21	1.11
Q11. don’t say one thing in private and another thing in public.	1.94	1.00
Q12. maintain channels of communication with specific key community leaders.	2.04	.97
Q13. accept responsibility for addressing important issues facing the school district.	1.74	.99

Table 4.1 (continued)

Q14. reviewed the district's strategies for attaining its long-term instructional goals.	1.87	.99
Q15. Effectively and often discuss roles and responsibilities.	2.27	1.15
Q16. Confer so that differences of opinions are identified.	2.01	.99
Q17. Goes out of their way to make sure all members have the same information on important issues.	1.65	.89
Q18. Give attention to the concerns of the community during board meetings.	1.84	.96
Q19. Are consistently able to hold confidential items in confidence.	1.96	1.15
Q20 participated in discussions about the effectiveness of the instructional program.	1.88	.98
Q21. Have conducted an explicit examination of its roles and responsibilities.	1.95	1.05
Q22. Discuss the values of the district in reaching a conclusion to a problem.	2.00	.98
Q23. Work together to see that decisions are accepted and carried.	1.75	.96
Q24. Have formed effective ad hoc committees or task forces that include staff, board members, and community representatives.	1.89	1.04
Q25. Are able to speak their minds on key issues without fear that they will be ostracized by some members of the board.	2.18	1.12

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*Note: (1) Very satisfied; (2) Satisfied; (3) Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; (4) Dissatisfied; and (5) Very dissatisfied*

Satisfaction with setting aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts is noted across 41% ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ) of school board members and superintendents. The data also indicated 51% ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) of school board members and superintendents are satisfied with having formal structures and procedures for involving the

community. They are also satisfied with participating in discussions about their roles and responsibilities where 39% ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) of school members and superintendents indicated being satisfied. Respondents also indicated they are satisfied with maintaining channels of communication with specific key community leaders where 45% ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) of superintendents and school board members expressed satisfaction. Conferring so that differences of opinions are identified is another area of satisfaction for respondents where 42% ( $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) of school board members and superintendents were satisfied. In terms of discussing the values of the district in reaching a conclusion to a problem, 47% ( $M = 2.00$ ,  $SD = .98$ ) of school members and superintendents were satisfied.

In addition, the data indicated 84% ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied with setting clear instructional priorities for the academic year. In terms of relying on observation and informal discussions to learn about roles/responsibilities 77% ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied. As for requesting adequate information before making a decision 87% ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = .91$ ) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied. With not saying one thing in private and another thing in public, 83% ( $M = 1.94$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied. The study findings also revealed 82% ( $M = 1.87$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied with reviewing the district's strategies for attaining its long-term instructional goals. In terms of giving attention to the concerns of the community during board meetings 84% ( $M = 1.84$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied.

The responses across participants about forming effective ad hoc committees or task forces that include staff, board members, and community representatives revealed 77% (M = 1.89, SD = 1.04) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied. Similarly, the data indicated 78% (M = 1.95, SD = 1.05) of school board members and superintendents are very satisfied or satisfied with conducting an explicit examination of its roles and responsibilities. In regards to participating in discussions about the effectiveness of the instructional program, 79% (M = 1.88, SD = .98) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied. As for holding confidential items in confidence 77% (M = 1.96, SD = 1.15) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied.

Furthermore, 89% (M = 1.75, SD = .96) of school board members and superintendents indicated they were very satisfied or satisfied with working together to see that decisions are accepted and carried out. With making sure all members have the same information on important issues 88% (M = 1.65, SD = .89) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied. Similarly, 88% (M = 1.74, SD = .99) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied with accepting responsibility for addressing important issues facing the school district. In addition, 84% (M = 1.75, SD = 1.04) of respondents indicated they are very satisfied or satisfied with working together in making decisions that are important to the future of education. In regards to their ability to reach consensus on important matters, 88% (M = 1.69, SD = .89) of school board members and superintendents were very satisfied or satisfied.

Interestingly, 59% (M = 2.24, SD = 1.06) of respondents were either satisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with participating in discussions about what to do differently because of a mistake. The data also indicated 51% (M = 2.18, SD = 1.12) of school board members and

superintendents were either satisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with being able to speak their minds on key issues without fear that they will be ostracized by some members of the board. In terms of effectively and often discussing roles and responsibilities, 34% ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) of respondents were either satisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Finally, 56% ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) of respondents were either satisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with generating a list of creative approaches/solutions.

Table 4.2

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Survey Items 26 – 35 Relating to Levels of Importance*

<i>Questionnaire Item: In terms of level of importance, please rank the following statements related to essential characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships from 1 (Very important) to 5 (Not important at all)...</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q26. Effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement.	1.17	.47
Q27. Effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of quality instruction.	1.17	.48
Q28. Effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn.	1.34	.64
Q29. Effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.	1.45	.69
Q30. Effective school boards and superintendents have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community.	1.38	.68
Q31. That effective school boards and superintendents establish a strong communications structure.	1.19	.41
Q32. Effective school boards and superintendents use data for continuous improvement.	1.33	.55

Table 4.2 (continued)

Q33. Effective school boards and superintendents align and sustain resources to meet district goals.	1.20	.42
Q34. Effective school boards and superintendents lead as a united team to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for improvement efforts.	1.23	.48
Q35. Effective school boards and superintendents are accountability driven.	1.35	.60

*Note: (1) Very important; (2) Important; (3) Moderately important; (4) Unimportant; and (5) Not important at all*

School board members and superintendents identified all of the essential characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships as very important or important. The respondents indicated being accountability driven as very important or important ( $M = 1.35$ ,  $SD = .60$ ) as well as leading as a united team to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for improvement efforts ( $M = 1.23$ ,  $SD = .48$ ). They also indicated aligning and sustain resources to meet district goals ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) and using data for continuous improvement ( $M = 1.33$ ,  $SD = .55$ ) as being very important or important. Establishing a strong communications structure ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SD = .41$ ), having a collaborative relationship with staff and the community ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = .68$ ), and having strong shared beliefs and values about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels ( $M = 1.45$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) were identified as very important or important. Finally, school board members and superintendents indicated having strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn ( $M = 1.34$ ,  $SD = .64$ ), committing to a vision of quality instruction ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD = .48$ ), and committing to a vision of high expectations for student achievement ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD = .47$ ). These essential characteristics were identified as very important or important for effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

## Factor Analysis

A factor structure already existed for the first 25 items of this study's instrument related to levels of satisfaction. Smoley's Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ) that contained 73 original survey items provided questionnaire items for this study that contained similar factors and were already validated. The first 25 questionnaire items of this study's instrument were identified from Smoley's BSAQ and provided similar factor structures. For this study, four items from the BSAQ were identified to address the factor of educational accountability, four were identified to address the factor of instructional program, four were identified to address the factor of leadership roles, five were identified to address board-superintendent conflicts, four were identified to address teamwork, and four were identified to address school-community relations.

