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How Exemplary Rural Superintendents Build Trust

With and Between School Board Members

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Organizational Leadership

March 2019

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It is with a grateful heart that I thank my wife Denice, and daughters Lindsey and Kiersten, for their constant love and support to complete what has become the monumental effort of writing this dissertation. From the beginning of the three-year program, all three cheered me on and convinced me that it could be done. Denice and my daughters would tell me, “Soon you will be Dr. Cora, Dad!” Denice was the individual who would remind me of the assignments and portions of chapters that needed to be accomplished by particular dates and would push me through the hard times to meet the deadlines. It was this continual support and encouragement that provided me the strength to continue past these moments when potentially abandoning the program crossed my mind.

My parents Martha Merced and the late Regino Cora were immigrants from Puerto Rico migrating to the United States in the 1950s. They were poor, but always found a way to provide for their children. My mother was the hard worker with the warm, caring heart for others. My father quickly learned that a good education would provide opportunities to those who took the opportunity to take advantage of education in America. He gained his degree in criminal justice and was Bethlehem, Pennsylvania’s first Latino police officer. My father impressed upon me that education was the key to success. He would often say he would like to have a ‘doctor’ in the family. This long journey was partially sparked by my father’s words and completed in his honor. I thank him for the inspiration and wish he were here to share in my achievement—I believe he would be proud.
There is a second group of individuals who deserve special recognition and acknowledgement. The Thematic Trust Team of Terri Giamarino, Damon Wright, and Dan Scudero have been by my side since the beginning of this journey. While the three of them were always ahead of me during this journey, they never gave up on me and continually encouraged me, just like family members. I am honored to call them my friends, and I am extremely proud of them for completing their doctoral degrees with me—thank you Dr. Giamarino, Dr. Wright, and Dr. Scudero for sharing the stressful times and, more importantly, sharing the laughter that allowed all of us to soar through to the end of this journey.

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It is because all of the individuals listed in this acknowledgement that I completed the Brandman University Doctoral Program. Hard work, perseverance, staying focused on the target, and having a phenomenal support system of teammates has landed me where I am today. Grateful is such a simple word with a great meaning of thanks to everyone who supported my efforts.

In closing, this dissertation has expanded my learning and experiences as a superintendent. Board members, staff, parents, and most importantly, students will benefit from my learning as it has molded me in ways I have yet to discover. It is a goal of mine as a superintendent to leave a legacy of meeting the many needs of those I work with and making a positive difference in their lives.
ABSTRACT

How Exemplary Rural Superintendents Build Trust With and Between School Board Members

by Edwin G. Cora

Purpose: The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection.

Methodology: This explanatory sequential mixed-methods case study combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches, also known as an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study. Numerical data (quantitative), through use of a survey, were used to provide the researcher a broad perspective on how exemplary superintendents build trust with and between school board members. Also, narrative data (qualitative), in the form of select open-ended interviews of exemplary superintendents, were used to determine successful experiences related to building trust with and between school board members (Roberts, 2010).

Findings: The first major finding of the trust research with exemplary rural superintendents was that each superintendent who participated concurred that all five domains—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection—were found to be important when building trust with and between school board members. The second major overarching finding from the study was that communication is a critical function and transcends all domains. Communication was consistently mentioned during the qualitative interviews as an important component for building trust with and between
superintendents and board members. The superintendents emphasized the need for
costant, open, and honest conversations with board members.

**Conclusions:** The study supported the conclusion that the exemplary rural
superintendents who participated in this study believe and use all five trust domains
(competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection) including communication as
a sixth domain. All five exemplary rural superintendents described during their
interviews ways in which they use the five domains and communication to build and
maintain trust with and between their school board members.

