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# Public School Board Governance Practices in Western Pennsylvania and AYP Scores; Is There a Relationship?

Kyle William Foust

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PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN WESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA AND AYP SCORES;  
IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP?

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leadership

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Kyle Foust

December 2009

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Kyle Foust

2009

***DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY***  
***SCHOOL OF EDUCATION***  
***INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM FOR***  
***EDUCATIONAL LEADERS***

***Dissertation***

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

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PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN WESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA AND AYP SCORES; IS THERE A CORRELATION?

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## ABSTRACT

# PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA AND AYP SCORES; IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP?

By

Kyle Foust

December 2009

Dissertation Supervised by Professor Philip Belfiore, PhD

This study investigated what, if any, relationship exists between school board governance practices and student achievement as demonstrated by a school district's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) scores in both math and reading for 2007-2008 school year. To measure the effectiveness of governance practices, a survey created by Thomas Holland and adapted by Richard Smoley (1999), which empirically assesses the performance of school boards, was administered to members of the following types of public school boards: urban, suburban, rural, and charter. Smoley's survey measures six dimensions of effectiveness: *Decision Making*, *Functioning as a Group*, *Exercising Authority*, *Connecting to the Community*, *Working Toward Board Improvement*, and *Acting Strategically*. The literature surrounding the proper role of a school board and how that developed throughout the history of the United States was reviewed, particularly as it pertains to the accountability culture that exists in today's education system which

has spawned many alternative schools such as charters. The literature surrounding what makes an effective board and how that can be quantified was also reviewed.

The 73-question survey was administered in person to all board members prior to a public meeting. Those not in attendance were mailed a survey directly or a copy was provided to them by the board secretary. Once all participants had returned their survey, the scores were calculated and correlated to the most recent AYP scores in math and reading for the corresponding school district. Following Pearson Product Moment statistical analysis, no positive correlation was found. The board with the highest overall score on the survey directed the charter school, which had the lowest AYP scores in both math and reading. It should be noted, however, that that charter board directed a district whose mission was to educate vulnerable students. Conversely, the urban school board had the lowest survey scores yet their students performed above those of other districts in both math and reading. Despite the results of this particular study, further research is encouraged because of the fact that effective school board governance and its relationship to student achievement is largely understudied.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Public schools in the United States and the school board members who lead them face a multitude of problems: high enrollment, a shortage of teachers, buildings in need of repair or replacement, and high dropout rates (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Moreover, as school personnel wrestle with these and other problems, they are confronted by lawmakers and a public who are increasing skeptical and demanding more accountability of their schools than ever before. Exacerbating the problem is that fewer and fewer Americans are willing to answer the call of public service by serving on a school board to help solve those problems. Given the fact that school boards are under enormous pressure to meet established benchmarks of success while at the same time given less and less latitude by lawmakers to implement policies to ensure success, it's no wonder that few want to serve on a school board (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2000).

Concerning the education system in the United States, there is no doubt that the role of the federal government is increasing. However, many issues are still debated and decided upon at the local level by the local school board. Because much of the decision-making authority is still carried out at the local level, some believe that local school boards are needed now more than ever to improve schools (Campbell, 1999; Resnick, 1999). School boards can be critical to implementing necessary change. Despite criticism of their performance, they are still a very credible institution within their community because most are directly elected by the public they serve. That credibility can help persuade the local community to adopt the needed reforms (Shannon, 1994). In

addition, there is general agreement that school boards serve an important purpose by providing a forum for citizens to present their concerns (or support) for policies and issues facing the school system (Leuker, 1992; Rallis, 1992; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). School boards act as a final arbiter of student discipline appeals, they hire and fire personnel, they adopt a budget and they make the policies by which the school district must govern (Kirst, 1994).

While many have faith in the current governance structure, there are others who believe that its effectiveness has diminished to the point that a new governance system needs to be instituted to ensure that future, necessary reforms are adopted (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Olson & Bradley, 1992; Whitson, 1998). Still others worry that school boards will become increasingly ineffective as school board members, most who serve for 4 years or less, become increasingly unconcerned about responding to the public's demand to make schools better (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000; Hess, 2002).

#### Purpose/mission of school boards

It has been stated, quite poetically, that school boards work on behalf of those “who want to be carried and for those who must, for those we never give up on and for those who don't get a second chance. For those we smother ... and for those who will grab the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it” (Hughes, 1995, ¶7). Many people in the United States have a grandiose idea of what public schools should achieve. They view the public education system as a place where children can learn the skills needed to achieve what they aspire to as adults. School boards are entrusted to ensure those opportunities are afforded. Although the budget, i.e. the possibility of a tax increase and hot button issues (like instituting a dress code) often get the most attention, school boards will

ultimately be judged by how well students achieve and by how much students learn while in school (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002).

While the goal of school boards has remained unchanged over the years, the means to achieve the ends has changed dramatically. Particularly over the last 20 years, school board involvement in the day-to-day business of the school district has increased. Up until the 1960s, school boards generally left the administrative duties to the school administration. School board members, then, were mainly concerned with providing general oversight to the professional school administrators who were charged with running the school district (Danzberger, 1992; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Hill, 2003).

While the mission, stated or otherwise, of school boards has changed, another important change affecting school board service is motivating factor of why people run to serve on the school board in the first place. More than ever before, people choose to run and serve on a school board for very personal reasons. Often times the reasons are to advance their own political career or to advance the fortunes of a small constituency group within the community (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1994; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Hill, 2003; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Mountford & Brunner, 1999). The change in motivation to run and serve on a school board has been described as a “major [negative] factor altering the performance of too many school board members” (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001, p. 6). In addition, the politicization of the school board often shifts the composition (and leadership) of the board back and forth between competing personalities or competing interests groups (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001). This last point is exacerbated by the fact that most school board

members serve only one term (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Corollary to, or possibly a direct outcome of the politicization of the school board is that turnover rates for superintendents continue to increase. According to a 2002 survey of school board members, the average tenure of a superintendent was only 5.48 years (Hess, 2002); another negative trend working against strong school governance (Danzberger, 1994).

When there have been attempts to reform school boards, the current system is often supported by defenders of the status quo, such as teacher unions or special interest groups, who feel governance changes will eliminate their ability to influence education policy more directly at the local level (Danzberger, 1994). To make effective governance changes, Danzberger (1994) argues that reformers must reassure the public that proposals to improve school board performance is not a conspiracy against local control but an attempt to truly improve a system that desperately needs change. Current school governance is not effectively suited to address the current needs facing students and schools (Danzberger, 1994). If reforms are not instituted to change the governance structure, the ability for school boards to influence education policy will continue to erode (Kirst, 1994).

#### Circumstances leading to the problem

When an education system falters, this reality presents serious problems for students and for society as a whole. The strength of a country's education system has social, economic, and political consequences. A quality education strengthens the democratic system by making individuals aware of their rights and opportunities. Additionally, a quality education makes an individual a more productive worker who, in turn, adds to the productivity of the national economy (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2007).

There is much research to indicate that the system of education in the United States needs improvement. In their annual report to the United States Congress, the National Center of Education Statistics (2006) reported that the math and reading scores of American 4<sup>th</sup> graders is remaining constant or falling behind in relation to the scores of industrialized countries who belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). And while the reading scores of 15 year olds in the United States remains even or better than other OCED countries, their math and problem solving skills and falling behind as measured by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (National Center of Education Statistics, 2006).

School boards, and the work that they do, contribute to the success or failure of their respective school district. Although there are few substantive studies that investigate the link between school governance models and student achievement (Gemberling, Smith & Villani, 2000; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000), many prominent school governance reform researchers agree that a more clearly defined governance structure for school boards and school administration will lead to better and more effective school systems (Danzberger, 1992; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). In the final analysis, the means of school governance are just as important as the decisions that are made (Campbell & Greene, 1994). Every decision a school board makes has a direct or indirect impact on student achievement; the “*sine qua non*” of board service (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001, p. 25).

#### Statement of the problem

Some teachers can generate higher student achievement than other teachers (Brophy & Good, 1986; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Some schools can generate higher

student achievement than others (Brookover, Schwitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood & Wisenbaker, 1978; Harkreader & Weathersby, 1998; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988; Weil, Marshalek, Mittman, Murphy, Hallinger, & Pruyn, 1984), but there is uncertainty regarding the degree that school boards can affect higher student achievement. If an empirical relationship can be determined between school board governance and student achievement, the appropriate governance structure can be adopted by school boards across the country.

Finding a relationship between certain school board governance behaviors and student achievement is important because “without good governance, good schools are the exception, not the rule” (Education Commission of the States, 1999a, p. vi) and, ultimately, “improving student achievement through community engagement is the key work of school boards” (Gemberling, Smith & Villani, 2000, p. 1). School boards themselves have the ability to make significant and positive changes to the district they lead, and, therefore, have a significant and positive impact upon student achievement.

In the era of high stakes testing and accountability, the need for effective school boards is becoming increasingly important. Unfortunately, many school districts are unsuccessful because they are led by boards that do not align their policies with programs and resources that improve education (Elmore, 1993). To promote policies that foster greater student achievement, school boards need to cultivate a collaborative partnership between themselves and the superintendent (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000), as well among themselves as a group (Del Collo, 2001; Smoley, 1999).

#### Purpose/significance of the study

School board members play an important role in their community because of their long-standing tradition of representing the education needs of the community they serve.

While citizens of a community demand much of their school system, as they should, they have little effect on the day-to-day machinations of what goes on in the schools. For example, they cannot directly affect teaching styles, curriculum, or student discipline (other than their own children). However, at the ballot box, citizens can elect officials to represent them that will demand the use of the best teaching practices available to implement a sound curriculum within an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. To that end, the purpose of this study was to investigate if any relationship exists between school board governance and student achievement as demonstrated by a district AYP scores in math and reading for 2007-2008 school year.

In general, school boards have been an “understudied” area of research (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002, p.1). More specifically, research studies completed to gauge the effect of school board governance on student achievement are few and far between (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Conley, 2003; Iowa Association of School Boards, 2000; Lashway, 2002; Maritz, 2003; Trenta, et al.2002). Many researchers believe more empirical evidence is needed to examine the relationship between school board governance and its effect on school achievement (Borba, 2002; Cuban, 1984; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986). Despite the shallow breadth of research on this matter, those who have investigated the matter indicate that a positive relationship exists between school board governance and student achievement (Griffin & Chance, 1994; Peterson, Murphy, & Hallinger, 1987)

An additional drawback to the research that has been done is the nature of the districts investigated. Most school governance studies focus on urban school districts that comprise one-sixth of all students but less than 1% of all school districts (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Wilson, 1994). “Indeed,

some school board authorities have cautioned that traditional school board and educational governance is being abandoned due primarily to problems in urban areas” (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002, p. 38). Recently, however, this dynamic has begun to change as reformers, researchers and other organizations interested in improving public school education have investigated how school boards in urban, rural, and suburban settings all throughout the United States are performing.

#### Organization of the study/theoretical framework

A survey, created by Richard Smoley (1999), which empirically assesses the performance of school boards, will be administered to a convenient sample of school members in three separate public school districts and one public charter school board. To vary the sample, the three traditional public school boards will be comprised of an urban, rural, and suburban district respectively. All districts utilized in the study were located in Western Pennsylvania.

Smoley’s research is an extension of the research conducted by Holland, Chait, and Taylor (1989) who sought to empirically identify the characteristics of effective boards of trustees of independent colleges. Holland, who assisted Smoley to adapt the original survey, advises the use of questionnaires over structured interviews in particular because structured interviews require a heavy invest of time and money that is often beyond the means of the researcher (Jackson & Holland, 1998).

Smoley’s survey identifies six dimensions of effective school board performance, and the data from the survey’s will be compared to the reading and math test scores on the Pennsylvania System of Schools Assessment (PSSA) that each district annually administrates. A benchmark of achievement on the tests is Adequate Yearly Progress

(AYP). Adequate Yearly Progress, as outlined in the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002, requires that schools in Pennsylvania must have 63% of their students reach the proficiency level in reading and 54% proficiency in math for the years 2008-2010. Proficiency is defined as “a solid understanding and adequate display of the skills included in the Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards” (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007, ¶6). Those standards will increase incrementally until 2014 when every child in Pennsylvania must meet proficiency in math and reading (See Table1). Schools that fail to reach the annual benchmarks are given designations to communicate their lack of success. For instance, schools who do not meet the target for one year are given a *Warning*. Those schools who do not meet targets for two or three consecutive years are given a *District Improvement* designation. Any school who does not meet the performance targets for four or more years consecutively receives a *Corrective Action* designation (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007).

In 2007-2008 report, 455 of Pennsylvania school districts, or 91%, were meeting Adequate Yearly Progress targets. Six of Pennsylvania’s schools, or 1.2%, were making progress, and 39 schools, or 7.8%, needed varying levels of improvement (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2009b).

Table 1

*Pennsylvania Proficiency Standards in Reading and Math by year*

Target Year (s)	Target Proficiency Reading	Target Proficiency Math
2002-2004	45%	35%
2005-2007	54%	45%
2008-2010	63%	54%
2011	72%	67%
2012	81%	78%
2013	91%	89%
2014	100%	100%

Note: From Pennsylvania Department of Education

Null hypothesis

For the purpose of this research, an attempt to prove/disprove causality between effective school board governance and student achievement is not the goal. School boards can be a key part of a “culture of improvement” (Lashway, 2002, p. 2) by creating conditions that promote student achievement. The goal is to determine the significance of the correlation (if one exists) between school board governance and student achievement. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study is that there is no correlation between Smoley’s school board governance model and student achievement.