The ten items related to levels of importance identified from the study conducted by the Center of Public Education (2011) did not contain factor structures. The study, *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*, conducted a meta-analysis review of studies that consisted of bodies of research that examined the characteristics and practices of effective school boards. It is for this set of questionnaire items (Items 26 – 35) that factor analysis was conducted.

The purpose of factor analysis is to determine a factor structure that may exist among survey items (Salkind, 2014). The key objective in performing factor analysis is to reduce a larger set of variables to a smaller set of factors. These new factors combine items from the original set of items that are capable of accounting for a larger portion of the variability in the item.

Conducting factor analysis on items 26-35 resulted in two strong factors related to levels of importance, student achievement and collaboration (Table 4.3). The mean scores and standard deviation of the two factors were then calculated (Table 4.4). In addition, the internal consistency of the two factors, student achievement and collaboration, was examined by calculating the Cronbach's alpha for each correlation (Table 4.5). The student achievement factor yielded a Chronbach's alpha score of  $a = .856$ . The collaboration factor yielded a Chronbach's alpha score of  $a = .834$ . This indicates a strong internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire items associated with the factors of student achievement and collaboration.

Table 4.3

*Factor Analysis Results for Items 26-35*

Scale item	Factor 1: Student Achievement	Factor 2: Collaboration
Q26	.87	
Q27	.82	
Q28	.75	
Q29	.73	
Q30	.71	
Q31		.72
Q32		.75
Q33		.81
Q34		.73
Q35		.74

*Note.* Q26 (That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement.) Q27 (That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of quality instruction.) Q28 (That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn.) Q29 (That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.) Q30 (That effective school boards and superintendents have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community.) Q31 (That effective school boards and superintendents establish a strong communications structure.) Q32 (That effective school boards and superintendents use data for continuous improvement.) Q33 (That effective school boards and superintendents align and sustain resources to meet district goals.) Q34 (That effective school boards and superintendents lead as a united team to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.) Q35 (That effective school boards and superintendents are accountability driven.)

Table 4.4

*Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Two Factors Related to Levels of Importance*

Factor	School Board Members			Superintendents		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Student Achievement	105	1.33	.538	90	1.26	.400
Collaboration	105	1.25	.338	90	1.28	.439

### **Chronbach's Alpha**

A survey instrument was developed to measure the research questions that guide this study and the six factors associated with the framework of the study. Chronbach's Alpha analysis of the data was conducted in this study in order to confirm the consistency and reliability of the instrument questions and the six factors associated with the framework of this study: educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations.

Chronbach's alpha reliability coefficients range from 0.00 to 1.00. The higher the coefficient, the higher the level of reliability. Coefficients equal to 1.00 indicates perfect internal consistency reliability. Coefficients equal to 0.00 indicates a complete absence of correlation among items (Wagner, 2011). The level of significance of the study was .05. Alpha scores of  $a < .05$  were considered unacceptable. Alpha scores of  $a > .05$  were considered acceptable. An alpha of 0.70 or higher indicated strong correlation.

All six factors of this study relating to levels of satisfaction had strong Cronbach's alphas of above 0.70. This indicates a strong internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire items associated with each of the factors. The Cronbach's alphas for each of the six factors for the first

25 questions relating to what extent school board members and superintendents are satisfied in regards to their relationship with one another were as follows: Educational Accountability  $\alpha = 0.842$ , Instructional Program  $\alpha = 0.886$ , Leadership Roles  $\alpha = .879$ , Board-Superintendent Conflict  $\alpha = 0.906$ , Teamwork  $a = .880$ , and School-Community Relations  $a = .872$ . This yielded a strong combined Chronbach's alpha of  $a = .975$  for the first 25 questionnaire items (Table 4.5).

For questionnaire items 26-35 measuring the level of importance related to essential characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships, there was a strong internal consistency reliability as well. The student achievement factor yielded a Chronbach's alpha score of  $a = .856$ . The collaboration factor yielded a Chronbach's alpha score of  $a = .834$ . The Chronbach's alpha for questionnaire items 26-35 was  $a = .878$  (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

*Reliability of Instrument: Chronbach's alpha*

Factors	Items	Chronbach's alpha ( $a$ )
Educational Accountability	1, 7, 13, 19 (4 items)	.842
Instructional Program	2, 8, 14, 20 (4 items)	.886
Leadership Roles	3, 9, 15, 21 (4 items)	.879
Board-Superintendent Conflict	4, 10, 16, 22, 25 (5 items)	.906
Teamwork	5, 11, 17, 23 (4 items)	.880
School-Community Relations	6, 12, 18, 24 (4 items)	.872
Student Achievement	26, 27, 28, 29, 30 (5 items)	.856

Table 4.5 (continued)

Collaboration	31, 32, 33, 34, 35 (5 items)	.834
Overall Measurement for Level of Satisfaction	Items 1-25	.975
Overall Measurement for Level of Importance	Items 26-35	.878

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### **Comparison of Factor Scores**

One of the research questions of this study explored levels of satisfaction for school board members and superintendents by exploring how satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship (Items 1 – 25). Responses from the two sample groups regarding levels of satisfaction were compared using regression analysis. Regression analysis was used to examine the relationship between the dependent variables of this study while controlling the independent variables. The dependent variables were the six factors that were the construct for the instrument.

The dependent variables were: (a) educational accountability, (b) instructional program, (c) leadership roles, (d) board-superintendent conflicts, (e) teamwork, and (f) school-community relations. The independent variables were (a) role of the participant, (b) gender of the subjects within the study, (b) student enrollment within each participant’s district, and (c) years of experience in the position as a school board member or superintendent.