**Recommendations:** Based on the findings of this study, the researcher believes there is a
void of information that warrants an expansion of research for superintendents. Future
research could provide more breadth and depth or have a different twist on potential
related topics.
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PREFACE

Following discussions and considerations regarding the opportunity to study superintendent and school board trust with many populations, four doctoral students in collaboration with faculty members developed a common interest in exploring the strategies exemplary superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with and between school board members. This resulted in a thematic study conducted by a research team of four doctoral students. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was designed with a focus on the five domains of trust: connection, concern, candor, competence, and consistency using The Values Institute’s Trust Framework by author Weisman (2016) to identify and describe the strategies superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with and between school board members. Each researcher administered a survey to 15 superintendents to determine what strategies they perceive as most important in building trust with and between school board members utilizing the five domains: connection, concern, candor, competence, and consistency. The researcher then interviewed five of the 15 superintendents who participated in the survey to determine which strategies they perceive as most important in building trust with and between school board members. To ensure thematic consistency and reliability, the team developed the purpose statement, research questions, definitions of terms, interview questions, survey, and study procedures.

Throughout the study, the term “peer researchers” is used to refer to the researchers who conducted the thematic study. My fellow doctoral students and peer researchers studied superintendent and school board trust strategies with the following populations in California K-12 school districts: Edwin G. Cora, rural superintendents;
Theresa M. Giamarino, regional occupational centers and programs superintendents; 
Daniel R. C. Scudero, suburban superintendents; and Damon J. Wright, urban 
superintendents.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Throughout recorded history, trust has been listed as an essential element needed to establish the strength of relationships. Luhmann (1979) stated, “Confucius once remarked that rulers need three resources: weapons, food and trust. The ruler who cannot have all three should give up weapons first, then food, but should hold on to trust at all costs: without trust we cannot stand” (p. 4). Trust is essential to all relationships and is the foundation to building the advancement of productive workplace opportunities for organizations (Luhmann, 1979).

During the 20th century, in particular post-World War II, the economy and profits soared. In this time of economic growth, it was a man’s word that carried promise and integrity that built a bond of trust in business products and services. Business competition was limited, and advertising and marketing were practically unnecessary because most businesses were relational (Weisman, 2016). In today’s world with the Internet and the dot.com economy, technology and innovation have made us faster, more efficient, and more globally connected. Instead of relationships and trust being primary to making a decision about products and services, consumers simply use their money to purchase goods from businesses that have the products they need from anywhere in the world (Weisman, 2016). Globalization and instant access to products and services have caused a shift in customers’ loyalties. With today’s rapid pace of technology making electronic transactions commonplace between people and businesses, Kempton (2014) stated that transactions require a basis of values-added trust, at a minimum. In addition to trust, integrity is vital to doing business in a global economy (Kempton, 2014; Weisman, 2016). According to Kempton (2016), “At the heart of integrity is the strength to hold
steady in what you believe is true, good, and beautiful—even when it costs you” (p. 54). Kempton (2014) believed trust and integrity are integral to each other. In order to trust someone, the individual typically displays integrity, and those who demonstrate integrity are normally easiest to trust (Kempton, 2014).

The need for trust extends to all segments of our society. The 2018 Gallup Poll shows that only 38% of the population in the United States has a great deal to quite a lot of trust in churches, 11% in Congress, 25% in big businesses, 37% in the presidency, 54% in police, 74% in the military, and only 29% in public education (Gallup Poll, 2018). Trust is essential to the success of all organizations, including the need for trust from the leaders responsible for public education (Kowalski, 2005a). The relationship that a school superintendent has with the school board is the first building block of success (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

In American public school districts, elected citizens of given communities constitute today’s school boards. A typical school board consists of five citizens though sometimes there may be as few as three or as many as seven or more citizens on a school board. The school boards hire one individual, a superintendent, to run the day-to-day operations of the school district. For this relationship to work productively, the school board and superintendent must have mutual trust (Hess & Meeks, 2010). Trust is one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent (Mishra, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, 2000). Trust is the foundation of all successful board/superintendent relationships.
The role of the modern superintendent is often analogized with that of an orchestra conductor (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 2006; Domenech, 2009), and for good reason: superintendents are consistently conducting all aspects of a school district. School district superintendents are always being observed. Every word and action are listened to and watched by all district stakeholders who include staff, teachers, parents, and community members. As a result, it is critical for superintendents to strategically think and consider every conversation and action. Future success, and more importantly trust, will be determined by past actions. Lindskold (1978) shared that the information from previous interactions provides opportunities to assess the intentions and motives of others. This information forms a basis for predictions about future behavior and inferences about trustworthiness (Anderson & Weitz, 1989).