Limitations of this research

The surveys for this research will only be administered to school board members in Western Pennsylvania limiting the ability to generalize the results to only those areas with similar demographic characteristics.

## Definition of terms

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*: Meeting established Federal goals of proficiency in the following areas: student achievement, attendance or graduation rates, and test participation.

*No Child Left Behind*: Law enacted by the United States Congress in 2001 designed to bring greater accountability to public schools and to implement empirical measures parents, legislators, and school officials can review to determine if schools are delivering a quality education.

*School board member*: An official serving on a public school board (traditional and charter boards only). School board members of private school organizations will not be included, i.e. parochial schools.

*School board*: The governing body of a school district that shares power with the school superintendent.

## Research question

Is there a relationship between the governance practices of school board members in Western Pennsylvania, as measured by the Smoley survey, and student success, as measured by a school district's most recent AYP scores in math and reading?

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Among many things, a primary purpose of the education system in the United States is to foster student achievement. School boards have much to do in regard to what policies will be put into place to foster that achievement. A climate of accountability has put school boards under unprecedented scrutiny and pressure to ensure that the school system they direct and the students they are responsible for are succeeding.

Increased accountability in the school system requires a school board prepared to meet that challenge. However, the wherewithal to improve schools and school boards is often lacking as few citizens find an interest in serving on a board and the community, in general, is uninterested in the details of what occurs within the schools on a daily basis. (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002). In addition, once a person is on a school board, they too often concern themselves with providing jobs to supporters and addressing the concerns of important members of the public at-large rather than establishing policies that promote student achievement (Hill, 2003).

To determine the success of a school system in general, or the success of a school district, a particular school, or an individual student, a variety of benchmarks can be analyzed. A review of student grades or scores on standardized tests and the number of students who continue their education beyond high school are gauges of success in the field of education. Rarely is the performance and effectiveness of the school board reviewed as a possible contributing factor to the success of the school district (Maritz, 2006). When the success of a school district is looked at through the lens of the school board, it is often done anecdotally. Numerous articles have been written by former and

current superintendents, school board members and administrators who give personal testimony as to what is the best approach a board should take regarding student achievement. What is missing, however, is empirical data which shows what best practices or other means have been proven lead to student achievement (Maritz, 2006). Mirroring the increased use of empirical data to judge the success of students in the classroom, more scholarly research is being conducted that collects and analyses empirical data regarding effective school board performance.

This chapter will provide an overview of the important changes to the governance structure that have shaped the current definition of what a school boards' proper role should be. Research studies that either anecdotally or empirically link specific school board action to student achievement will be discussed, especially as they pertain to the current accountability culture that exists in the United States public school system. Finally, concepts regarding school board effectiveness will be discussed to provide a theoretical framework for this research.

#### Current debate regarding the school boards' proper role

A significant problem facing school boards is determining what their proper role should be. Making this determination is all the more difficult when one considers that school boards are required to serve two masters at the same time. On one hand, they are the legally established arm of their respective state government charged with carrying out the education directives passed into law. On the other hand, they are the political servants of the local community that elected them (Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). Among scholars, there is widespread agreement that the proper role of a school board is poorly defined (Alvey & Underwood, 1985; Danzberger, 1992; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Grady & Bryant, 1992; Guthrie & Kirst, 1988; Lortie, 1987; Rallis &

Criscoe, 1993; Trotter & Downey, 1989). A recent survey by the Education Policy and Leadership Center (2004) noted that new school board members do not understand their role, responsibilities, or the issues they face. Data collected by the Institute for Educational Leadership (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986) indicates this is a pervasive feeling among all school board members. As a result, some school boards decide to be very hands-on in regard to the operation of their respective school district while other school boards defer to the chief administrators of the district in these matters.

As school board members attempt to carry out their responsibilities, defined well or not, they are pressured by a variety of sources and interests groups. The applied pressure comes from (a) an ever increasing number of federal and state mandates, i.e. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), (b) organizations representing teachers, parents, and constituents who look out for the interests of their members, i.e. National Education Association (NEA) and Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and (c) the school superintendent who is expected to share power with the board as the chief administrative officer of the school district (Illinois Association of School Boards, 1989; Kirst, 1994; Rallis, 1992; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Wirt & Kirst, 1982; Ziegler & Jennings, 1974). How board members react to the many pressures they face is rooted in what they feel is the proper role of a school board member.

Historically, a school board member's role has been described as that of a trustee who is charged with providing quality education and sound fiscal management (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Conley, 2003; Education Policy and Leadership Center; 2004; Mountford & Brunner; 1999). A school board who governs as a trustee believes they are accountable to the entire community, and therefore,

they feel they must make decisions in the best interest of the entire community. Today, however, school boards members, more than ever before, give deference to the constituency groups that help them get elected (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001, Leuker, 1992; Mountford & Brunner; 1999; Schlechty, 1992; Washington State House of Representatives, 1990). A result of this deference is that the needs of the entire community become secondary to the wants/desires of special interest groups (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Schlechty & Cole, 1993). This approach to board leadership has proved to be problematic. A report for the Institute for Educational Leadership stated that the most ineffective school boards are those whose members serve for personal reasons rather than with the interest of the entire community in mind (Danzberger, Kirst & Usdan, 1993).

When school board members begin to act more as politicians and less like trustees, they act to pacify special interest groups that could defeat them at the ballot box. Instead of addressing the long-term needs and goals of the district, these particular board members address the needs of the squeaky wheel so as not to stir up trouble and harm their reelection chances (Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Zeigler & Jennings, 1974). School board members of this type do not develop the ability to resist pressure from the community because they also fail to thoroughly educate themselves about the issues confronting them. They also receive little orientation, training, or on-going professional development to help educate them to their responsibilities (Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). As a result, school board members fail to provide the necessary leadership to address important issues such as the health and social service needs of students and their families; they fail to properly communicate school progress to the public; and they facilitate poor working relationships with superintendents (Danzberger, 1994). Compounding the

difficulties facing school boards members is that, in any given year, one-third of them (across the country) are new to their position; which places many of them on a steep learning curve and more vulnerable to outside pressures seeking to maintain the status quo (Danzberger, 1994).

Despite evidence to suggest that there is an increasing tendency for school board members to serve to achieve personal rather than community minded goals, there are data that indicates the spirit of cooperation, respect, and teamwork needed for trustee leadership still exists. According to a survey conducted by the Education Policy and Leadership Center (2004) of superintendents and school board members in Pennsylvania, when asked to identify the importance of *mutual respect and respect for others*, 91% of those who responded to the survey felt these attributes were *very important*. Eighty-five percent of the survey respondents felt it was *very important* to collaborate with the superintendent and management team. Eight-two percent felt open-mindedness in deciding policy issues was *very important* characteristics of school board members; while 77% believed that open communication was *very important* (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004).

#### Overview of current school board governance

School boards have enjoyed a long-standing tradition as a cherished institution in the United States (Conley, 2003). They helped craft an educational system that transformed the United States from an agrarian society to an industrial power by dramatically increasing secondary school completion and postsecondary education participation (Danzberger, 1994). Creating such a system has allowed the United States to achieve the greatest economic prosperity know to the world (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). Despite their position and success, it is a wonder anyone would decide to serve on

a school board since few are financially compensated for their work. A recent National School Boards Association survey published in 2002 revealed that only 67.2% of those surveyed received some form of monetary compensation for their service on a school board (Hess, 2002). Since many school board members serve due to intrinsic motivating factors, school board has been described as “the epitome of representative governance in our democracy” (Shannon, 1994, p. 387) and the “highest form of public service” (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986, p. 14).

Despite the contribution of school boards and their members throughout the history of the United States, their role in the current education system faces serious questions of “legitimacy and relevance” (Danzberger, 1992, p. 1). Even among the board members themselves, there seems to be a level of uncertainty regarding their value. According to a survey of over 2100 school board presidents in the late 1980s, most felt they (school boards) were a “rubber stamp” for the school administration (Feistritz, 1989, p. 19). Other studies have found that the opinions and actions of school board members too often mirror those of the professional school personnel rather than the community the school board is supposed to represent (Rallis & Criscoe, 1993; Zerchykov, 1984). Further evidence of concern regarding school governance is that “the culture of the local school board is not strong and future directed with a defined mission; rather, it is present-oriented, more reactive than proactive, limiting its ability to initiate or support restructuring” (Rallis & Criscoe, 1993, p.10). In part, the ineffectiveness of school boards has been linked to the generation of Baby Boomer who now populate many school boards. It is postulated that Baby Boomers prefer instant gratification and prefer quick fixes to problems. As a result, they shun the hard work necessary to avoid rubber-stamping the superintendent’s policies (Rosenberger, 1997).

In Pennsylvania, however, recent data suggests the commonwealth's school boards are more responsible and responsive to their district's needs. Fifty-eight percent of the superintendents and 74.7% of the state's school board presidents agree or strongly agree with the notion that school boards will often postpone decisions until further information could be obtained to make a more informed decision; and 97% of the school board presidents believed they were not the rubber stamps others claimed them to be (Del Collo, 2001). While routine issues are passed without discussion or dissent, important issues usually create discussion between opposing viewpoints.

Although the school governance structure has been modified over the years, there is now a more intense effort to make school boards more legitimate and relevant by instituting reforms that will aim the boards' focus toward effective policy development and promotion of student achievement (Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). However, reaching consensus on what reforms should be instituted is difficult because the list of reform ideas ranges from the elimination of local school boards altogether, to tightly defining their role to reduce their ability to micromanage. Other reform proposals would alter current school governance by merging the existing school boards with children's policy boards to increase and improve schools, or by electing local school communities who would then hire the school principals and provide oversight to the school district (Danzberger, 1992).

#### School board reforms/historical perspective

Throughout the history of the United States, the nation's education system has grown in both importance and complexity. From the beginning, the nation agreed that schools should be publicly supported to educate its citizens and ensure the success of the newly created, yet fragile democracy. However, the national government and state governments

had an almost non-existent role in education until late into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Education Commission of the States, 1999a). Up until that time, nearly every decision regarding education and schools was made at the local level (Meier, 2002). Today, this situation has changed dramatically. The federal government now provides 10% of the total funding for K-12 education in the United States (United States Department of Education, 2009). In Pennsylvania, Governor Rendell proposed the appropriation of \$9.9 billion in his 2009-2010 pre-K-12 budget (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2009). In addition to funding, *No Child Left Behind* has left an indelible federal mark on the country's education system.

As the nation's education system has evolved, Massachusetts has consistently been at the forefront. In 1642, Massachusetts became the first colony in America to pass a law requiring that parents send their children to a school as town leaders administered both the school and the local government (Danzberger, 1994). As the job of running the government and the school system became more complex, Massachusetts instituted local, independent school boards to govern their school districts in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986; Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1992). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Massachusetts created the first state board of education and the office of state school superintendent. However, day-to-day control of individual school systems was still the responsibility of local community leaders (Danzberger, 1994; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001). Over time, all states have followed Massachusetts's lead.

Many of the more important changes to the school governance structure in the United States were instituted during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the nation's economy was transforming itself because of the Industrial Revolution. The

economic changes the country was dealing with affected the nation's schools as well. To keep up with the economic transformation, social scientists and business leaders were consulted to offer reform proposals that would meet the demands of the new economy. Essentially, the reforms called for school systems to reorganize themselves on a corporate model to increase their efficiency and produce the types of workers that would be needed in the new, industrial economy (Education Commission of the States, 1999a).

As they analyzed the effectiveness of the education system, reformers believed that politics, especially the negative connotations of politics, was adversely affecting schools. Too often school board members advocated policies or took action that rewarded their political friends, regardless of what was in the best interest of the school district. Reformers wanted school boards to function much like a corporation's board of directors rather than a political machine (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Kirst, 1994; Urban & Wagoner, 1996). To achieve this end, electoral reforms were adopted which changes in the process by which school board members were elected.

Progressives believed that corrupt political machines influenced school board members to vote in such a manner that the political party, and not the public, was the board members' first priority (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1994; Education Policy and Leadership Center; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Kirst, 1994). As it was noted at the time, there was not a Democratic or Republican way to pave a road, so why should there be a Democratic or Republican way to operate a school (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). The two electoral reforms adopted were the institution of at-large elections and conducting school board elections separate from the regular election cycle. The goal of

these reforms was to make school board members more accountable to the public and free them from the potential negative influences of the political system (Kirst, 1994).

At-large elections were instituted so that school board candidates would no longer be elected by, and (if elected) represent the interests of a political precinct or ward, they would be elected by the community at-large (Kirst, 1994; Meier, 2002; Tyack, 1974). It was reasoned that if school board members were elected by the entire community, it would provide them incentive to make decisions in the interest of the entire community and provide the trustee leadership Progressives hoped for (Kirst, 1994; Meier, 2002; Tyack, 1974). The second reform, off-year elections, meant that school board elections would be conducted during the years between mayoral and presidential elections when political activity, and the potential to influence those elected, was at its lowest (Kirst, 1994; Meier, 2002; Tyack, 1974). Researchers have described these two electoral reforms of the early 1900's as the last reforms to significantly alter the school governance structure (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1994; Danzberger & Usdan, 1994; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Kirst, 1994).