After controlling the independent variables of role, gender, student enrollment within each participant’s district, and years of experience, the data revealed marginal significance between school board members and superintendents in levels of satisfaction in the factors of instructional program (Table 4.7) and school-community relations (Table 4.11). Otherwise,

there was an absence of significant differences between school board members and superintendents in the factors of educational accountability (Table 4.6), leadership roles (Table 4.8), board-superintendent conflicts (Table 4.9), and teamwork (Table 4.10).

With controls in place, years of experience were significant in predicting levels of satisfaction. Regression analysis revealed that school board members and superintendents with more years of experience were more satisfied than their counterparts who had fewer years of experience. The more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the higher his or her score in each of the six factors related to levels of satisfaction. Other than marginal significance in the factors of instructional program and school-community relations, the data revealed that gender and student enrollment within each participant's district did not significantly influence the level of satisfaction for school board members or superintendents.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the best linear combination of role, gender, years of experience, and district size to determine if educational accountability scores were different between school board members and superintendents (Table 4.6). Not all independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(4,190) = 2.84$ ,  $p < .026$ . After controlling for differences in measures, school board members and superintendents had similar educational accountability scores. The results of the regression model indicated that the model explains 6% of the variance in educational accountability scores,  $R^2 = .06$ . One variable was a significant predictor within the model. Years of experience was significant,  $p = .002$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of educational accountability.

Table 4.6

*Regression Analysis Summary of Educational Accountability*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Role	.065	.125	.605
Gender	-.006	-.123	.960
Experience	-.032*	.010	.002
Size of district	.040	.046	.382
Constant	1.999	.140	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.06		
<i>F</i>	2.84**		

\*\**p* < .05   \**p* < .10

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the best linear combination of role, gender, years of experience, and district size to determine if instructional program scores were different between school board members and superintendents (Table 4.7). Not all independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(4,190) = 3.17$ ,  $p < .015$ . After controlling for differences in measures, school board members and superintendents had similar instructional program scores. The results of the regression model indicated that the model explains 6% of the variance in instructional program scores,  $R^2 = .06$ . Two variables were predictors within the model. Years of experience was significant,  $p = .001$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of instructional program. Role was of marginal significance,  $p = .059$ ,

indicating that superintendents are more satisfied than school board members in the factor of instructional program.

Table 4.7

*Regression Analysis Summary of Instructional Program*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Role	.241	.127	.059
Gender	-.019	-.125	.880
Experience	-.033*	.010	.001
Size of district	.034	.046	.466
Constant	2.002	.142	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.06		
<i>F</i>	3.17**		

\*\**p* < .05 \**p* < .10

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the best linear combination of role, gender, years of experience, and district size to determine if leadership role scores were different between school board members and superintendents (Table 4.8). Not all independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(4,190) = 3.17$   $p < .015$ . After controlling for differences in measures, school board members and superintendents had similar leadership role scores. The results of the regression model indicated that the model explains 7% of the variance in leadership role scores,  $R^2 = .07$ . One variable was a significant predictor

within the model. Years of experience was significant,  $p = .000$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of leadership role.

Table 4.8

*Regression Analysis Summary of Leadership Roles*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Role	.039	.138	.775
Gender	.028	.135	.837
Experience	-.040*	.011	.000
Size of district	.040	.050	.860
Constant	2.278	.154	
$R^2$	.07		
$F$	2.84**		

\*\* $p < .05$  \* $p < .10$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the best linear combination of role, gender, years of experience, and district size to determine if board-superintendent conflicts scores were different between school board members and superintendents (Table 4.9). Not all independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $F(4,190) = 2.83$   $p < .026$ . After controlling for differences in measures, school board members and superintendents had similar board-superintendent conflicts scores. The results of the regression model indicated

that the model explains 7% of the variance in leadership role scores,  $R^2 = .07$ . One variable was a significant predictor within the model. Years of experience was significant,  $p = .000$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of board-superintendent conflicts scores.

Table 4.9

*Regression Analysis Summary of Board-Superintendent Conflicts*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Role	.116	.135	.775
Gender	.016	.132	.837
Experience	-.033*	.011	.000
Size of district	.021	.049	.860
Constant	2.248	.151	
$R^2$	.07		
<i>F</i>	3.31**		

\*\* $p < .05$  \* $p < .10$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the best linear combination of role, gender, years of experience, and district size to determine if teamwork scores were different between school board members and superintendents (Table 4.10). Not all independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $F(4,190) = 2.47$   $p < .047$ . After controlling for differences in measures, school board members and superintendents had similar teamwork

scores. The results of the regression model indicated that the model explains 6% of the variance in teamwork scores,  $R^2 = .06$ . One variable was a significant predictor within the model. Years of experience was significant,  $p = .004$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of teamwork scores.

Table 4.10

*Regression Analysis Summary of Teamwork*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Role	.207	.119	.083
Gender	.090	.117	.443
Experience	-.028*	.010	.004
Size of district	.036	.044	.412
Constant	1.729	.134	
$R^2$	.06		
$F$	3.18**		

\*\* $p < .05$  \* $p < .10$

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the best linear combination of role, gender, years of experience, and district size to determine if school-community relations scores were different between school board members and superintendents (Table 4.11). Not all independent variables significantly contributed to the prediction,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $F(4,190) = 3.18$ ,

$p < .015$ . After controlling for differences in measures, school board members and superintendents had similar school-community relations scores. The results of the regression model indicated that the model explains 5% of the variance in school-community relations scores,  $R^2 = .05$ . Two variables were predictors within the model. Years of experience was significant,  $p = .003$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of school-community relations. Role was of marginal significance,  $p = .056$ , indicating that superintendents are more satisfied than school board members in the factor of school-community relations.

Table 4.11

*Regression Analysis Summary of School-Community Relations*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Role	.238	.124	.056
Gender	.029	.122	.811
Experience	-.030*	.010	.003
Size of district	-.030	.045	.510
Constant	2.071	.139	
$R^2$	.05		
$F$	2.92**		

\*\* $p < .05$  \* $p < .10$

## Summary

This chapter presented findings related to school members and superintendents in the state of California. The data presented in this quantitative chapter addressed the research questions that guide this study relative to how satisfied school board members and superintendents are with their relationship and what characteristics school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. In addition, the data addressed the conceptual framework related to social capital that framed this study. The factors stemming from the principle of social capital were measured through the survey instrument and included educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations.