The responsibilities of a superintendent, whether in a small rural or large urban school district, are demanding and difficult. In particular, a small district superintendent typically takes on numerous roles. To add to the many responsibilities, the superintendent needs to discern community values and expectations; they must establish a trust early-on and consistently nurture and strengthen the relationships with key stakeholders (AASA, 2009; Banks, Maloney, Stewart, & Weber, 2007). More importantly, the superintendent must maintain a positive working relationship with school board members. This relationship building is at times the most difficult of responsibilities, depending on each individual board member. Superintendents are in a sense politicians, meaning they need to work well with all stakeholder groups and carefully navigate the political landscape within their school district. Smith (2012)
stated, “Superintendents who focus on their communication skills and develop a trusting relationship with their school board members demonstrate a commonality among successful superintendents” (p. viii).

**Background for Trust**

Trust is the glue that binds people together.

—Josh Morgan, “The Decline of Trust in the United States”

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence in both behavioral and social sciences stating trust is essential to society (S. M. R. Covey, & Link, 2012; Morgan, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Trust is tied to an increase in the number of citizens participating in civic voluntary duties and an increase in resilience to disasters (Morgan, 2014). Trust is also attributed to a decrease in dishonesty and a decrease in economic disparity. According to Morgan (2014), trust is linked to increased health, happiness, and aptitude. Numerous authors who have studied trust have come to the conclusion that trust improves the human experience (S. M. R. Covey & Link, 2012; Gibbons, 2004; Morgan, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

Authors Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2018) shared that long-range data from the United States where the General Social Survey (GSS) has been collecting information about attitudes about trust since 1972 suggests that “people trust each other less today than 40 years ago. This decline in interpersonal trust in the U.S. has been coupled with a long-run public distrust in government—according to estimates compiled by the Pew Research Center since 1958” (para. 4).

*Washington Post* writer Emily Badger (2015) added that the National survey data confirm,
Trust in other people is lower now in America than at any point in the last four decades. The General Social Survey conducted by NORC [the National Opinion Research Center] at the University of Chicago has been asking a random national sample of adults since 1972 this same question: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people? (para. 4)

Figure 1 shows the results from a Washington Post analysis of 1,686 interviews, which illustrates a stark statement regarding the decline of trust over time in the United States (Badger, 2015).

It has often been argued that trust is critically important for successful cooperation and effectiveness in an organization (Zand, 1972). Trust is important in all spheres of social life. Trust binds friendships (Gibbons, 2004), facilitates bargaining and negotiations (Olekalns & Smith, 2005), reduces transaction costs in intrafirm exchanges (Bharadwaj & Matsuno, 2006), and even resolves international political conflicts (Kelman, 2005). As Josh Morgan (2014) so eloquently stated, “Trust is the glue that binds people together” (para 1).

The field of trust experts is filled with varying definitions. One leading expert in the field of trust, Michael Weisman (2016), founder of The Values Institute, defined trust as “a belief in the reliability, ability, or strength of someone or something” (p. 33). Further, he defined trust as a daily journey for individuals to embark on as they move up the Pyramid of Trust to more productive and long-lasting levels of trust (Weisman, 2016).

A second leading expert in the field of trust is Megan Tschannen-Moran (2014), who believed “trust is one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (pp. 19-20). One last example of defining trust was provided by Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) who defined trust as

The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (p. 712)
Though there are numerous other definitions of trust, S. M. R. Covey and Link (2012) claimed high trust individuals have three specific beliefs about trust:

1. A belief in being worthy of trust,
2. A belief that most people can be trusted,
3. A belief that extending trust is a better way to lead.

Studies have shown an ever-increasing number of employees have declared a decrease in trust with their supervisors or organizations (Gallup Poll, 2013; Hurley, 2006; Thompson, 1967). In 2002, the University of Chicago surveyed 800 Americans and discovered that four out of five individuals surveyed had “only some” or “hardly any” confidence in the individuals in charge of their organizations (Hurley, 2006). Thompson (1967) shared that interpersonal trust among members of an organizations is crucial to organizational success and permanency of the superintendent has a clear influence on the achievement of school district performance.