Following the Progressive Era, school board members, generally, served as trustees of the whole districts as the reforms intended (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). However, the reforms alone were not responsible for the facilitation of trustee leadership. Between the Progressive Era and the 1960s, most school board members were community elites who enjoyed the respect of most, if not all, in their community (Cronin, 1973; Danzberger, 1994; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970, Kimbrough, 1964). The elites, as business or civic leaders, were considered above reproach and, therefore, able to stay above the political fray and make decisions in the spirit of progressive reform.

The nation's school system underwent a second transformation in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century after the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court decision. *Brown* defined education as "private good, protected by constitutional entitlement" (Education Commission of the States, 1999b, p. 7). Minority groups, who previously felt that the educational system prevented them from improving their lives, now had legal protection to demand equal educational opportunity. Up to the time of the *Brown* decision, however, one reform from the Progressive Era, at-large elections, made it difficult for minority candidates to get elected to school boards (Kirst, 1994). At-large elections elect representatives "from an entire area rather than one of its subdivisions" (Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary, 2006). For instance, a school board member, elected in an at-large election in the City of Erie, would be eligible to receive votes in all of the city's seven wards. Because a citywide campaign requires greater financial resources, which minority candidates often lacked in comparison to other demographic groups, their opportunities for election are diminished (Fraga, Meier & England, 1986). Reformers in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century encouraged the reinstatement of district or ward elections to make school board members more reflective of the minority populations they represented (Danzberger, 1994).

Civil Rights legislation changed the composition of school boards, particularly in urban areas and promoted delegate style representation. As the number of minorities who could participate in the political system increased, the number of minorities elected to school boards increased, especially in urban areas (Danzberger, 1992). These new school board members, who in part owed their election to votes and needs of the minority communities, felt obligated to represent the interests of those groups that elected them. The interests of a constituency group were prioritized over the interests of the community

as a whole. Despite the best intentions of the Civil Rights Era, the increased tendency for school board members to serve a constituency group rather than the community as a whole has proven to be a detriment to better school board governance (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1994; Education Policy and Leadership Center; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001; Kirst, 1994).

While positive strides have been made to increase the number of minorities on school boards, minority groups continue to be underrepresented on school boards (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2001). In a 1995 survey of school board members in the United States, the National School Boards Association reported that the percentage of Blacks serving on school boards was 3.2% and the number of Hispanics was 1.0% (Tarazi, 1997). However, the 1990 Census reported that Blacks constituted 12.1% of the United States population. Hispanic was not specifically identified on the 1990 Census form but it was estimated that 97% of *Other* races was Hispanic. *Others* constituted 3.9% of the population at that time (United States Bureau of Census, 2006). A more recent National School Boards Association survey published in 2002 reported that 7.8% of school board members in the United States were Black while 3.8% were Hispanic (Hess, 2002). The 2000 U.S. Census reported 12.3% of the population was Black and 12.5% was Hispanic (United States Bureau of Census, 2009).

It is interesting to note that two important periods of reform in the United States, the Progressive Era and the Civil Rights Era, each hoped to improve the country's schools but achieved divergent goals in the end. The Progressive Era reforms hoped to promote trustee leadership but this, in the end, diminished the opportunities for minority

representation on school boards. Conversely, the Civil Rights Era hoped to increase minority representational but did so at the expense of trustee leadership.

The latest transformation that occurred in U.S. schools followed the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Due to the fear that schools in the United States were falling behind in an emerging global economy, the new focus of schools was to prepare students to successfully compete in this new economy (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). There was added public and political pressure to increase school accountability by implementing rigorous standards to measure the success of schools (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001). This trend continues today.

While there have been numerous changes in the education system at the national level, here in Pennsylvania, the state legislature has implemented changes as well. In Pennsylvania, school boards were established with the *Free School Act of 1834* requiring each municipality to elect a school board (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). In 1963, the General Assembly adopted a reorganization act to reduce the number of school districts in Pennsylvania. When the reorganization was complete, Pennsylvania reduced its number of schools districts from over 2,000 down to its current level of 501 (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). At the time of the reorganization, all school districts except Pittsburgh and Philadelphia chose their school board members in public elections. However, in 1976 Pittsburgh disbanded the appointed board in favor of publicly elected school board (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). In four other instances since 1976, appointed school boards have been created to take over the duties of the elected school board due to the district's continued academic failure or financial mismanagement (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). In these

cases, the new board did not replace the elected board but it was ceded much of the elected board's constitutional, legal authority.

Economic, social, political realities continue to affect the evolution of the education system in the United States (Campbell & Green, 1994; Hill, 2003; Maritz, 2006). Although the state and federal government have both increased their involvement in education, as the system has evolved, local school boards continue to make most of the significant education decisions and retain a great deal of authority (Knezevich, 1984; Krepel & Grady, 1992; Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1991). As a result, school reformers and researchers have sought to make local school boards more effective given the transformation of the education system.

#### Recent school board governance reforms

While school governance reforms vary, the intended desire of most is to focus school board attention on making sound education policy and avoiding the tendency to micromanage. (Danzberger, 1994; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Resnick, 1999). Some reforms are structural, intended to alter the performance of the board or redefine their role. For instance, to improve school board performance, many reformers have called for mandatory orientations for school board members and continued professional development seminars that the members must attend for as long as they serve on the board (Education Policy and Leadership, 2004). Other reforms are electoral in nature. Electoral reforms seek to alter the electoral process by which school board members are chosen to serve on the board itself. In the end, the reforms proposals that facilitate better leadership on the part of school board members are ultimately presented to facilitate student achievement.

If researchers are correct in asserting that school governance must be reformed, this logically implies that school boards must be doing something that must be changed. One such area of negative critique is school board members' penchant for micromanaging the day-to-day affairs of the school district. Recent surveys have documented that school boards spend too much time on the matters better left to the professional staff of the district and too little time on the matters that should be their primary focus (Danzberger, 1994; Rallis & Criscoe, 1993). A five-year study of school board minutes in West Virginia found that boards spent only 3% of their time on policy development and oversight while 54% of their time was spent on administrative matters (Olson & Bradley, 1992, as cited in Todras, 1993). For those interested in reforming and strengthening the work of school board members, West Virginia provides evidence that school boards can get side tracked on matters best left to the school district administration and that legislation is necessary to refocus the mission of the board.

There is a litany of structural reforms that could be instituted to promote effective school board performance. Goodman and Zimmerman (2000) have suggested streamlining state laws that encourages a better working relationship between the superintendent and the school board. They also recommend more professional development training be made available to school board members. In a report published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Hill, Warner-King, Campbell, McElroy & Munoz-Colon, 2002) a clarification and curtailment of school board authority on the part of state legislatures was also recommended. Furthermore, they recommended that more charter schools be created to eliminate the geographic monopoly school boards now enjoy (Hill, et al, 2002).

In the early 1990's, a twenty-three person task force consisting of school board presidents, members of the business community, newspaper columnists, representatives from public and private schools, research fellows, and college professors was commissioned by the Twentieth Century Fund to investigate school board governance. The task force recommended that local school boards should be transformed into policy boards that are responsible for short/long term strategic planning, approving the budget, approving but not negotiating labor agreements, establishing policies for purchasing, ensuring staff development, and hiring/evaluating superintendent (but allowing that person to implement school district policy). The task force further advised that all these changes be made constitutionally at the state level to clarify the role of school boards (Danzberger, 1992).

Site-based management is another reform proposal. Under site-based management, the critical education decisions are made at the building level by school principals rather than by the school board and central administration (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1992; Hoffman, 1995; Olson, 1992). The effectiveness of site-based management has been questioned, however. A recent study concluded that, after reviewing the effectiveness of site-based management, "no compelling link between site-based management and students' academic achievement was found" (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002, p. 12).

Other reforms have called for school operations to be sub-contracted out to a college or a corporation. Already, when the school board has been deemed a contributing factor to the school districts' financial or academic distress, they have been stripped of their administrative and fiduciary duties. These duties are then put in the hands of the

state itself or the local mayor (Danzberger, 1992; Resnick, 1996). In Pennsylvania, as of 2004, this situation has occurred in the following districts: Philadelphia, Harrisburg, Chester Upland, and Duquesne (Education and Policy Leadership Center, 2004). The justification often given for a mayoral and/or state takeovers is that a more cooperative spirit between the school administration and the board can be fostered which will reduce the pressure of outside influence and provide better services that promote student achievement (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002). The mayoral takeover approach has had varying degrees of success in the city of Chicago (Wong, Dreeben, Lynn, & Sunderman, 1997).

Additional reform measures call for the elimination of standing board committees which can undermine the administration and decrease the amount of debate among the entire board. Standing committees, it is argued, make decisions without input from the rest of the board which are then, all too often, automatically ratified by the board as a whole with little to no discussion or debate. This dynamic only serves to further undermine the effectiveness of the school board as a whole because individual members put greater focus on their committee work rather than their responsibility to the board, and the community, in general (Danzberger, 1994).

While electoral reforms have been instituted in the past, there has been a renewed emphasis to make alter school board elections. The proposed reforms hope to increase voter turnout and provide incentives for trustee leadership (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger, 1994). A popular electoral reform encourages more communities to hold school board and municipal elections at the same time. This reform, it is argued, would increase voter turnout requiring school board members to be more accountable to a larger segment of the community (Allen & Plank, 2005, Hill, 2003). At-large elections can also

reduce factions that occur because of geography, i.e. no board member would represent just a segment of the school district's boundaries (Aiken & Alford, 1970; Lineberry & Fowler, 1967, Welch & Bledsoe, 1988).

While some reformers argue for more at-large elections, others call for a return to elections by district or ward, the antithesis of at-large elections. Meier (2002) argues that ward elections increase political conflict, which, in turn, increases political participation. Still another electoral reform calls for school board candidates to run as part of a slate and offer themselves as an entire group to the community. A result of slate elections, it is argued, is increased group accountability on the board instead of holding individual school board members accountable for their actions (Schlechty & Cole, 1993). In other words, when it comes time to judge the success or failure of the school board, the slate will be judged as a whole and they will be re-elected in the next election if the public deems they did an effective job. If the public deems them a failure, they, as a group, will be defeated.

#### Increased calls for accountability

Schools today face an increasingly difficult dilemma. On one hand, boards have traditionally allowed the superintendent and the professional education staff to direct, and, therefore, be responsible for the decisions making of the school district. Because the professional staff made most of the decisions, they had been the ones held most accountable. This dynamic is changing as local school boards are responsible for the implementation and attainment of state and federal standards, especially in regard to student achievement (Lashway, 2002). At the same time, the increased number of state and federal mandates has diminished the local school boards ability to make their own decisions regarding the quality of education their respective school district provides

(Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986; Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002; Danzberger, 1992; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000; Iannaccone & Lutz, 1994; Kirst, 1994; Todras, 1993). For example, at the federal level, Title IX, the *Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDA)* and *No Child Left Behind* mandated specific actions local school districts had to take.

Beginning primarily in the 1970s, states have increased their influence indirectly through federal mandates requiring more equitable funding for schools. In essence, the federal mandates required a greater role for states in education because they were responsible for a larger share of the funding necessary to carry out the mandates. Local school districts, as they accepted more state dollars, accepted the fact that they would be more accountable to state authorities. As a result, state funding for education in the United States has increased from 39% to 47% while local funding has dropped from 52% to 43% (Odden & Picus, 2000 as cited in Conley, 2003). What is encouraging is that local schools boards have cooperated, in general, with the new mandates. In many cases, the mandates are required only to ensure that reluctant school districts institute the changes that many others have already seen cause to implement (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986; Danzberger, 1992).

To create an education system that fosters student achievement within the climate of accountability that currently exists, boards must annually review and evaluate the performance of all the schools they are responsible for (Conley, 2003). They can do so by using objective, empirical data that identifies which schools are performing (or underperforming) and why; requiring that underperforming schools adopt a plan to improve; and reorganizing those underperforming schools if/when necessary (Conley, 2003). If local school boards do not implement plans that successfully remediate the

failures of its students, either the state or federal government will eventually step in and do it for them. Fortunately, a recent national survey suggests that school board members have the right frame in mind as most stated that, whatever actions school boards may take, student achievement is a top priority for them (Hess, 2002).

#### *Accountability and No Child Left Behind*

The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001 was a new act of Congress designed to address an old problem. *No Child Left Behind* was a reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Act* (ESEA) of 1965 and a continuation of the call for reforms and accountability measures after *A Nation Risk* was published in 1983. *A Nation at Risk* identified the concern that schools were not properly preparing students for the global economy of the future (Irons & Harris, 2006). To help ensure NCLB met its goals, the largest increase ever in federal aid to education was appropriated with a special emphasis on assisting at risk students and the schools who have a disproportionate number of at risk students (Trahan, 2002). A factor which many hoped would lead to the success of *No Child Left Behind* was the bipartisan support it received on Capital Hill as both President Bush and George Miller, the Ranking Democrat on the Education and Workforce Committee trumpeted its passage (Rudalevige, 2002).