In regards to levels of satisfaction, the data indicated the more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factors of educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, school board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. The data also indicated superintendents are more satisfied than school board members in the factors of instructional program and school-community relations.

In regards to essential characteristics to effective school board member and superintendent relationships, respondents identified the factors of student achievement and collaboration as important characteristics to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. Gender and size of district did not make a difference on levels of satisfaction or importance for school board members or superintendents in any of the factors.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter begins with an overview of the problem, purpose statement, research questions, methodology used, and summary of major findings. The discussion section will follow and provide an analysis of the findings. After the analysis section are the implications for policy and practice, followed by suggestions for future research. The conclusion ends this chapter.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to compare how the relationship between school board members and superintendents impacts a school district. The need to examine the relationship between school board members and the superintendent is more critical than ever given the various reforms in education and very high academic expectations (Ford, 2017). This study is significant because it investigates what factors school board members and superintendents are satisfied with in regards to their relationship with one another. Reporting on social capital constructs relevant to this relationship will fill a void in the current research in relation to the factors of educational accountability, instructional programs, leadership roles, board member-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. In addition, this study explored what characteristics school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

### **Statement of Purpose**

By gaining information and knowledge regarding the impact the relationship between school board members and the superintendent has on a school district, educators and other stakeholders could use the collected research to address potential concerns within their organization relevant to this relationship. The findings of this study could be used to address

characteristics of school board member and superintendent relationships that deter student achievement and school district success. Identifying perceived characteristics that are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships allows stakeholders to improve the working relationship between the two entities and increase the chances of success for a school district.

### **Research Questions**

The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship?
2. What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?

### **Methodology**

Quantitative research design was used to conduct the research for this study. This study used a survey instrument to collect data from school board members and superintendents. The instrument consisted of four demographic questions and 35 primary questions that addressed components of the research questions that frame this study. Questionnaire items were answered on a five point Likert-type scale that indicated the participants' level of satisfaction for questions 1-25 , ranging from one = very satisfied to five = very dissatisfied, or level of importance for questions 26-35, ranging from one = very important to five = not important at all.

For questions 1-25, a total of four to five items were used to measure differences between school board members and superintendents in each of the six factors of educational accountability, instructional programs, leadership roles, school board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. For questions 26-35, ten items were used to identify

what characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

Participants for this study were selected from a database system that includes contact information for school board members and superintendents within the state of California. The California School Board Association (CSBA) Board of Directors allowed the researcher to use their comprehensive e-mail database to contact superintendents and school board members within the state of California. An electronic survey was sent to the identified populations. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and their responses will remain anonymous.

In order to keep the random sample sizes as large as possible, invitations to participate were sent to 250 superintendents and 350 school board members in the CSBA database system. Of these invitations,  $N = 105$  school board members completed a survey and  $N = 90$  superintendents completed a survey. During the period of October through December 2016, participants had an opportunity to participate in the study by completing the electronic survey.

The first step to analyzing the data was to conduct descriptive statistics for all variables and calculate scales to identify patterns that may have emerged from the data. Second, factor analysis of the participant responses related to level of importance (items 26-35) was conducted to identify factors that may have emerged. Chronbach's Alpha analysis of the data was conducted next in order to confirm the consistency and reliability of the instrument questions and the original six factors associated with the framework of this study. The last step was to conduct regression analysis to look for correlations among variables.

## Discussion

### **Research Question #1: How satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship?**

The research from the literature review indicates that school board member and superintendent relationships are vital to the effectiveness of a school district and to the success of any educational institution. The academic achievement of students may be impacted by this relationship (Reeves, 2000). That impact may be positive or negative depending on the dynamics of the relationship. Even a school district's morale, stability, credibility of administrative leadership, and trustworthiness may be impacted by the superintendent and school board member relationship (Lamkin, 2006).

Additionally, the research has shown that the relationship between school board members and superintendents can be one that is complex and stressful (Miller et al., 2009). There are various factors that contribute to this complexity and stress. Eadie (2008) cited educational reform and very high academic expectations as contributing factors to making the relationship between superintendents and school board members complicated and contentious.

In order to arrive at the findings for the research question exploring how satisfied school board members and superintendents are with their relationship, multiple regression analysis was conducted. Multiple regression analysis revealed correlations among variables. It allowed for determining if factor scores were different between school board members and superintendents when controlling the variables of role, gender, years of experience, and district size.

Based on multiple regression analysis, the findings of this study revealed that years of experience significantly influences the level of satisfaction that school board members and

superintendents have in regards to the factors of educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, school board member-superintend conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. The more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the higher his or her level of satisfaction in each of the six factors related to their relationship.

In the factor of educational accountability, there was 6% variance in scores. Years of experience was of significant influence within the model,  $p = .002$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of educational accountability.

In the factor of instructional program, there was 6% percent variance in scores. Years of experience was of significant influence within the model,  $p = .001$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of instructional program.

In the factor of leadership roles, there was 7% percent variance in scores. Years of experience was of significant influence within the model,  $p = .000$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of leadership roles.

In the factor of school board-superintendent conflicts, there was 7% percent variance in scores. Years of experience was of significant influence within the model,  $p = .000$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of school board-superintendent conflicts.

In the factor of teamwork, there was 6% percent variance in scores. Years of experience was of significant influence within the model,  $p = .004$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of school board-superintendent conflicts.

In the factor of school-community relations, there was 5% percent variance in scores. Years of experience was of significant influence within the model,  $p = .003$ , indicating the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the greater the level of satisfaction in the factor of school-community relations.

The findings of this study also indicate a marginal significance between school board members and superintendents in levels of satisfaction in two factors. In relation to the factors of instructional program and school-community relations, superintendents are more satisfied than school board members. The data indicated 86% ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) of superintendents being slightly more satisfied than 79% ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) of school board members in the factor of instructional program. The data also indicated 83% ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) of superintendents being slightly more satisfied than 76% ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) of school board members in the factor of school-community relations. This means there is a statistical difference that is marginally significant between how satisfied superintendents are with the instructional program and school-community relations in comparison to school board members. Superintendents were likely to be more satisfied than school board members with the factors.