Authors Swift and Littlechild (2015) stated in 2006, Robert F. Hurley, a professor of management at Fordham University in New York, stated the most successful high-performing world-class organizations are typically among the highest trust environments. Without a high level of trust, organizations cannot attract or retain the most talented employees (Swift & Littlechild, 2015). Furthermore, leadership literature stated a key quality of an effective leader is trustworthiness (Bennis, 1999; S. Covey, 2001; Weisman, 2016). There are concrete steps to building trust, including knowing how to listen, knowing when to speak, and owning bias—these action steps are crucial.
Theoretical Foundations

Trust has many key components in relationships—honesty, openness, reliability, truthfulness, credibility, sincerity, values, principles, vulnerability, integrity, and ethical behaviors (Crowley, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). While all of these trust elements are important, it is critical to have a deeper understanding of trust by exploring several trust theories, including trust theory (Mack, 2018), social capital theory (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993), interdependence theory (DeOrtentiis Summers, Ammeter, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013), and social cognitive theory (Ng & Lucianetti, 2016). Each theory is briefly discussed in this chapter to provide the reader context and a better understanding of the theoretical foundation of trust.

Commitment Trust Theory

Trust Theory is when trust and commitment coexist, two fundamental factors that are needed for a successful relationship (Mack, 2018). In the literature, two principle forms of trust, cognitive-based and affect-based, are noted. The first principle form of trust is cognition-based trust. Cognition-based trust is evident when one individual trusts another based purely on good reason and past evidence of trustworthiness (Chowdhury, 2005; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McAllister, 1995). According to Hill and O’Hara (2006), “A person’s assessment of another’s trustworthiness is sometimes mostly a prediction as to the other’s behavior, something we label ‘trust that’ trust” (p. 1721). For example, one might say, I trust that the hamburger I just bought at McDonald’s will taste just perfect. Other times, we assess more internally, such as, I trust in Mrs. Snelling to arrive at our scheduled parent meeting early. These two assumptions would be based on prior routines and actions by McDonald’s and Mrs. Snelling. In the education world, trust theory states
that the staff, parents, and community need to believe they are heard and treated fairly and the superintendent and school board members are consistently reliable in performing all duties of which they are in charge (Pittman, 2012).

The second principle form of trust is affect-based trust. Paliszkiewicz (2010) stated, “Affect-based trust is grounded in the emotional bonds between individuals involving mutual care and concern” (p. 317). Mayer et al. (1995) differentiated between two key components of trust: *benevolence*, which has an affective component, and *competence*, which stresses the cognitive component. Likewise, Cook and Wall (1980) “recognized trust as faith in the trustworthy intentions of others and confidence in the ability of others” (p. 40). In his book, *The Limits of Organization*, Arrow (1974) considered trust as a basic element for organizations and the economy in general. Interpersonal trust occurs when there is a readiness on one person’s part to accept vulnerability or inherent risk based on expectations regarding another person’s behavior (Borum, 2010). Hill and O’Hara (2006) stated,

> Trust permits transactions to go forward on the basis of a handshake rather than a complex formal contract; it reduces the need to expend resources on constant monitoring of employees and business partners; and it avoids the uncertainty and expense associated with trying to enforce formal and informal agreements in the courts. (p. 1791)

**Social Capital Theory**

Social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people with similar norms (Dekker & Uslaner 2001). Social capital is a term used to describe a person’s participation or position within a particular
social group, which contributes to their lives in certain ways. Sander (2002) stated that “the folk wisdom that more people get their jobs from whom they know, rather than what they know, actually turns out to be true” (p. 213). Adler and Kwon (2002) identified the core intuition guiding social capital research is that the goodwill that others have toward us is a valuable resource. The two authors define social capital as “the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor” (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 23). Dekker and Uslaner (2001) claimed that social capital is fundamentally about how people interact with each other.