NCLB is based on four principles. The first principle is accountability for results. Rigorous math and reading standards were instituted for grades 3-8. Individual schools and districts as a whole would receive annual report cards so that parents, policymakers, and educators could judge the effectiveness of schools. The second principle instituted greater flexibility for states, school districts, and schools to use federal block grant funds to meet the benchmarks set by NCLB. The third principle provided greater choices for the parents of children from failing schools. The fourth principle promoted the use of

best practice teaching methods that were shown to increase student achievement (Ohnemus, 2002).

While many have hailed the impact of NCLB, others have argued the law does not deliver what it intended because national standards of achievement were not instituted (Rudalevige, 2002). Some believe that NCLB will be used as a pretext by schools to eliminate special education programs (Wasta, 2006). The outline of this argument is that if special education students have some disability which needs additional focus or remediation, but they are achieving proficiency on a test as defined by the state standard, the justification of continuing programs will no longer exist (Wasta, 2006). Further criticism of the NCLB is that it only measures a student's skills at a certain, fixed point in time. Making accurate judgments concerning a school districts success, or lack thereof, based on a brief snapshot of their students overall educational development is difficult (West, 2005).

#### Charter schools and charter school governance

The concept of a charter school can be traced back to the education reform movements started in the 1960s which led to the school choice initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s. The term charter was first used by the former President of the American Federation of Teachers, Al Shanker, in a speech he gave to the National Press Club. Shanker proposed that those interested in reforming their schools, i.e. anyone or any group that had a plausible idea to better educate students could apply for, and subsequently be granted, a charter to implement their plan (Leiding, 2008).

The general purpose of charter schools is to utilize market forces to improve educational instruction and school management. In the end, the better schools will survive because parents are choosing those schools over underperforming schools; the

success of a charter school begets further success. Even if the charter school fails, proponents feel this can be viewed positively because the school is closed rather than continuing on providing a substandard education (Center for Education Reform, 2009d).

Charter schools survive and succeed for two basic reasons. First, they enjoy a high degree of credibility within the community due to the involvement of highly motivated parents and teachers. Parents are motivated because the charter school has afforded them the opportunity to move their child from what they perceive as an underperforming school to one that provides a better learning environment; without having to remove their child from the public school system. Teachers are highly motivated because the charter school fosters an environment that encourages creativity and innovation on their part. Second, charter schools can succeed because they can make quick adaptations to accommodate the learning needs of their students; in part by the creativity infused by the teachers but also because the charter schools are not required to deal with the bureaucratic minutia that traditional schools must deal with (Leiding, 2008).

The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1991 (Leiding, 2008). To date, there are over 4500 charter schools enrolling 1.3 million students across the United States. Most charter schools are small, generally housing 150-200 students at the middle or secondary level, and they serve a disproportionate and increasing number of poor and minority students (Center for Education Reform, 2009a). In fact, two-thirds of all charter schools educate middle or secondary students (Leiding, 2008). In Pennsylvania, charter schools were established by Act 22 in 1997. In the Commonwealth today, there are 117 such schools in operations enrolling nearly 50,000 students. Eleven of the charter schools in Pennsylvania are cyber charter schools (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2009c).

To deliver on the promises of the charter, the school is not bound to all the rules and regulations that traditional public schools must follow. For example, charter schools can hire teachers who are not certified to teach in public schools (Miron, 2005). In exchange for operational autonomy, charter schools are required to account for student success within a period of time; often 3-5 years. If the school fails to reach their objectives, their charter can be revoked by their sponsor. This has occurred infrequently, however, and most charter schools are closed because of financial difficulty or mismanagement (Center for Education Reform, 2009c). Typical sponsoring agencies are a local school district, a state educational agency, a college or university, and nonprofit organizations (Leiding, 2008). In some cases, charter schools are operated by for-profit companies. This has been especially popular in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona, and California (National Education Association, 1998)

Reviews regarding the success, or lack thereof, of charter schools is mixed. Critics argue that too often charter schools (and other private options for education) negatively reroute students and resources from the public system and the attention of people who can positively affect change within the existing public school system (Cooper & Randall, 2008) or that they increase the segregation of minorities in schools (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2007). In regard to academic achievement, studies also report mixed results. Some studies indicate that charter schools students underperform in comparison to their counterparts in traditional schools (Nelson, Rosenberg & Van Meter, 2004) while other studies indicate that charter school students outperform their traditional public school counterparts (Loveless, 2003; Hoxby, 2004). Recent polling data indicates that 71% of the public believed that school reform should focus on fixing the existing system

rather than finding some new alternative; a percentage that has remained constant from four previous polls using the same question (Rose & Gallup, 2006).

Although there is much to disagree about regarding charter schools, in one area there is wide agreement; the success of charter schools is dependent on a strong state charter school law (Center for Education Reform, 2009a; Miron, 2005). The report by the Center for Education Reform (2009a) indicated there was a direct correlation between strong charter school laws and the success of the charter school itself; 65% of the states with strong charter school laws reported increased academic achievement while only two states with weak laws demonstrated increased achievement. In that study, Pennsylvania ranked 12<sup>th</sup> (out of 40 states and the District of Columbia which have charter laws), earning a B letter grade (Center for Education Reform, 2009b). An additional study concluded that Pennsylvania's charter school students performed better than traditional public schools by a small degree (Miron, 2005).

In the end, for charter schools to be successful and deliver on their mission, effective leadership and governance from their school board is essential (Martinelli, 2005). When creating a charter school board, Pennsylvania's Act 22 provides a great deal of latitude to the sponsoring agency. The Act assigns the board the same duties of a regular school board, i.e. they have the power to make decisions regarding budgeting, curriculum, employ personnel, enter into contracts, etc., but the law does not prescribe how large or small the board should be. Furthermore, the law does not enumerate any specific qualifications individual charter school board members should meet (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2009a).

## Studies/reports identifying characteristics of effective school governance

If the purpose of school boards is to be accountable for setting the conditions necessary for student achievement, what are the characteristics of effective boards that achieve this goal? Ideally, a school board is democratically elected and operates in a non-partisan fashion when formulating sound educational policy. Once that policy is created, an effective school board will leave the execution of that policy to the superintendent, the other professional administrators of the school district, and the teachers (Gemberling, Smith & Villani, 2000). While much anecdotal evidence abounds regarding effective school boards, there are little data which substantiates what governance structures work better than others do. When data are available, it often fails to reach clear conclusions (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002). Two notable exceptions are studies conducted by Goodman, Fulbright & Zimmerman (1997) and the Iowa Association of School Boards (2000) which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. As the pressure increase on school boards to ensure student achievement, given the accountability culture school boards operate within, the time for quantitative studies is now more than ever (Maritz, 2006).

A recurrent difficulty many school governance studies face is the lack of an agreed upon, operational definition of school board effectiveness. Usually, effective governance is defined in very generalized terms and often describes what a school board ought not to do rather than what a school board should do (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002). Most school governance studies use one or all of the following methodologies: anecdotal recommendations from education practitioners, interviews, focus groups, and surveys of the many stakeholders in school governance, i.e. (school board members, superintendents, parents, etc.) examination of

board minutes, and direct observation. For example, Lawrence Hardy, an Associate Editor of the *American School Board Journal*, recommends that individual board members do not keep secrets from each other. By being straightforward and honest with each other, members will reduce the number of surprises that will occur during board deliberations. Hardy (2001) further recommends that a clear set of operating rules be established to help communication.

Griffin and Ward (2006) identified five characteristics of effective boards following a panel discussion of educators from across the nation convened by CTB/McGraw-Hill, a well known publisher of standardized achievement tests. The five characteristics identified were: a focus on student achievement, aligning the budget with educational priorities, holding the professional educators accountable for the resources allocated to them, an engagement of the community in the school district, and a wise use of data. As the authors stated, “in God we trust, all others bring data” (Griffin & Ward (2006, p. 1-2).

According to Deborah Land in her study entitled *Local School Boards Under Review* for the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (2002), there are four characteristics of effective school boards. Land reached her conclusions after reviewing much of the existing school governance literature. First, an effective school board is aware that their primary focus is to foster student achievement. Second, effective school boards enjoy amicable relations with their superintendent and other education stakeholders. To facilitate an amicable relationship, the board approves policies that lead to student achievement but they leave the administration of those policies to the professional staff. In short, they do not micromanage the district. Third, effective school boards are successful at implementing sound policy. To implement

sound policy, the board engages the community for support and they ensure that the goals, mission, and vision of the district are aligned with their budget priorities. Fourth, effective boards periodically evaluate their own performance and provide for training opportunities to address the shortcomings of individual board members and the board as a whole (Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, 2002). Previous analysis published by the Educational Research Service (1976) concerning key school board leadership functions made similar recommendations.

In an attempt to collect empirical data regarding school boards, studies done in the late 1990's interviewed individual school board members to investigate their motivation for serving on board and how the motivating factors influenced their action on the board. Three findings were made. First, board members with personal agenda were more likely to micromanage district decisions. Second, board members interested in reform worked collaboratively. And third, a board member who is only concerned with a single issue tends to dominate the agenda and dialogue of the board (Mountford & Brunner, 1999).

Randall Richards (1997), in a report for the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) also identified eleven characteristics of effective boards. The report concluded that effective boards have a clearly defined role and they focus on creating sound policy, they are knowledgeable of the governance process, and they oriented toward getting tasks accomplished; and they celebrate them when success is achieved. Effective school boards provide leadership by focusing on quality for their customers (parents and students), respecting the opinions and perspectives of others, and operating in an ethical manner.

The Baldrige in Education Criteria, founded on the quality management

principles of former Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige, identified Eleven Core Values of effective management utilized in business, health care, and non-profits that school boards that school board can follow. Like other reports and studies, Baldrige encourages vision, planning, the use of best practices, flexibility, and a reliance on data to measure success. However, Baldrige goes a step further than by advocating the implementation of a strategy that focuses on constant improvement of the entire organization, i.e. the school district (Baldrige in Education, 2008).

In an attempt to better define the leadership roles of school boards in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Campbell and Greene (1994) identified eight characteristics of effective boards. According to the authors, school boards should possess a clear understand of their role and mission which is, primarily, to provide quality education for all the children in the districts. School boards should adopt a high level of professionalism by working as a team, they should conduct meetings in a positive atmosphere, and they should both respect and appreciate the role and the responsibilities of other school staff. In addition, school boards should work to establish trust throughout the district by utilizing open and honest communication while attempting to be fair to all points of view.

The Education and Policy Leadership Center (EPLC) (2004), an organization committed to improving schools and the performance of school boards in Pennsylvania, also made numerous recommendations in their report. The EPLC has stated that to be effective, a school board should focus on the following: planning for the district's success (setting a strategic vision), adopting sound education policies and reviewing them as needed, and hiring, monitoring, and evaluating the superintendent. However, once the superintendent is hired, the board should resist any temptation to micromanage the administration of the school district. In addition, boards need to communicate openly and

honestly with the school administration and the community, and advocate on behalf of all children in the community to local, state, and federal policymakers (Education and Policy Leadership Center, 2004).

The Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA) (2006) recommends that, to be effective, boards should do the following: act as advocates for the district with the community and other education agencies/officials, model responsible governance and leadership, govern through policy, ensure effective planning for the entire district, monitor education program to ensure results are meeting standards, and be in constant communication and engagement with the community. The PSBA identifies benchmarks and indicators of success with each standard to clarify their findings. For instance, to govern through policy, an appropriate benchmark would be to establish guidelines to divide the duties of the superintendent and the school board. If the school board delegated the implementation of policy to the superintendent, this would be an indicator that the benchmark was successfully reached (PSBA, 2006).

Kathleen Vail (2001) advocates that school boards can be effective by improving their relationship with the superintendent. To that end, school boards need to clarify (with the superintendent) what their role is in the education system. By doing so, boards should redefine their concept of power as one of collaboration rather than control. Trust needs to be fostered between the board and the superintendent and they need to set a clear plan of action for the district. Although a strong, collaborative relationship between the board and the superintendent is vital, school boards must also know when to dismiss the superintendent when it becomes clear that his/her objectives are not in the best interest of the community and/or the school district.

A report published in 1998 by five state school board associations also outlined an effective model of school governance. The task force interviewed school board members, superintendents, staff, and policy experts over two years to create the model. Recommendations for the task force were ultimately tested in the field and published in an eight-volume summary (California School Boards Association; Illinois Association of School Boards; Maine School Boards Association; Pennsylvania School Boards Association; Washington State School Directors' Association, 1998). The report identified eight policy categories that all school board decisions should be made. Effective boards set a vision, they implement policies that promotes student achievement and a strong learning environment (which includes allowing teachers to use a variety of teaching methods, and they engage the local community to support the district and its programs (CSBA, et. al., 1998). The more school boards can focus on these categories, the greater the chances they will facilitate student learning. In their publication for the National School Boards Association entitled *The Key Work of School Boards Guidebook*, Gemberling, Smith & Villani (2000) reached the same conclusions two years later.

A study conducted by Trenta et al. (2002) sought to determine the possible correlation between school board governance and student achievement. Small group discussions and focus groups with board members representing twenty-one urban school districts in Ohio were utilized. Five sets of issues were determined to have some bearing on student achievement. Those issues were the following: the hiring and retention process for superintendents; the hiring, placement and evaluation of teachers, principals, and other professionals; general school board effectiveness; the need and costs associated with strategic planning; and the oversight required for emerging technology (Trenta, et.

al., 2002). The study, while making general recommendations for further study, indicated that school governance is only one factor (of many) that affect student learning.