The difference in satisfaction related to the instructional program is important because school board members hold the superintendent accountable for student achievement (Thompson, 2014). High expectations from school board members place greater pressure on the superintendent to increase student learning at all levels. The risks are higher for a superintendent

versus school board members when it comes to instructional leadership. A superintendent who makes a negative instructional or academic decision may create devastating effects on a school district. Such poor decision-making by a superintendent may also take a significant amount of time to correct and may result in the superintendent being terminated by the school board (Capper & Young, 2015). It is important for the superintendent and school board members to be aligned when it comes to a district's instructional program. Strong superintendent-school board relations results in better student achievement (Korelich and Maxwell, 2015). Therefore, the better the working relationship between superintendents and school board members, the greater the potential for a school district to have higher student achievement.

The difference in satisfaction related to school-community relations is important because school board members and superintendents must build trust with members of the community. Community stakeholders have influence over superintendents and school board members (Lee & Eadens, 2014). When superintendents and school board members do not see eye to eye in regards to school-community relations, the results can have devastating effects on the superintendent's relationship with school board members. Community members elect school board members to be the individuals entrusted with supporting education. School board members are building trust with community stakeholders through the very process of being elected (Marzano et al., 2005). Individuals or special interest groups can support or challenge a superintendent's agenda or even the superintendent's job security. Therefore, it is critical for superintendents to build a positive relationship with community stakeholders.

In addition, data from multiple regression analysis revealed that gender and student enrollment within each participant's district did not significantly influence the level of satisfaction for school board members or superintendents in any of the factors. A *p* value greater

than 0.05 indicates insufficient evidence exists to support any correlation between the dependent variables and independent variables (Salkind, 2014). With controls in place, the  $p$  values of both independent variables, gender and student enrollment, for each of the six factors were insignificant. This means that gender and student enrollment do not influence levels of satisfaction for school board members or superintendents in any of the factors.

In the factor of educational accountability, the independent variable of gender yielded a  $p$  value of .960 while the independent variable of student enrollment within each participant's district yielded a  $p$  value of .382 indicating gender and student enrollment are insignificant predictors of satisfaction levels for school board members or superintendents. In the factor of instructional program, the independent variable of gender yielded a  $p$  value of .880 while the independent variable of student enrollment within each participant's district yielded a  $p$  value of .466 indicating gender and student enrollment are insignificant predictors of satisfaction levels for school board members or superintendents. In the factor of leadership roles, the independent variable of gender yielded a  $p$  value of .837 while the independent variable of student enrollment within each participant's district yielded a  $p$  value of .860 indicating gender and student enrollment are insignificant predictors of satisfaction levels for school board members or superintendents. In the factor of board-superintendent conflicts, the independent variable of gender yielded a  $p$  value of .837 while the independent variable of student enrollment within each participant's district yielded a  $p$  value of .860 indicating gender and student enrollment are insignificant predictors of satisfaction levels for school board members or superintendents. In the factor of teamwork, the independent variable of gender yielded a  $p$  value of .443 while the independent variable of student enrollment within each participant's district yielded a  $p$  value of .412 indicating gender and student enrollment are insignificant predictors of satisfaction levels

for school board members or superintendents. In the factor of school-community relations, the independent variable of gender yielded a  $p$  value of .811 while the independent variable of student enrollment within each participant's district yielded a  $p$  value of .510 indicating gender and student enrollment are insignificant predictors of satisfaction levels for school board members or superintendents.

**Research Question #2: What characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships?**

When asked what characteristics are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships, participants identified two strong factors. The findings of this study revealed the factors of student achievement and collaboration as being very important to effective school board members and superintendent relationships.

As a very important characteristic to the effectiveness of the school board member and superintendent relationship, student achievement is connected to areas of learning and instruction. This means that school board members and superintendents who commit to a vision of high expectations for student-academic success have more effective working relationships. In addition, school board members and superintendents who commit to a vision of quality instruction have more effective working relationships. School board members and superintendents who have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn have effective working relationships as well. Identifying student achievement as an important characteristic to the effectiveness of the school board member and superintendent relationship also includes school board members and superintendents having strong shared beliefs and values about the educational system within a school district and the ability to teach all children at a high level.

As a very important characteristic to the effectiveness of the school board member and superintendent relationship, collaboration is connected to areas of communication and goal-setting. This means that school board members and superintendents who have established a strong communication structure have more effective working relationships. Having effective working relationships involves leading as a united team to build shared goals, knowledge, and values. It also means that school board members and superintendents who align and sustain resources and use data to meet district goals have more effective working relationships.

When important characteristics of student achievement and collaboration between school board members and the superintendent are in place, a school district may realize greater success. Marzano et al. (2005) identified school board member and superintendent leadership as vital to the effectiveness of a school district. Numerous aspects of a school district may be influenced by the relationship between school board members and the superintendent. The influence may be realized in higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, successful implementation of state academic standards, and retention of employees. The influence may also be realized in smoother collective bargaining efforts, recruitment of new employees, effective employee discipline, increased parent participation, and meaningful community partnerships.

To uncover the factors of student achievement and collaboration, factor analysis was conducted. The purpose of conducting a factor analysis was to determine if a factor structure existed among the ten survey items. These new factors combined items from the original set of items. A larger set of variables (items 26-35) were reduced to a smaller set of factors, student achievement and collaboration. The mean scores and standard deviation of the two factors were then calculated.

School board members and superintendents identified all of the essential characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships as very important or important. Once items 26-35 were analyzed through factor analysis, school board members indicated the factor of student achievement as very important or important ( $M = 1.33$ ,  $SD = .54$ ) and they indicated the factor of collaboration as being very important or important ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = .34$ ). Superintendents indicated the factor of student achievement as very important or important ( $M = 1.26$ ,  $SD = .40$ ) and they indicated the factor of collaboration as being very important or important ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = .44$ ).

A strong internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire items associated with the factors of student achievement and collaboration were also realized. The level of agreement or disagreement from participants in the study with regard to Item 26 (That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement) was consistent with their agreement or disagreement with Item 27 (That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of quality instruction), Item 28 (That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn), Item 29 (That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels), and Item 30 (That effective school boards and superintendents have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community). This grouping of items is the student achievement factor. Essentially, this indicated that a participant who responded with agreement to an item in the factor responded similarly to the other four items within that factor.