In the book Making Democracy Work, Putnam et al. (1993) suggested that social capital can be understood as those “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (p. 167). Similarly, another definition has social capital relating to the value of social networks, bringing similar people together and bridging a diversity of people with norms of reciprocity (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001; Uslaner, 2001). According to Falcone and Castelfranchi (2011), taking the point of view from another individual is particularly important when one considers the number of studies conducted in social science that connect trust with social capital issues.

**Interdependence Theory**

The interdependence theory stems from social psychologist and researcher Morton Deutsch. In 1949, Deutsch developed the theory of cooperation and competition. According to Deutsch’s (1949) theory, social interaction typically takes one of two forms: (a) tending to promote interdependent behavior when individuals can only attain
goals if everyone else achieves their goals and (b) being completely interdependent. This second form of interdependence is when individuals can only attain their goals if some or all others involved do not achieve their goals (DeOrtentiis et al., 2013).

Rusbult and Van Lange (2008) believed that most psychological theories are based on a “within-person” perspective to analyze human behavior, meaning individual actions and experiences are referenced as opposed to a perspective from multiple group members. They stated, “Interdependence theory analyzes the relations between people in terms of situation structure, describing structure using variables such as dependence, covariation of interests, and information certainty” (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008, p. 2049). Two thirds of a person’s average days are spent interacting with others, which is why the interdependence theory focuses on between-person relations. Interdependence is as meaningful as the individuals themselves (Rusbult & Lange, 2008).

Working in teams has been found to be far more productive than working in solitude. The concept of working in teams is based on the belief that employees working cooperatively can achieve goals much more efficiently than working alone (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). Interdependence, as seen within a team, is related to team effectiveness, and it can be argued that trust, cohesion, and satisfaction all characterize dissimilar ways in which interdependence affects team results (Beersma et al., 2003; Wageman, 1995). DeOrtentiis et al. (2013) stated, “The relationship between trust and effectiveness has been explored at both individual and group levels of analysis, and organizations experience benefits from the development of trust” (para. 5).
Social Cognitive Theory

Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura was responsible for contributing to the concept of social cognitive theory. The theory stated that a percentage of an individual’s knowledge is obtained by directly observing another person within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences (Ozyilmaz, Erdogan, & Karaeminogullari, 2018). According to Ng and Lucianetti (2016), “The social–cognitive theory also suggests that individuals hold beliefs about their ability to make things happen through their own actions, also known as self-efficacy” (p. 14).

According to work conducted by Bandura (2012), “Social–cognitive theory suggests that self-efficacy beliefs determine behavioral intensity, particularly when the domains of those beliefs and the type of behavior in question are in accordance” (p. 14). Additionally, social–cognitive theory suggests that individuals who experience an increase in apprehension and distress are unlikely to experience progress in self-efficacy because of negative emotions indicating they are susceptible to poor performance (Bandura, 1977). Insights of self-efficacy influence people’s choices—the way individuals think about themselves, including the goals they pursue and the determination they put forth, including how long they are willing to work toward the goals while facing adversity and the outcomes they expect. Consequently, self-efficacy influences individuals’ inspirations to achieve actions and their belief in their ability (Vinney, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is the Pyramid of Trust developed by the Values Institute and depicted by Michael Weisman (2016) in the book Choosing Higher Ground.
Values Institute Framework

The Values Institute framework developed the “Pyramid of Trust” (Weisman, 2016, p. 138), which discussed five components of trust. The five domains of trust include competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection (Weisman, 2016). The Values Institute framework stated that the connection between the five domains of trust collectively and what they indicate about how a company or individual demonstrates their values are just as important as the domains themselves. The Pyramid of Trust was envisioned with competence and consistency as the foundation on which one can build trusting relationships (Weisman, 2016). The middle of the pyramid displays concern and candor, which begin to supersede regular functional interactions and add some “emotionally charged ‘glue’ to relationships” (Weisman, 2016, p. 139). At the very top of the Pyramid of Trust is connection where relationships are formed to help individuals move their organizations to higher levels of effectiveness and to reach the goal of trust (Weisman, 2016).