In 2002, a study of one school district in Colorado investigated the correlation between the beliefs held by the school board as they pertained to student achievement. To collect data, interviews were conducted with six of the seven board members, the district's communication's director, and other school leaders. Members of the community were also interviewed to gauge the board's communication and engagement with the public. In addition, direct observations and a review of board minutes and other public documents were conducted (Gudvangen, 2002). The conclusions reached by the study were that the board had begun to adopt characteristics of good governance (such as engaging the community in a variety of venues), however, the ability of any board, or any individual member of the board to utilize a particular model of school governance that leads to higher student achievement is uncertain at best (Gudvangen, 2002). A similar study was completed in Washington State. During interviews of school board members that served in school districts that failed to make progress on state standardized tests, McCarthy and Celio (2001) found that board members took their responsibilities too passively. Because school board members (and administrators) felt little pressure to ensure standards were being met, they did little to fix the problem.

Goodman, Fulbright, and Zimmerman (1997), in their research for the *New England School Development Council* made 40 recommendations summarized within six categories that they believed would increase the effectiveness of school boards. The essential element of improving the performance of the school board was to create a collaborative relationship with the superintendent. During a yearlong national study, Goodman et. al. (1997) interviewed 132 educators, parents, and other citizens in ten

demographically diverse school districts across five states. The states included in the study were Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon and Texas. The size of the districts in the study ranged from a low of 477 to a high of 45,139 pupils. Dropout rates ranged from less than 1% in some school districts to as much as 25% in two school districts. Following an analysis of the data collected from the individual interviews, Goodman et. al. (1997) made the distinction between a *quality governance district* and a *poor governance district*.

School board members in a *quality governance district* often served at least two terms and the superintendents usually had served at least ten years in that capacity. Board members in a *quality governance district* went on retreats to evaluate their performance and to set goals for the next year. Often the goals agreed upon were focused toward student achievement (Goodman, Fulbright & Zimmerman, 1997). Other characteristics of a *quality governance district* were that their school boards refrained from micromanaging the day-to-day affairs of the districts. However, the board still kept abreast of what was occurring in the schools because the board president often met regularly with the superintendent. Following his or her meeting with the superintendent, the board president would then report back to the other board members to keep them informed of the superintendent's initiatives. Additional characteristics of school boards were that they established school policy but allowed the superintendent to carry out that policy; they served as a bridge between community and administration, they adopted a budget; they ensured the education facilities were adequate for delivering a quality education; and they evaluated the superintendent on mutually agreed upon procedures (Goodman, Fulbright & Zimmerman, 1997). A *poor governance district* tended to disregard their agenda and the formal chain of command in the school district. Such

behavior led to role confusion and much bickering between board members and the superintendent. In addition, individual school board members often played to the media for attention to advance their personal agenda (Goodman, Fulbright & Zimmerman, 1997).

The most exhaustive study of school board governance and its correlation to student achievement was conducted by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) (2000). In their quantitative study, the IASB interviewed 159 people (superintendents, board members, central office staff, principals, assistant principals, and teachers) in six school districts in Georgia. Three of the districts were generally high achieving districts and three were generally low achieving districts. Socio-economic status was controlled for and 75% of the people interviewed were *local* or *very local* people who had lived and gone to college in the area their entire lives. Two types of districts were identified depending on their success/lack of success: *stuck* districts (those districts where student achievement was stagnant and below normal) and *moving* districts (those districts where student achievement was above the norm). Although there were many differences between the two types of districts, two similarities did present themselves: the board/superintendents relationships were generally peaceful, and the board's opinion of their superintendent was generally favorable.

In general, the differences were noticeable in the different behaviors exhibited by the board and the professional school administration (IASB, 2000). Following the completion of their study, the IASB published *Seven Conditions for School Renewal* which they believed were central for boards to facilitate student achievement. The first of the seven conditions was an emphasis on building a human organization system. In a *stuck* school district, the superintendent made most of the important decisions, the board

members could not identify policy initiatives, and board members held a bleak outlook regarding their duties (IASB, 2000). In addition, socioeconomic and demographic factors were often used by the superintendent and board members as excuses to justify why students could not learn and achieve. Conversely, in *moving* districts, board members interacted with the schools and “radiated trust” (IASB, 2000, p. 41).

The second condition to facilitate student achievement was the ability to create and sustain initiatives. In *stuck* districts, few and often insignificant initiatives were undertaken by the district. In *moving* districts, many initiatives were instituted and proper support was provided to see the initiative through to its completion (IASB, 2000). The third condition was creating a supportive workplace for staff. In *stuck* districts “little conception of how to support personnel existed” (IASB, 2000, p. 45) while in *moving* districts the board members thought highly of the staff and that they could help them meet their goals with proper support. The fourth condition was proper staff development. In *stuck* districts, board members believed that the staff was on their own in regard to their professional development. In *moving* districts, the board viewed themselves as a partner where it was incumbent upon them to provide resources to develop the staff to better educated students (IASB, 2000). The fifth condition was to support all schools and sites within the district with data and information. In *stuck* districts, the board members were suspicious of the professional staff while in board members in *moving* districts trusted the staff to consistently provide information and data (IASB, 2000). The sixth condition was community development. In a *stuck* district, board members consistently had the sense that the community was unsupportive of their efforts so the public was not actively engaged. On the other hand, in *moving* districts, the public was encouraged to be

part of the decision making process to garner their support of initiatives because they (the public) were part of the team (IASB, 2000).

The seventh and final condition for renewal was shared/integrated leadership. In a *stuck* district, the board believed that reasons for decisions were beyond their control and, therefore, incapable of integrating or sharing leadership. In *moving* districts, board members felt it was their duty to work with the staff and administration to find solutions to problems (IASB, 2000). In summary, the IASB found that in *stuck* districts, the board consistently viewed student achievement an accepted view of the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics but in *moving* districts boards believed that they were there to help students reach their fullest potential (IASB, 2000).

Some states have reviewed the reform proposals and acted to better define the role of their school boards. The *Massachusetts Reform Act of 1993* clarified the education governance structure by designating the school board as a policymaking board and the superintendent as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) charged with managing the district on a day-to-day basis (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004). Kentucky and Tennessee have enacted similar legislation. In 2003, West Virginia further clarified the role of their school superintendents and school boards in alignment with what was done in Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Tennessee (Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004).

#### Board effectiveness; a theoretical framework

Eugene Smoley (1999) agreed with many other researchers that school boards should implement and then evaluate sound education policy and programs (and be sure that the budget priorities support those policies and programs), that they should choose and evaluate the superintendent but not interfere with the day-to-day administration of the

school district, that they should interact with and effectively communicate with the public they serve, and that, in the end, they need to ensure that the appropriate person/people are held accountable for providing a quality education. In an attempt to provide empirical data to facilitate the discussion of whether a school board is being effective or not, Smoley (1999) developed a survey to empirically evaluate school board performance. As part of the *School Board Effectiveness Project* in Delaware, Smoley interviewed 45 school board members across the state (almost 40% of all school board members). At the conclusion of the interviews, 111 “vignettes” (Smoley, 199, p. xviii) were coded into six dimensions or categories of action where the effectiveness of school boards can be judged. Smoley then created a 73-question *Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire (BSAQ)* that will be the methodological foundation for this study. The BSAQ quantifies school board effectiveness. Smoley’s survey was adapted, with slight modifications, from a survey created by Holland et. al. (1993) to determine the effectiveness of college boards of trustees. In fact, Holland assisted Smoley with the creation of the survey for school boards (Holland, personal communication, March 21, 2007). The six dimensions of effective school boards are:

1. *Decision Making*; making well informed decisions among all the alternatives that could be considered.
2. *Functioning as a Group*; each board member should respect and trust all other members of the board so that the group can work together collectively to accomplish their goals. Often a set of rules are adopted to provide a framework for the group to operate. Common rules of operation are reaching a consensus on decisions, supporting those decisions unanimously, honoring confidentiality, and having the school

board's meeting agenda be set jointly by the board president and the superintendent.

3. *Exercising Authority*; by acting independently when needed and cooperating when appropriate with the superintendent. Sometimes what the superintendent wants is opposite of what the community supports.
4. *Connecting to the Community*; by serving as a liaison between the school district and the entire community. "An effective board understands what the community wants and explains to the community what it believes to be in the best interest of the children" (Smoley, 1999, p. 53).
5. *Working Toward Board Improvement*; by encouraging tenured members to run for leadership posts on the board, by reflecting on their performance to gain perspective, and by seeking outside assistance with projects beyond their scope, i.e. consultants to help with strategic planning.
6. *Acting Strategically*; by planning for the long term needs of the school district while keeping in mind all constituencies (parents, students, teachers, staff, state and federal lawmakers) (Smoley, 1999).

### Summary

In summary, education reformers and researchers agree on basic principles that school board members across the country can follow as they try and provide a quality education for students and fulfill the responsibilities school board members are supposed to; and to meddle into the duty of others, i.e. the superintendent. A general consensus as to what the proper duties of a school board member are as follows: to hire, evaluate, and dismiss, if necessary, the superintendent of the school district. Once the superintendent is hired, the board should delegate all other administrative matters as they pertain to

personnel and the implementation of school policy to the administration. The board should also conduct short and long term planning consistent with the district's mission to ensure the success of the students, staff, administration, and the board itself should undergo continual self-reevaluation. Finally, the board needs to communicate with state and federal officials as needed and provide a forum for the community to discuss school policy (Danzberger, 1992; Danzberger, 1994; Education Policy and Leadership Center, 2004; Goodman & Zimmerman, 2000). School board researchers and reformers also agree that the proper duties of school board members should be codified into law by state constitutions. In many cases, this has already been done.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY/RESEARCH DESIGN

In the era of high stakes testing, the need is great for school districts to account for the funds they receive annually to educate their students. This research will analyze the relationship between two measures of student success (AYP scores in math and reading) and the quality of school board governance. The quality of school board governance will be quantitatively assessed by the distribution of an objective survey.

Due to *No Child Left Behind* and countless other pieces of legislation, at both the federal and state level, school districts are required more than ever to prove their students are succeeding academically. Increasingly, local school boards are often at the center of the student success debate because they ultimately approve the policies and create the environment that school administrators and staff operate within to achieve the intended student success. The role of the school board is critical to the success of the district. Having said all that, there have been few empirical studies that have gauged the success, or lack thereof, of school boards. In the past, most of the data collected concerning school boards has been anecdotal; usually the recollections of former school board members or school administrators describing, from their perspective and years of experience, what they thought was, or was not useful.

A survey created by Holland, Chait, and Taylor (1993) and adapted by Eugene Smoley (1999) quantifies school board governance into six dimensions or categories: (a) *Decision Making*, (b) *Functioning as a Group*, (c) *Exercising Authority*, (d) *Connecting to the Community*, (e) *Working Toward Board Improvement*, and (f) *Acting Strategically* (Smoley, 1999). The six categories were the result of extensive interviews with school

board members. Their responses to the questions were then codified into the six dimensions of school board governance. For the purposes of this study, data from three participating traditional public school boards and one charter school board were compared to the most recent AYP scores in math and reading for that respective school district to determine if a relationship existed.

#### Research subjects

A convenient sample of four school districts in Western Pennsylvania was utilized to conduct the study. To vary the sample, a rural, urban, and suburban school district will be represented as well as members of a public charter school board. Charter school board members will be included because they are a separate public board but they are appointed to their position and, therefore, their responses to the survey might differ dramatically from a traditional school board member. Permission to approach the school board as a whole was gained from the school board president first. Upon his/her approval, the researcher distributed the survey to all the members of the board during work session meetings or public meetings of the board. Participation in the study by all the school board members was voluntary and proper consent to participate was agreed to before surveys were distributed and data collected. As outlined in the consent form, all raw data will be kept confidential during the analysis of the data and will be destroyed five years after the successful defense of the study (See Appendix A).

#### Instrumentation

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data was collected from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's website. The most recent data, for 2007-2008 will be utilized for this study. Smoley's 73-question survey was then distributed and collected in person by the researcher. Each board member was afforded the opportunity to complete the

survey in a private setting (which all participants chose to do). As a result, to ensure the anonymity of each participant, the survey's were returned in sealed envelopes either to the superintendent, the board secretary, or by regular mail directly to the researcher via a self-addressed, stamped envelope which the researcher provided.

#### Data analysis

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient was utilized to compare the data from the survey. The Smoley survey allowed the researcher to aggregate the responses from each individual school board member to a group score for each of the six categories that the survey identifies. The group score from the survey was then used to determine if a correlation existed between the AYP score in math and reading for that particular school district.