Similarly, participants responded to Item 31 (That effective school boards and superintendents establish a strong communications structure), Item 32 (That effective school

boards and superintendents use data for continuous improvement), Item 33 (That effective school boards and superintendents align and sustain resources to meet district goals), Item 34 (That effective school boards and superintendents lead as a united team to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts), and Item 35 (That effective school boards and superintendents are accountability driven) with the same level of agreement or disagreement. This factor was named the collaboration factor.

Finally, the internal consistency of the two factors of student achievement and collaboration was examined by calculating the Cronbach's alpha for each correlation. The student achievement factor yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of  $a = .856$ . The collaboration factor yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of  $a = .834$ . The overall Cronbach's alpha for questionnaire items 26-35 was  $a = .878$ . An alpha of 0.70 or higher indicated strong correlation. As with the six factors relating to levels of satisfaction, both factors relating to levels of importance, student achievement and collaboration, had strong Cronbach's alphas of above 0.70. This confirmed that the items in the instrument were able to consistently and reliably measure the factors of student achievement and collaboration in determining important characteristics to the effectiveness of the school board member and superintendent relationship.

### **Implications**

The results of this study are of consequence to anyone who assumes the role of school board member or superintendent. It is clear from the data that years of experience significantly influences how satisfied school board members and superintendents are with their relationship as it relates to the factors of educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, school board member-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. School board members and superintendents become more satisfied over

time in their respective positions. With controls in place, the  $p$  value of the independent variable, years of experience, for each of the six factors was significant. This means that years of experience influenced levels of satisfaction for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the higher his or her level of satisfaction in each of the six factors related to their relationship.

In the factor of educational accountability, years of experience was of significant influence with a  $p$  value .002, indicating years of experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction level for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the more satisfied they were with the factor of educational accountability. This is important because school board members hold superintendents to a very high degree of accountability. This is primarily due to accountability for school improvement being a theme of federal and state policies (Lunenberg, 2011). Federal and state policies heightened awareness of accountability by attaching punitive measures to school districts and schools if certain educational goals were not met (Ravitch, 2010). School districts that failed to meet educational goals and targets would be required to restructure, which meant it could convert to a charter school, replace the principal and staff, or relinquish control to private management, turn control over to the state. As school board members and superintendents gain experience, they become more satisfied with their working relationship in the factor of educational accountability. This allows for improved relations and more effective dealings between school board members and superintendents when addressing legislative accountability measures.

In the factor of instructional program, years of experience was of significant influence with a  $p$  value of .001, indicating years of experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction

level for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the more satisfied they were with the factor of instructional program. This is important because superintendents are held accountable for student achievement by school board members. The superintendent is held to very high expectations to increase student learning. School board members place greater pressure on the superintendent. The risks for a superintendent are higher than they are for school board members when it comes to instructional leadership. For example, superintendents who make poor academic or instructional decisions may lose their job (Lunenberg, 2011). Academic performance is higher in school districts where school board members and the superintendent have positive working relationships (Fowler, 2009). Therefore, school districts have greater potential for higher student academic achievement when the working relationship between superintendents and school board members is stronger and positive.

In the factor of leadership roles, years of experience was of significant influence with a  $p$  value of .000, indicating years of experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction level for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the more satisfied they were with the factor of leadership roles. It is important that school board members and the superintendent have defined leadership roles in education. School boards delegate the implementation of policies to the superintendent and the superintendent is responsible for ensuring that policies are implemented (Lee & Eadens, 2014). As school board members and superintendents become more experienced they may be better able to establish clear roles between them that contribute to a positive and stable relationship. An unhealthy and negative relationship between the two entities serves as a deterrent to the education of children (Sell, 2006).

In the factor of school board-superintendent conflicts years of experience was of significant influence with a  $p$  value of .000, indicating years of experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction level for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the more satisfied they were with the factor of school board-superintendent conflicts. As school board members and superintendents gain experience over time, they become better skilled at building positive relationships and improving communication to address possible conflict or thwart conflict before it arises. Establishing a relationship of trust is the first order of business for school board members and the superintendent (Boyd et al., 2008). Trust results from good team relationships. School board members and superintendents who have trusting and healthy relationships can overcome various obstacles that may lead to conflict. There is greater potential for success and progress when trust and respect exist between superintendents and school board members (Fowler, 2009). In order for a school district to succeed, the relationship between superintendents and school board members must be positive and based on trust.

In the factor of teamwork, years of experience was of significant influence with a  $p$  value of .004, indicating years of experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction level for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the more satisfied they were with the factor of teamwork. This is important because superintendents and school board members who view themselves as a team and not separate entities have a better chance of realizing success in a school district. If the board and superintendent have not paid proper attention to their relationship and ability to work together as a team, the school district may not be successful (Ford, 2017). As school board members and superintendents gain more experience, they may be better able to build a foundation of

teamwork. Working as a team is based on shared understanding (Covey, 2009). Working together to develop common goals, a common language, and common expectations are signs of working as a team.

In the factor of school-community relations, years of experience was of significant influence with a *p* value of .003 indicating years of experience is a significant predictor of satisfaction level for school board members and superintendents. The more years of experience a school board member and superintendent had, the more satisfied they were with the factor of school-community relations. This is important because when school board members and the superintendent are not in agreement over school-community relations, the results can have devastating effects on the superintendent's relationship with school board members. Community involvement in public schools is essential in relation to forging district missions and visions (Eadie, 2008). School boards and superintendents must develop effective practices and processes to connect with their school communities (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015). Creating such processes is something that more experienced school board members and superintendents may be more successful in accomplishing. It is critical for superintendents to build a positive relationship with community stakeholders, because community members elect school board members. Since community members can challenge or support a superintendent's agenda or even the superintendent's job security, building a positive relationship with community stakeholders is critical for the superintendent.

A significant finding of this study was the more years of experience a school board member or superintendent had, the higher his or her level of satisfaction in each of the six factors related to their relationship. As school board members and superintendents gain experience, they become more satisfied with their ability to address factors that are important to their working

relationship. School board members and superintendents who are able to address factors such as educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations, allow for greater opportunity to reach and meet identified goals for a school district. By meeting the goals established by school board members and the superintendent, school districts have increased opportunities to realize and achieve success.

As school board members hire superintendents to lead their school district, they must keep in mind the value of experience. Superintendents who have more experience than others may be better equipped at managing the demands of the job. School board members must exercise patience when working with a superintendent who may be new to the position. Likewise, superintendents must also exercise patience when new school board members are elected to their positions. Because the findings of this study indicate that both groups become more satisfied with key factors related to the success of a school district, it is recommended that school board members and superintendents allow time for themselves to refine and improve skill sets and processes related to the factors of educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflict, teamwork, and school-community relations.

The data from this study also makes it clear that superintendents are more satisfied with the instructional program within a school district and school-community relations than are school board members. In regards to the instructional program, the data indicated 86% ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = .72$ ) of superintendents are slightly more satisfied than 79% ( $M = 1.91$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) of school board members. This suggests that school board members are not as satisfied as superintendents on matters related to the instructional program. School board members hold the superintendent accountable for student achievement. The risks are higher for a superintendent versus school

board members when it comes to instructional leadership. This places greater pressure on the superintendent to increase student learning at all levels. Such circumstances may influence the perceptions of school board members. School board members may have higher expectations for what is expected from the instructional program. Where superintendents may be more satisfied with the instructional program, school board members may be more critical and less satisfied.

In addition, many school board members are not educators and they may not be realistic about what an effective instructional program should consist of and what a realistic timeline for achievement should look like when it comes to instruction. What school board members view as an effective instructional program may not be in line with what the superintendent views as an effective instructional program. The superintendent may be approaching the instructional program from a professional educator's perspective and school board members may be approaching the instructional program from a novice perspective. This is where the two entities need to be closely aligned on what the realistic goals and expectations of the instructional program are so there are no disparity over what can be realistically achieved.

School board members were also less satisfied than superintendents on matters relating to school-community relations. The data indicated 83% ( $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) of superintendents are slightly more satisfied than 76% ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) of school board members in the factor of school-community relations. This suggests that school board members are not as satisfied as superintendents on matters related to school-community relations. School board members may have greater pressure placed on them by the community through the very process of being elected by the community. Superintendents are not elected to the position, they are hired by school board members. This process of community members electing school board members and superintendents being hired by school board members may result in unequal satisfaction

over school-community relations. Because superintendents are not hired by the community, they may place less significance on their relationship with community members. They may not feel as pressured by what is taking place in the community or with community members. Because school board members are elected by community members, they may place greater significance on their relationship with the community. School board members may be more critical of school-community relations than superintendents simply because they may feel more accountable to the community. This dynamic may influence the level of satisfaction when it comes to school-community relations.

Through factor analysis, the study also validates student achievement and collaboration as being very important characteristics to effective school board members and superintendent relationships. The purpose of conducting a factor analysis was to determine if a factor structure existed among survey items 26-35. This means a smaller set of factors, student achievement and collaboration, were derived from a larger set of variables (items 26-35). A participant who responded with agreement to an item in the factor responded similarly to the other four items within that factor. These new factors combine items from the original set of items that are capable of accounting for a larger portion of the variability in the item.

There was a consistent level of agreement or disagreement from participants in the study that resulted in the student achievement factor with regard to Item 26 (That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement) in relation to Items 27 (That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of quality instruction), Item 28 (That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn), Item 29 (That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about

the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels), and Item 30 (That effective school boards and superintendents have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community).

There was also a consistent level of agreement or disagreement from participants in the study that resulted in the collaboration factor with regard to Item 31 (That effective school boards and superintendents establish a strong communications structure), Item 32 (That effective school boards and superintendents use data for continuous improvement), Item 33 (That effective school boards and superintendents align and sustain resources to meet district goals), Item 34 (That effective school boards and superintendents lead as a united team to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts), and Item 35 (That effective school boards and superintendents are accountability driven).

The findings of this study indicate that school board members and superintendents become more satisfied over time in their respective positions, superintendents being more satisfied than school board members with the instructional program within a school district and school-community relations, and student achievement and collaboration being identified as very important characteristics to effective school board members and superintendent relationships, there are conclusions that can be drawn from this study. The conclusions that can be drawn include school board members and superintendents should work towards creating professional and effective working relationships with one another within their school districts. This would include setting aside time to address important issues facing a school district, developing clear instructional priorities for a school district, accepting clearly defined roles and responsibilities, participating in discussions without fear of being ostracized by members of the board, working together to reach decisions, paying attention to the concerns of the community, committing to a vision of high expectations for student achievement, and leading as a united team.

The findings from this study also confirm the importance of the school board member and superintendent relationship. The findings were determined by calculating descriptive statistics for all variables to identify patterns that may have emerged, conducting factor analysis of the participant responses to identify emerged factors, conducting Chronbach's Alpha analysis of the data in order to confirm the consistency and reliability of the instrument questions and the factors associated with the framework of this study, and conducting multiple regression analysis to look for correlations among variables. School board members and superintendents have a tremendous responsibility as professionals to build positive and effective relationships with one another. Establishing and sustaining positive and effective relationships with one another will lead a school district toward increased success.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study examined how satisfied school board members and superintendents are with their relationship and what characteristics are important to the effectiveness of their relationship. In the course of collecting and analyzing data, new considerations arose that warrant future research. It is recommended that future research be conducted in the following:

1. Years of experience significantly influences a school board member and superintendent's level of satisfaction. Further research on years of experience significantly impacting levels of satisfaction might produce a better understanding of why more experienced school board members and superintendents become more satisfied over time and less experienced school board members and superintendents experience lower levels of satisfaction. Such a study may require longitudinal research, but may produce valuable findings regarding the influence of experience over time.