In part, because Holland helped Smoley develop his questionnaire, the survey is reliable and valid. Holland, in a phone interview (personal communication, March 21, 2007) said that Smoley's questionnaire has only slight variations and is an excellent source to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a board. The reliability of the BSAQ was good. A revised alpha coefficient for all six dimensions ranged from a low of .69 to a high of .87 with an overall alpha coefficient of .77 for the entire BSAQ. There was also excellent interrater reliability with a lowest of 70.5% and a high of 87.4%. The average interrater reliability for the entire BSAQ was 79.6%. The validity of the BSAQ was also good. For all six dimensions, the overall Pearson's  $r$  was moderately strong and statistically significant ( $r=.35$  and  $p=.05$ ) (Jackson & Holland, 1998)

#### Summary

This chapter summarizes the purpose, the participants, the instrumentation, and the method of data analysis that the researcher will utilize to correlate the relationship

between AYP scores of students and school board leadership. In depth analysis of the date will be discussed in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate what relationship may exist between the governance practices of school board members in Western Pennsylvania and student success. The governance of participating school districts was analyzed through the use of a survey created by Richard Smoley (1999) that quantifiably measures the effectiveness of the school boards leadership. Student success was measured utilizing the participating school districts most recent AYP scores in math and reading. The school board members of four school districts participated in the study representing the four types of public school boards: rural, urban, suburban, and a charter school board.

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analysis of the data collected. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the study's participants. The second section provides an overview of the survey. The third section of this chapter provides an overview of the survey data for each school board. The fourth section of this chapter provides analysis of data as it pertains to each of the survey's six dimensions. The fifth section of this chapter summarizes the Pearson Product Moment data comparing all the response of the participants to identify similarities and differences. The final section of the paper summarizes the 2007-208 AYP data for each participating school district.

#### Description of the participants

A sample size of convenience for this study was secured by approaching the presidents of four local boards in Western Pennsylvania each representing a different type of school district, i.e. rural, urban, suburban, and charter school. The total number of

board members who could participate in the study was thirty five (35). Participation in the study was voluntary. As a result, only thirty-one (31) or 88.57% of the school board members decided to participate in the study by returning the survey. All nine (9) members of the urban school board returned the survey. Eight (8) of the nine (9) members of the rural school board returned the survey. Seven (7) of the (9) members of the suburban school board returned the survey. At the time the charter school board was approached to participate in the study, one seat was vacant. As a result, seven (7) of the eight (8) members returned the survey.

#### Description of survey

The survey utilized for this study was created by Richard Smoley that quantifies school board governance and leadership. Smoley's survey modified a previous groundbreaking survey created by Holland, Chait, and Taylor (1989) that investigated the governance practices of private boards of trustees. The survey itself is comprised of seventy-three (73) questions that address six dimensions of board governance. The six dimensions are (a) *Making Decisions*, (b) *Functioning as a Group*, (c) *Exercising Authority*, (d) *Connecting to the Community*, (e) *Working Toward Board Improvement*, and (f) *Acting Strategically*. Thirteen (13) questions on the survey measure the governance dimension of *Making Decisions*. All other governance dimensions are measured by twelve survey questions (Smoley, 1999). Although responders were required to answer all questions, in seven instances a school board member either left a question blank, responded that the question did not apply, or their answer straddled two possible answers. In all these cases, the responses to those particular questions were not included in the data.

## Macro view of survey results

The first part of the research question for this study seeks to quantifiably determine the governing effectiveness of each school board by using the Smoley survey. Smoley, broke effectiveness into six categories or dimensions. Each of these dimensions will be further defined as the data for each is summarized. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was utilized to determine how similar or dissimilar the boards governed. The response to the survey indicates the individual board members perspective of how well or how poorly the board acts as a whole in regard to the six dimensions of board governance. *Effective* governance is defined as a mean of 2.0 or higher, *Somewhat Effective* governance is defined as a mean is between 2.0 and 1.5, mean score between 1.5 and 1.0 indicates a *Slightly Effective* board (Woodward, 2006). The model board, as identified by Smoley, is when the mean is 2.0 or above. (See Table 2).

Only two participating school boards rated themselves as a model board or better. The charter school had the highest overall mean (M=2.06) following by the rural board (M=2.01). The third highest overall mean was for the suburban board (M=1.63) and the lowest overall mean was for the urban board (M=1.49).

Table 2

*Mean Effectiveness of Board Governance by District*

Dimension	Mean/ Rural Board	Mean/ Charter Board	Mean/ Suburban Board	Mean/ Urban Board	Mean of means
Making Decisions	2.09	2.31	1.50	1.50	1.85
Functioning as a Group	2.11	2.01	1.63	1.46	1.80
Exercising Authority	2.09	2.00	1.83	1.61	1.88
Connecting to the Community	2.08	2.24	1.71	1.57	1.90
Working toward Board Improvement	1.55	1.58	1.50	1.37	1.50
Acting Strategically	2.16	2.26	1.61	1.42	1.86
Grand Mean	2.01	2.06	1.63	1.49	1.80

## Micro view of survey dimension results

According to Smoley, the dimension of *Decision Making* refers to a school board's ability to make well-informed decisions among all the alternatives that could be considered. To make these decisions, the board should rely on objective data (Smoley, 1999). The high mean for this dimension occurred within the charter board ( $M = 2.31$ ). The mean for this dimension by the charter board represented the highest mean average of any dimension. The lowest mean for this dimension occurred within both the urban and suburban boards ( $M = 1.5$ ). Table 3 outlines the rank order of means for the dimension of *Making Decisions* and includes the appropriate anecdotal descriptor regarding their effectiveness.

Table 3

*Rank order of means; Making Decisions*

District Type	(M) Mean	Descriptor of Effectiveness
Charter	2.31	Effective
Rural	2.09	Effective
Suburban	1.50	Somewhat Effective
Urban	1.50	Somewhat Effective
Mean of Means	1.85	Somewhat Effective

The dimension of *Functioning as a Group* refers to a school board's ability to respect and trust all other members of the board so that the group can work together collectively to accomplish their goals. Common rules of operation are reaching a consensus on decisions, supporting those decisions unanimously, honoring confidentiality, and having the school board's meeting agenda be set jointly by the board president and the superintendent (Smoley, 1999). The high mean for this dimension occurred within the rural board ( $M = 2.11$ ) and the lowest was among the urban board ( $M = 1.46$ ). Table 4 outlines the rank order of means for the dimension of *Functioning as a Group* and includes the appropriate anecdotal descriptor regarding their effectiveness.

Table 4

*Rank order of means; Functioning as a Group*

District Type	(M) Mean	Descriptor of Effectiveness
Rural	2.11	Effective
Charter	2.01	Effective
Suburban	1.63	Somewhat Effective
Urban	1.46	Slightly Effective
Mean of Means	1.80	Somewhat Effective

The dimension of *Exercising Authority* refers to a school board's ability to act independently when needed and cooperate when appropriate with the superintendent. In the end, school boards that can exercise their authority properly can resist attempts to unduly influence their decision-making (Smoley, 1999). The high mean for this dimension occurred within the rural board ( $M = 2.09$ ) and the low mean occurred within the urban board ( $M = 1.61$ ). Table 5 outlines the rank order of means for the dimension of *Exercising Authority* and includes the appropriate anecdotal descriptor regarding their effectiveness.

Table 5

*Rank order of means; Exercising Authority*

District Type	(M) Mean	Descriptor of Effectiveness
Rural	2.09	Effective
Charter	2.00	Effective
Suburban	1.83	Somewhat Effective
Urban	1.61	Somewhat Effective
Mean of Means	1.88	Somewhat Effective

The dimension of *Connecting to the Community* refers to a school board's ability to serve as a liaison between the school district and the entire community. When the board properly connects with its community, it understands what the community wants and can communicate what it believes to be in the best interest of the children, even if those beliefs are inconsistent with the wants of the community (Smoley, 1999). The high mean for this dimension occurred within the charter board ( $M = 2.24$ ) and the low mean occurred within the urban board ( $M = 1.57$ ). Table 6 outlines the rank order of means for the dimension of *Connecting to the Community* and includes the appropriate anecdotal descriptor regarding their effectiveness.

Table 6

*Rank order of means; Connecting to the Community*

District Type	(M) Mean	Descriptor of Effectiveness
Charter	2.24	Effective
Rural	2.08	Effective
Suburban	1.71	Somewhat Effective
Urban	1.57	Somewhat Effective
Mean of Means	1.90	Somewhat Effective

The dimension of *Working Toward Board Improvement* refers to a school board's encouragement by tenured members to run for leadership posts on the board, by the board's ability to reflect on their performance to gain perspective, and by their willingness to seek outside assistance with projects beyond their scope, i.e. consultants to help with strategic planning (Smoley, 1999). The highest mean for this dimension occurred within the charter board (M = 1.58). This particular mean average represented the lowest high mean of all six dimensions. The low mean for this dimension occurred within the urban board (M = 1.37). This particular mean average represented the lowest low mean of all six dimensions. Table 7 outlines the rank order of means for the dimension of *Working Toward Board Improvement* and includes the appropriate anecdotal descriptor regarding their effectiveness.

Table 7

*Rank order of means; Working Toward Board Improvement*

District Type	(M) Mean	Descriptor of Effectiveness
Charter	1.58	Somewhat Effective
Rural	1.55	Somewhat Effective
Suburban	1.50	Somewhat Effective
Urban	1.37	Slightly Effective
Mean of Means	1.50	Somewhat Effective

The dimensions of *Acting Strategically* refers to a school board's ability to plan for the long term needs of the school district while balancing the wants, needs, and/or mandates of all stakeholders in the education system, i.e. students, parents, teachers, staff, state and federal lawmakers (Smoley, 1999). The high mean for this dimension occurred within the charter board (M = 2.26) and the low mean occurred within the urban board (M = 1.42). Table 8 outlines the rank order of means for the dimension of *Acting Strategically* and includes the appropriate anecdotal descriptor regarding their effectiveness.

Table 8

*Rank order of means; Acting Strategically*

District Type	(M) Mean	Descriptor of Effectiveness
Charter	2.26	Effective
Rural	2.16	Effective
Suburban	1.61	Somewhat Effective
Urban	1.42	Slightly Effective
Mean of Means	1.86	Somewhat Effective

#### Pearson data

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was done to compare all the responses to determine how differently or how similarly the school boards governed as measured by the Smoley survey. Pearson scores can range from +1.0 to -1.0. A value of 1 indicates that a perfect relationship exists between the variables. When the data is plotted, all the points will lie on a straight line. A value of  $-1$  implies an inverse relationship and a value of 0 implies that there is no linear relationship between the variables (Moore, 2006). Table 9 displays all the Pearson ( $r$ ) Products for all possible pairings of sample groups. None demonstrated any significant correlation.

Table 9

*Pearson Product Moment Correlations; per dimension*

(D-1=*Making Decisions*; D-2=*Functioning as a Group*; D-3=*Exercising Authority*; D-4=*Connecting to the Community*; D-5=*Working toward Board Improvement*; D-6=*Acting Strategically*)

Group to Group	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6
Suburban-Urban	-0.004	-0.104	0.130	-0.245	0.242	-0.160
Suburban-Charter	0.044	-0.092	0.366	0.182	0.139	0.209
Suburban-Rural	0.172	0.077	0.511	0.209	0.308	0.177
Urban-Suburban	-0.004	-0.104	0.143	-0.259	0.239	-0.149
Urban-Charter	0.081	-0.006	-0.060	0.020	0.095	-0.134
Urban-Rural	-0.114	0.222	0.009	-0.320	0.050	-0.211
Charter-Suburban	0.044	-0.092	0.345	0.144	0.126	0.177
Charter-Urban	0.081	-0.006	-0.060	0.020	0.095	-0.134
Charter-Rural	0.240	0.301	0.328	-0.011	0.190	0.080
Rural-Suburban	0.172	0.077	0.516	0.211	0.297	0.201
Rural-Urban	-0.114	0.222	0.009	-0.320	0.050	-0.211
Rural-Charter	0.240	0.301	0.328	-0.011	0.190	0.080

## AYP data

Annually, school districts are required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (modified by the *No Child Left Behind*) to administrate standardized tests to determine their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (United States Department of Education, 2009). In Pennsylvania, the tests are known as the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). The scores of the test gauge the level of proficiency, or lack thereof, of all students in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2009d). If a district does not make appropriate AYP, there are various warning levels to help school districts take corrective action to

improve their students test scores. The three school districts whose school boards members elected to participate in the study are all met the AYP targets at the conclusion of the last round of testing. The charter school did not. The charter school is under a School Improvement II warning at this time (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2009b). A level II warning requires a corrective plan of action be submitted to the state to get back on track toward AYP. Below are the test scores for the participating districts in both reading and math. For the 2007-2008 round of testing, Pennsylvania's target for AYP in reading was 63% and the AYP target in math was 56%. Table 10 outlines the AYP scores for each participating district and includes the overall survey mean as well as the appropriate descriptor of each boards' effectiveness.