2. Superintendents are more satisfied with the instructional program within a school district than are school board members. Future studies that identify key differences that contribute to this disparity in satisfaction over the instructional program could provide data that prevents disagreements between the two populations. This would allow school board members and superintendents to have better working relationships with one another when discussing and evaluating the instructional program of a school district. This may lead to greater success in a school district's instructional program.
3. Superintendents are more satisfied with school-community relations than are school board members. Future studies that identify key differences that contribute to this disparity in satisfaction over school-community relations could provide data that prevents disagreements between the two populations. This would allow school board members and superintendents to have better working relationships with one another when discussing and evaluating school-community relations. This may also improve school-community relations within school districts.
4. Collaboration was identified by school board members and superintendents as essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. A qualitative study that examines the attitudes and perceptions of both populations having collaborative relationships with one another would yield valuable information that contributes to the importance of school board members and superintendents working together.
5. Student achievement was identified by school board members and superintendents as essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. A mixed methods study that utilizes qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the attitudes and perceptions of both populations related to student achievement would yield

valuable information regarding common characteristics exhibited by school board members and superintendents in high performing districts and low performing districts.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to answer research questions related to how satisfied are school board members and superintendents with their relationship and what characteristics do school board members and superintendents believe essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. The conceptual framework for this study was based on factors stemming from the principle of social capital and they include educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, board-superintendent conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. Claridge (2004) defined social capital as the connections that exist between people that includes their shared values and norms of behavior, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous cooperation. Social capital is about active, social choices that connect people with one another and allows people to accomplish things that matter to a community or organization to solve everyday problems (Halpern, 2005). Social capital is stored in the types of relationships that allow school board members and superintendents to work effectively and successfully work with one another.

This study found school board members and superintendents become more satisfied over time with their relationship as it relates to the factors of educational accountability, instructional program, leadership roles, school board member-superintend conflicts, teamwork, and school-community relations. Superintendents are more satisfied than school board members with the instructional program and school-community relations within a school district. In addition, student achievement and collaboration between school board members and superintendents are

very important characteristics to effective school board member and superintendent relationships.

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## Appendix A

### **Impact of School Board Member/Superintendent Relationship on a School District**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine the level of satisfaction school board member and superintendents have about their relationship with one another. In addition, the questionnaire seeks to examine what characteristics school board members and superintendents believe are essential to effective school board member and superintendent relationships. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may discontinue your participation at any time. Your responses and your identity will be entirely anonymous. This study will be valuable to educational leaders and other stakeholders as they consider the relationship of school board members and superintendents. By continuing with this questionnaire you are giving your implied consent to participate in the study.

1. Are you a school board member or superintendent?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ School Board Member
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Superintendent
  
2. What is your gender?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ Male
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Female
  
3. How many years of experience do you have as a school board member or superintendent?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ 0-5 years of experience
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ 6-10 years of experience
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ 11-15 years of experience
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ 16-20 years of experience
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ 21+ years of experience
  
4. What is the current enrollment size of your district (General Education and Special Education students combined)?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ 1 – 4,999 students
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ 5,000 – 9,999 students
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ 10,000 – 14,999 students
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ 15,000 – 19,999 students
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ over 20,000 students

Please indicate to what extent you are satisfied with the following statements in regards to the relationship between school board members and the superintendent from 1 (Very satisfied) to 5 (Very dissatisfied):

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
4. Dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

1. This board and superintendent set aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts like the one we govern.
2. This board and superintendent set clear instructional priorities for the academic year.
3. This board and superintendent rely on observation and informal discussions to learn about their roles and responsibilities.
4. This board and superintendent have participated in discussions about what it should do differently as a result of a mistake a board member or superintendent has made.
5. This board and superintendent work to reach consensus on important matters.
6. This board and superintendent have formal structures and procedures for involving the community.
7. This board and superintendent request adequate information before making a decision.
8. This board and superintendent work closely together in making decisions that are important to the future of education in our district.
9. This board and superintendent have participated in discussions about their roles and responsibilities.
10. When faced with an important issue, the board and superintendent often “brainstorms” and tries to generate a whole list of creative approaches or solutions to the problem.
11. This board and superintendent don’t say one thing in private and another thing in public.
12. This board and superintendent maintain channels of communication with specific key community leaders.
13. This board and superintendent accept responsibility for addressing some important issues facing the school district.
14. Within the past year, this board and superintendent reviewed the school district’s strategies for attaining its long-term instructional goals.
15. This board and superintendent effectively and often discuss roles and responsibilities.
16. This board and superintendent confer so that differences of opinions are identified.

17. This board and superintendent typically goes out of their way to make sure that all members have the same information on important issues.
18. Explicit attention is given to the concerns of the community during board meetings.
19. This board and superintendent are consistently able to hold confidential items in confidence.
20. This board and superintendent have participated in discussions about the effectiveness of the district's instructional program.
21. This board and superintendent have conducted an explicit examination of its roles and responsibilities.
22. This board and superintendent discuss the values of the district in reaching a conclusion to a problem.
23. Once a decision is made, this board and superintendent work together to see that the decision is accepted and carried out.
24. This board and superintendent have formed effective ad hoc committees or task forces that include staff, board members, and community representatives.
25. This board and superintendent are able to speak their minds on key issues without fear that they will be ostracized by some members of the board.

In terms of level of importance, please rank the following statements related to essential characteristics of effective school board member and superintendent relationships from 1 (Very important) to 5 (Not important at all):

1. Very Important
2. Important
3. Moderately Important
4. Unimportant
5. Not Important at all

26. That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement.

27. That effective school boards and superintendents commit to a vision of quality instruction.

28. That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn.

29. That effective school boards and superintendents have strong shared beliefs and values about the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.

30. That effective school boards and superintendents have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community.

31. That effective school boards and superintendents establish a strong communications structure.

32. That effective school boards and superintendents use data for continuous improvement.

33. That effective school boards and superintendents align and sustain resources to meet district goals.

34. That effective school boards and superintendents lead as a united team to build shared knowledge, values, and commitments for their improvement efforts.

35. That effective school boards and superintendents are accountability driven.

## Appendix B

The California School Boards Association is participating in an anonymous survey on a critical topic for ensuring successful schools: board member-superintendent relations. We hope you will share your knowledge about the successes and challenges this issue presents through taking a simple, 10-minute survey about this subject. The survey will make an important contribution to the data about the impact of school board-superintendent relations, and how to help ensure that these relations are positive and productive.

Please take a few minutes of your time to help us better understand this critical subject from your local perspective so we can help devise and advocate for approaches that best meet the needs of your district and its students. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will be used for research purposes only. We will not disclose your identity or attribute any comments you make to you or your district. Thank you in advance for your time.

For any questions, please contact Julie Maxwell-Jolly, Senior Policy Director at the California School Boards Association, at [jmaxwelljolly@csba.org](mailto:jmaxwelljolly@csba.org).

Begin survey by clicking this link: *board member-superintendent relations*