Table 10

<i>AYP Scores in Reading and Math of participating districts</i>		
Board/test type	% at students scoring proficient or higher	Descriptor; board effectiveness/ District overall survey mean
Rural/reading	68.1	Effective
Rural/math	63.8	2.01
Charter/reading	28.3	Effective
Charter/math	41.9	2.06
Suburban/reading	76.8	Somewhat Effective
Suburban/math	78.6	1.63
Urban/reading	60.4	Slightly Effective
Urban/math	65.5	1.49

### Summary

Following the collection of data for this study, there is little evidence, beyond the anecdotal, that the participating school boards govern differently. While some are more

*Effective* in certain dimensions than others, when looked at objectively and statistically, the differences are minimal. Data from this study also indicate that there is also no direct relationship between the board's survey scores and the student scores on the PSSA exams. The board with the higher survey scores had the lowest PSSA scores while the district with the highest PSSA scores had the third lowest total mean on the survey. Further analysis and discussion of all data will occur in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to determine if a relationship existed between the effectiveness of school board governance, as measured by the survey created by Richard Smoley (1999), and the respective school board's district AYP scores in math and reading. The 73-question survey was administered to four types of public school boards; (a) urban, (b) suburban, (c) rural, and (d) charter. The responses to the survey's questions were then categorized into six dimensions of leadership; (a) *Making Decisions*, (b) *Functioning as a Group*, (c) *Exercising Authority*, (d) *Connecting to the Community*, (e) *Working Toward Board Improvement*, and (f) *Acting Strategically*.

This chapter provides a summary interpretation of the research data at both a macro and micro level. In addition, the variability of response by the participants in the survey is summarized. Following the interpretation of the data, suggestions for further research and a summary to the research project as a whole are provided.

#### Summary of survey data

Following the collection of data, each school board's response was statistically compared to the other participating school boards to identify variations of response. The aggregate data was also compared to each districts' AYP scores in reading and math to determine if a better score on the survey led to higher student achievement on the annual Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) test scores utilized for *No Child Left Behind*. The data indicates a mixed picture. The overall mean for urban boards was the lowest at 1.49 or *Slightly Effective*. Overall, the suburban board rated themselves at 1.63

or on the low end of *Somewhat Effective*. The overall mean for both the rural and charter boards were *Effective* at 2.02 and 2.07 respectively.

After compiling and aggregating the survey data, it was found that none of the participating school boards rated themselves as a model board according to Smoley's (1999) criteria (M = 2.0 or higher) in all six dimensions. The charter school board and the rural board had a mean of 2.0 or higher in each dimension except *Working Toward Board Improvement*. In fact, this dimension was consistently rated the lowest by all four school boards. The survey data is consistent with previous research, which has concluded that a majority of effective school boards are found in the homogeneous suburbs (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986; Danzberger, 1992). Charter school boards usually operate in an efficient manner as well because their members accept an appointment to the board and pledge their commitment to the school's mission. As a result, they often enjoy a great deal of accountability from the parents of the children who attend (Center for Education Reform, 2009e).

Other past trends presented themselves in this survey as well. Historically, urban school boards have ranked themselves lower than other school boards (Danzberger, 1992). In this study, urban school board members rated themselves lower in each of the six dimensions in comparison to the other three boards. Both the urban and suburban boards rated themselves below the model board in each dimension. Furthermore, all boards rated themselves as either *Effective* or *Somewhat Effective* in all dimensions except for three areas. In each case, it was the urban board who rated themselves as *Slightly Effective* when *Functioning as a Group* (M=1.46), *Acting Strategically* (M=1.42), and when *Working Toward Board Improvement* (M=1.37). The mean of 1.37

represented the lowest mean average of any dimension of all the participating school boards.

#### Comparison of AYP data and board survey scores

Following the collection of data, a positive correlation between the results of the survey and student success, as measured by AYP scores in reading and math, cannot be determined. The board with the highest survey scores was the charter school board ( $m = 2.06$ ). However, the AYP scores of their students included in this study were the lowest of all participating school districts. To put the apparent dichotomy of high charter school board survey scores but low AYP scores into proper perspective, further understanding of factors affecting scores on standardized tests needs to be identified. Documented demographic factors that negatively affect student scores on achievement tests are the level of family income, the level of education of the child's parents, the students ethnicity, the students proficiency with the English language, and whether the student is disabled (Marchant, Paulson, & Shunk, 2006). In the case of the participating charter board, their school has been created to educate those students who fall negatively into many of those categories; i.e. 84% come from economically disadvantaged homes, 35% have Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) and 48% are minorities (Perseus House Charter School of Excellence Annual Report, 2008).

Converse to the data from the charter school and its board, the participating suburban school district had the third lowest survey mean ( $M = 1.63$ ) but their students had the highest AYP scores in both math and reading. A mean of 1.63, is only considered *Somewhat Effective*, yet, overall, the students in that particular school district were scoring far above current the AYP targets. Similarly, the participating urban school board had the lowest grand mean ( $M=1.49$ ) from the survey yet their district's students

had the second highest AYP scores in math. Although a mean of 1.49 would describe a *Slightly Effective* school board, their district is making AYP in both math and reading. Finally, the participating rural district had the second highest survey mean, and the highest among the traditional, elected school boards that participated (M=2.01), yet their students AYP scores in math were the second lowest (lowest among the study's elected school boards). However, they are considered an *Effective* school board and their students AYP scores were far above the state targets.

#### Analysis of variability of survey results

When comparing the mean difference (the difference between the highest and lowest mean of each survey dimension) among the participating school boards, anecdotally there appears to be some difference in the way the boards operate. The highest mean difference occurred with the following dimensions: *Making Decisions* (mean difference of .81) and *Acting Strategically* (mean difference of .84). The dimension with the smallest mean difference was *Working Toward Board Improvement* (mean difference of .21). A statistical analysis of the variability of survey scores, however, paints a different picture. Pearson Product Correlations was conducted to determine the level of correlation between the governance processes of each board when compared with each other as indicated by the response to the survey. Calculations for all possible pairings of sample groups were conducted. Despite the more anecdotal descriptions applied by Smoley of that two school boards were *Effective* and that the others were *Somewhat Effective*, or *Slightly Effective* based on a mean score, none of the calculations demonstrated any significant correlation. (See Table 11).

Table 11

*Pearson Product Correlation Data for all Possible Pairings of Sample Groups*

(D-1=*Making Decisions*; D-2=*Functioning as a Group*; D-3=*Exercising Authority*; D-4=*Connecting to the Community*; D-5=*Working toward Board Improvement*; D-6=*Acting Strategically*); Sample Group Abbreviations; S=Suburban District, U=Urban District, R=Rural District, and C=Charter District

Sample Group	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6
S-U	-0.005	-0.104	0.131	-0.246	0.243	-0.160
S-C	0.045	-0.092	0.366	0.182	0.140	0.209
S-R	0.172	0.078	0.511	0.210	0.309	0.177
U-S	-0.005	-0.104	0.143	-0.259	0.240	-0.149
U-C	0.082	-0.007	-0.060	0.021	0.095	-0.135
U-R	-0.114	0.223	0.010	-0.321	0.051	-0.212
C-S	0.045	-0.092	0.346	0.145	0.127	0.177
C-U	0.082	-0.007	-0.060	0.021	0.095	-0.135
C-R	0.241	0.302	0.329	-0.012	0.190	0.081
R-S	0.172	0.078	0.517	0.211	0.297	0.202
R-U	-0.114	0.223	0.010	-0.321	0.051	-0.212
R-C	0.241	0.302	0.329	-0.012	0.190	0.081

In addition to Pearson ( $r$ ), three additional tests of statistical significance were conducted to provide additional analysis regarding the lack of variation between groups. For these tests, a sample group of seven board members from each school board type was compiled. The means for individual sample groups showed some clear variations; however with standard deviations averaging between 0.6-0.8, it is clear that this survey does not have a high enough fidelity to measure variation on a group of samples this small. Stated differently, if one school board demonstrated an average of 2 or “Agree” in Dimension 1: *Making Decisions*, with a standard deviation of 0.8, another school board would need to demonstrate a average score of 0.04 (or Strongly Disagree) just to find

themselves two standard deviations ( $Z$ -score = 2, at  $p > .05$ ) away from the former. Table 12 outlines the  $Z$ -score data.

Table 12

*Sample Group Variability of Responses to Survey*

((D-1=*Making Decisions*; D-2=*Functioning as a Group*; D-3=*Exercising Authority*; D-4=*Connecting to the Community*; D-5=*Working toward Board Improvement*; D-6=*Acting Strategically*)

Sample Group	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6
Suburban Mean	1.50	1.63	1.83	1.71	1.50	1.61
Suburban STDEV	0.65	0.83	0.70	0.68	0.68	0.67
Urban Mean	1.43	1.44	1.55	1.46	1.34	1.31
Urban STDEV	0.81	0.88	0.81	0.87	0.84	0.82
Charter Mean	2.31	2.01	2.00	2.24	1.58	2.26
Charter STDEV	0.64	0.88	0.75	0.65	0.76	0.64
Rural Mean	2.05	2.08	2.09	2.07	1.53	2.13
Rural STDEV	0.73	0.85	0.80	0.72	0.97	0.72

F-Ratios were also calculated to determine whether the four groups differed significantly.

The four groups only showed a  $p = .10$  statistical significant variation in two of the six dimensions of school board effectiveness (Making Decisions  $F = 2.44$ ; Acting Strategically  $F = 2.64$ ). (See Table 13).

Table 13

F Ratios; Dimension of Smoley Survey

((D-1=*Making Decisions*; D-2=*Functioning as a Group*; D-3=*Exercising Authority*; D-4=*Connecting to the Community*; D-5=*Working toward Board Improvement*; D-6=*Acting Strategically*)

F Ratio	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6
	2.44	0.88	0.64	1.57	0.10	2.64

Z-scores for distribution of means were conducted; however, none of the four sample groups demonstrates a statistically significant Z-score. (See Table 14).

Table 14

Z-scores (Distribution of Means) among sample groups

Group	D-1	D-2	D-3	D-4	D-5	D-6
Suburban	-1.06	-0.47	-0.12	-0.52	0.028	-0.69
Urban	-1.27	-1.03	-1.04	-1.35	-0.46	-1.68
Charter	1.59	0.647	0.42	1.22	0.29	1.40
Rural	0.74	0.85	0.74	0.65	0.14	0.97

In addition, Z-scores were calculated for each individual board member in comparison to the other member's scores of their own school board. None were found to significantly deviate in terms of Z-scores from their respective board. Finally, Z-scores were also calculated for each individual board member in comparison to all members' scores of all sample groups in the study. None out of the 28 respondents measured in this test were found to significantly deviate from the mean of the population.

Because the charter school board had the highest overall survey score, and they had the highest mean score in four of the six dimensions, a case could be made that appointed school boards are preferable based on the evidence of this research. A recent study in another geographic areas suggest that charter boards, overall, score better on the

Smoley survey than traditional public school boards (Woodward, 2006). An advantage that charter boards enjoy that may affect this dynamic is that their members are appointed and tabbed to serve on the board to bring a certain expertise; whether it be experience in education or management/business expertise. Furthermore, they are expected to fulfill the mission of the school's charter and be responsive to the needs of their students by avoiding the bureaucratic malaise and political maneuvering that sidetracks traditional school boards (Leiding, 2008). However, a more in depth look at the data provides positive indicators for traditional public school boards.

A lack of communication between the community and the board has been a common criticism among school board reformers (Meier, 2003). Furthermore, a report for the Institute for Educational Leadership (Carol, Cunningham, Danzberger, Kirst, McCloud & Usdan, 1986) indicated that if a reform agenda was to be enacted within a school system, the local community needed to participate in the school system. However, as in other studies, all of the school boards for this research rated themselves the best in *Connecting to the Community*. When doing so, an effective board can explain its actions to both the external community, i.e. the surrounding community of the district, and the internal community, i.e. the school personnel. They also seek input from as many sources as possible to facilitate a healthy exchange of ideas. This is a promising dynamic in that the educational system is not a mystery or a distant enterprise for those who must support it, the taxpayers and surrounding community.

The survey data also indicates that the school boards in this study are operating in a way that is conducive to a well run school district. For example, in the dimensions of *Exercising Authority*, the overall mean was 1.88, the second highest rating among the six dimensions. When school boards exercise their authority properly, they can act

independently when needed but they also have a strong working relationship with the superintendent (Smoley). Obviously, there is room for improvement because the overall mean is below that of an ideal board as determined by the Smoley survey, but the data also indicates, in general, the school board and the superintendent work together in a positive manner. The survey and AYP data back up the research by Domenech (2005) and Seitz (1994) that have shown effective school districts enjoy a good working relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

In three other dimensions, the participating school boards, while scoring below the ideal mean of 2.0, rated themselves strongly. Concerning the dimension of *Acting Strategically*, the overall mean was 1.86; indicating the school boards feel they are properly addressing the long and short-term needs of the school district. In regard to the dimension of *Making Decisions*, the overall mean was 1.85; indicating that the participating school boards felt they utilized objective data, discussed alternatives, and encouraged public involvement in the decision making process while not succumbing, unduly, to public pressure. The dimension with the second to last overall mean was *Functioning As a Group* (M=1.80) which indicates that the participating school boards, in general, have a healthy respect for each other and constructively work together to achieve the goals of the district.

While the survey data does provide some good news regarding school board performance, there are data that indicates the continued need for boards to improve their performance. For each board, the dimension rated the lowest was *Working Toward Board Improvement* (M=1.5); defined as a school board who actively seeks new members to run or fill vacancies so that people with proper background and knowledge can serve, they seek feedback to judge their own effectiveness and make positive changes

when/where necessary; and utilize consultants and experts when needed to make informed decisions (Smoley, 1999). This outcome is consistent with Woodward's (2006) research.

#### Suggestions for further research

Because this was such a small sample of schools in Western Pennsylvania, it is recommended that a larger sample of school board members be utilized in a replication of this study to see if the same patterns persisted across the entire state of Pennsylvania or across a large, multi-state region. A replication of this study with a larger sample, finding the same results, would confirm that school board governance has less to do with student success than socioeconomic factors of income and race and the reality of educational disability that some students must deal with. As it turned out, the three traditional public school boards represented districts that were meeting their AYP targets. Future replications of this study should include districts and school boards that are not making AYP.

To better judge the variability among response to the survey, future research should utilize the same survey but with a different number of Likert response. Psychological studies have demonstrated that survey respondents generally fail to use the extreme values of response options and gravitate toward the center (O'Brien, 1989). This fact, matched with the structure of the Smoley survey where the closest individuals can respond without exact alignment is a 25% variation in responses, indicates that the response options are too narrow to show any significant variation.

There are numerous opinions regarding how many Likert Scale points should be used on any particular survey. Matell and Jacoby (1971) determined that the reliability and validity of a survey instrument did not depend on the number of Likert points.

However, Masters (1974) found that reliability increases up to 4-points and leveled off thereafter. Additional analysis by Komorita and Graham (1965) determined that instruments with a six-point scale were the most reliable. Weng's (2004) analysis recommends the use of a seven-point scale (if a mid-point is desirable and a 6-point scale if not mid-point is needed) if the cognitive ability of respondents is equivalent to that of college students.

Future study should also continue to examine factors proven to facilitate strong school board governance. For instance, Maritz (2006) surveyed 295 of 501 school superintendents in Pennsylvania and determined that the longevity of school board service has a positive correlation at the .05 level to the board functioning together better as a team and achieving the district's goals. This report, armed with data the Smoley (1999) survey can provide, might provide additional analysis of what school boards can do to promote better achievement scores by its students.

Although the charter school was not making AYP targets, as explained earlier, it is difficult to hold the school board too responsible for this reality because of the charter schools mission to serve who are challenged academically. According to the Smoley survey, the charter board conducts themselves well and operates efficiently. Concerning charter schools and their boards, because they are often chosen for specific purposes, and as the research data for this study has borne out, they, therefore, operate closer to the ideal as determined by Smoley's survey, the survey should be administered to more charter boards. Perhaps a study can be done to examine charter boards solely. As stated earlier, correlating the AYP data of charter schools that are specifically created to educate students who have a history of non-performance on standardized tests to schools with high achieving learners does little to advance academic research. Although AYP scores

were the measurable outcome utilized for this study, research controlling for other measurable outcomes such as teacher retention, SAT scores, graduation rates, etc. should be conducted for two purposes; (1) to better identify the factors that ultimately define student success, and (2) to determine if school governance affects those dynamics.

Focus groups are a proven method of collecting qualitative data for academic research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). If studies are conducted in the future with such groups, the completion of the survey by those assembled might be useful. Because a focus groups is representative of most (if not all) constituency groups, the data collected would include the perspective of parents and citizens who have a vested interest in the school districts success but who are not employees or official representatives of the district.

Finally, an anecdotal comment by one school board member during the initial phase of administering the survey indicates the need for continued research of the school board's possible affect on achievement test scores. This particular school board member, when given an overview of the study's research questions, wondered aloud what school board members had to do with AYP scores. This exclamation caught the researcher off guard because he unwittingly thought that all school board members would assume they have something to do with their school districts achievement test scores. I am sure this particular school board member, who is a former educator, is not the only board member operating with the same perspective. Further board training detailing their performance and identifying their importance to the education system needs to be encouraged.

#### Summary

This purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between school board governance practices and the AYP scores of the students. Following the collection

of research, it was determined that there was not a correlation between the two factors. Determining how well the school boards governed proved difficult. Utilizing the constructs created by Smoley (1999) and Woodward (2006), the data indicated that there were differences in how the participating boards for this study operated. However, further statistical analysis indicated that all participating school boards essentially operate in a very similar fashion. The question can be asked, “Is analysis of school board governance then worthwhile?” Although there are many views regarding the question, study in this area should be continued. Some researchers say that school boards are not directly responsible for student achievement but they can help set the conditions for student success to occur (IASB, 2000; Lashway, 2002). If the board can work together in an organized fashion to create a strong learning environment, then they may influence student learning and accountability outcomes (Woodward, 2006).

The current study indicates that the participating boards, when administered the Smoley survey, produce results similar to other studies; including the critical elements of admitting they don’t focus on board improvement as much as they should and they don’t function as well as a group as they should. Continued efforts need to be implemented that focus attention on board improvement so they can implement policies that promote educational attainment by the students they represent. The survey can continue to be an important tool to help school boards govern better, even if, at this time, no statistical correlation can be determined between their governance practices and the scores of their students on standardized tests. For instance, much of the previous research describes school boards as a body that too often micromanages the superintendent and the professional school staff and they too often make decisions in response to public pressure. The data from this study does not bear this out.

This study, similar to previous studies examining school governance, indicated that a school board's ability to examine its operating structure for self-improvement is lacking. To positively affect schools and student success, school boards need to pinpoint their weaknesses and make the necessary adjustment for the betterment of the education system. Both National School Board Association and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) recommend the use of Smoley's survey to achieve such a goal because, in the end, "the measure of effective education governance is in the collective ability of board members to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities across the spectrum of responsible governing behaviors" (Danzberger, Kirst & Usdan, 1992, p. 82). However, the data from this study also refutes, to some degree, the research and commentary that all too often casts school boards and their individual members in a negative light, justifying the need for continued quantitative research regarding school board governance.

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## APPENDIX A

February 20, 2009

Dear School Board Director:

As a doctoral student at Duquesne University, I am requesting your participation in completing the attached board governance survey for my dissertation. The survey consists of 73 questions and takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The purpose of my study is to investigate what, if any, relationship exists between school board leadership and student achievement as demonstrated by a district Adequate yearly Progress (AYP) scores in both math and reading for 2007-2008 school year.

Each and every response to the survey is important for the study to be complete. The anonymity of the individual participants and the school districts will be kept. No identity will be made in any data analysis.

\* Attached you will find a copy of the survey and a self addressed stamp envelope. If you have not returned the survey at this time, your participation is greatly appreciated. Because my total sample will be quite small, it's imperative I get as much participation as possible. If you have completed and returned the survey, please ignore this request.

Your participation in this survey voluntary. A returned survey will indicate your voluntary consent to participate in the study. To ensure the anonymity of your responses, do not put your name or identify your school district on the survey. Please return it in the envelope provided for you on or before (I'll provide a date of 10 days after the follow up mailed to the school board member).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at 814-824-2171 or via email at [kfoust@mercyhurst.edu](mailto:kfoust@mercyhurst.edu). You may also contact my dissertation director, Dr. Phil Belfiore at 814-824-2268 or via email at [pbelfiore@mercyhurst.edu](mailto:pbelfiore@mercyhurst.edu). If you have questions concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, Dr. Richer at 412-396-6326 or via email at [richer@duq.edu](mailto:richer@duq.edu).

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Kyle Foust  
IDPEL Doctoral Candidate

## APPENDIX B

### The Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this self assessment of your school board. You will be answering a total of 73 questions. Your participation will help analyze what relationship, if any, exists between school board leadership and student achievement as defined by the most recent AYP scores for your district in math and reading.

Your answers to these questions will be confidential and they will only be viewed by Kyle Foust, doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Doctorate Program for Educational Leaders (IDPEL) at Duquesne University. Also, your scores will not be reported individually. The scores of all your fellow school board members will be aggregated and compared to three other school districts in Western Pennsylvania.

To maintain the anonymity of each school board member and each school district, do not write your name or identify which school district you represent on the survey.

The following statements describe a variety of possible actions by boards. Some of the statements may represent your own experiences as a member of your board, while others may not. For each of the items, there are four possible choices. Please mark the box which corresponds with the answer that most accurately reflects your answer to the statement. Thank you again for participating in this study.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	This board works to reach consensus on important matters.				
2.	I have participated in board discussions about what we should do differently as a result of a mistake the board made.				
3.	There have been occasions where the board itself has acted in ways inconsistent with the district's deepest values.				
4.	This board has formal structures and procedures for involving the community.				
5.	I have been in board meetings where it seemed that the subtleties of the issues we dealt with escaped the awareness of a number of the members.				
6.	Our board explicitly examines the "downside" or possible pitfalls of any important decision it is about to make.				
7.	Usually the board and superintendent advocate the same actions.				
8.	This board is more involved in trying to put out fires than in preparing for the future.				

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9.	This board sets clear organizational priorities for the year ahead.				
10.	A written report including the board's activities is periodically prepared and distributed publicly.				
11.	This board communicates its decisions to all those who are affected by them.				
12.	At least once every two years, our board has a retreat or special session to examine our performance, how well we are doing as a board.				
13.	Many of the issues that this board deals with seem to be separate tasks, unrelated to one another.				
14.	The board will sharply question certain administrative proposals, requiring the superintendent to reconsider the recommendations.				
15.	The board is always involved in decisions that are import to the future of education in our district.				
16.	If our board thinks that an important group of constituents is likely to disagree with an action we are considering, we will make sure we learn how they feel before we actually make the decision.				
17.	Board members don't say one thing in private and another thing in public.				
18.	This board and its members maintain channels of communication with specific key community leaders.				
19.	This board delays action until an issue becomes urgent or critical.				
20.	This board periodically sets aside time to learn more about important issues facing school districts like the one we govern.				
21.	This board relies on the natural emergence of leaders rather than trying explicitly to cultivate future leaders for the board.				

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22.	This board has formed ad hoc committees or task forces that include staff and community representatives as well as board members.				
23.	This board is as attentive to how it reaches conclusions as it is to what is decided.				
24.	The decisions of this board on one issue tend to influence what we do about other issues that come before us.				
25.	Most people on this board tend to rely on observation and informal discussion to learn about their roles and responsibilities.				
26.	This board's decisions usually result in a split vote.				
27.	When faced with an important issue, the board often "brainstorms" and tries to generate a whole list of creative approaches or solutions to the problem.				
28.	When a new member joins this board, we make sure that someone serves as a mentor to help this person learn the ropes.				
29.	I have been in board meetings where explicit attention was given to the concerns of the community.				
30.	I rarely disagree openly with other members in the board meetings.				
31.	I have participated in board discussions about the effectiveness of our performance.				
32.	At our board meetings, there is at least as much dialogue among members as there is between members and administrators.				
33.	A certain group of board members will usually vote together for or against particular issues.				
34.	I have participated in discussions with new members about the roles and responsibilities of a board member.				

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
35.	The board will often persuade the superintendent to change his mind about recommendations.				
36.	The leadership of this board typically goes out of its way to make sure that all members have the same information on important issues.				
37.	The board has adopted some explicit goals for itself, distinct from goals it has for the total school district.				
38.	The board often requests that a decision be postponed until further information can be obtained.				
39.	The board periodically obtains information on the perspectives of staff and community.				
40.	This board seeks outside assistance in considering its work.				
41.	Our board meetings tend to focus more on current concerns than on preparing for the future.				
42.	At least once a year, this board asks that the superintendents articulate his/her vision for the school district's future and strategies to realize that vision.				
43.	The board often requests additional information before making a decision.				
44.	I have never received feedback on my performance as a member of this board.				
45.	The board often discusses its role in district management.				
46.	This board has on occasion evaded responsibility for some important issue facing the school district.				
47.	Before reaching a decision on important issues, this board usually requests input from persons likely to be affected by the decision.				
48.	Recommendations from the administration are usually accepted with little questioning.				

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
49.	Board members are consistently able to hold confidential items in confidence.				
50.	This board often discusses where the school district should be headed five or more years into the future.				
51.	The board president and superintendent confer so that differences of opinion are identified.				
52.	This board does not allocate organizational funds for the purpose of board education and development.				
53.	I have been present in board meetings where discussions of the values of the district were key factors in reaching a conclusion on a problem.				
54.	The board usually receives a full rationale for the recommendations it is asked to act upon.				
55.	At times this board has appeared unaware of the impact its decisions will have within our service community.				
56.	Within the past year, this board has reviewed the school district's strategies for attaining its long-term goals.				
57.	We are not a "rubber stamp" board.				
58.	This board has conducted an explicit examination of its roles and responsibilities.				
59.	I am able to speak my mind on key issues without fear that I will be ostracized by some members of this board.				
60.	This board tries to avoid issues that are ambiguous and complicated.				
61.	The administration rarely reports to the board on the concerns of those the school district serves.				
62.	I have been in board meetings where the discussion focused on identifying or overcoming the school district's weaknesses.				

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
63.	This board often acts independent of the superintendent's recommendations.				
64.	Values are seldom discussed explicitly at our board meetings.				
65.	This board spends a lot of time listening to different points of view before it votes on an important matter.				
66.	The board discusses events and trends in the larger environment that may present specific opportunities for this school district.				
67.	The board is outspoken in its views about programs.				
68.	Once a decision is made, all board members work together to see that it is accepted and carried out.				
69.	All board members support majority decisions.				
70.	This board makes explicit use of the long-range priorities of this school district in dealing with current issues.				
71.	The board will reverse its position based on pressure from the community.				
72.	Members of this board are sometimes disrespectful in their comments to other board members.				
73.	More than half of this board's time is spent in discussions of issues of importance to the school district's long-range future.				

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