Domains—Pyramid of Trust

In this study, the researcher used the Values Institute Theoretical Framework for trust, which espouses five domains within the “Pyramid of Trust” (Michael Weisman, 2016, p. 138).

Competence. Competence is a measure of a person’s or organization’s ability to provide the services or products they say they will provide (Weisman, 2016). It is an individual’s ability to perform their duties and responsibilities at a satisfactory or exemplary level. A competent person is someone whom others can turn to for leadership and who have the ability to get the job done completely and correctly.
Consistency. Consistency is a measure of how well one’s actions mirror one’s values and how well one’s actions align with what they say they are going to do (Weisman, 2016). Employees desire a leader who walks his or her talk. Typically, over time, superintendents who regularly complete their responsibilities and duties are considered the best at their position.

Concern. Concern is a measure of how a person or organization cares about its stakeholders and whether or not the organization actively displays respect and integrity in their interactions with its stakeholders (Weisman, 2016). Crowley (2011) stated that feelings influence a person’s movement and behaviors; therefore, the way an employee feels on the job and whether or not his or her needs are being met makes a huge difference with how engaged or disengaged he or she will be in his or her work. Therefore, it is extremely important for leaders to demonstrate they care about their employees on a personal level.

Candor. Candor is the perception of how honest and open a person is on a day-to-day basis (Weisman, 2016). Superintendents are “on” at all times. Every word and conversation are heard and mentally recorded by others. The importance for superintendents to be intentional and strategic with every spoken word is critical to their reputation. One false statement or sense of dishonesty can severely damage a superintendent’s reputation.

Connection. Connection is an assembly of the other four components of trust and requires deliberate effort to create and sustain a long-term relationship with others (Weisman, 2016). A good relationship is one that a person approaches consciously, where participants behave in a manner consistent with their values. This type of
relationship is based on kindness and compassion and is mutually beneficial and satisfying (Oz, 2018). Without strong relationships and trust, a school governance team can quickly fragment into factions. Strong relationships can assist a team to weather any storm and make positive hard decisions (Crump, 2011). It is for this reason that there is an importance in developing norms and protocols for the governance team. According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), “Trust depends, in part, on what one expects of another on the basis of formal roles and informal norms” (p. 40). Superintendents need to make connections with all stakeholders including those who may even be adversaries. Employees appreciate leaders who truly care about them and make efforts to connect personally.

**Role of the School Board**

The American public educational school system is governed by citizens who are either elected or appointed to school board positions with most being elected positions. The local school board is a critical public link to public schools. School board members are trusted representatives of the community. According to the Center for Public Education (2011), school board members serve their communities in several important ways:

- School boards hold students as their number one priority. Educating students should always be the most important agenda item.
- The community’s view of what students should know and be able to achieve is what school boards need to consider when making decisions about school programs.
- School boards should be accessible to the public and held accountable for the performance of district schools.
Public trust is instilled in school board members to carry out their duties on behalf of the communities they serve. School boards are the education watchdog for their communities, ensuring that students get the best education for the tax dollars spent (Center for Public Education, 2011).

**Role of the Superintendent**

School district superintendents serve as the chief executive officer (CEO) and are typically hired by the school board of a district. As the CEO, superintendents oversee the general functions of the district, including but not limited to: education standards, student achievement, budgets, allocating resources, overseeing the hiring of staff, and acting as liaison to the community and governmental agencies (Browne, 2011). For today’s superintendents, Black (2007) stated, “It is not enough to be skilled in fiscal management and public relations and to have the fortitude to make tough decisions, they must also have expertise in K-12 curriculum and know how to improve student achievement” (p. 56).

The superintendency is public education’s most visible and most influential position (Kowalski, 2006). Superintendents often work together with the school board to develop a vision for the academic success of students. School boards have, in some cases, clashed with superintendents when they micromanage and want a more active role in designing school curriculum or deciding how student achievement is measured (Browne, 2011). The relationship with a school district’s board is critical to the superintendent’s longevity in his or her current district. It is critical that a superintendent establish board/superintendent protocols and maintain a positive working relationship to ensure success in the position.
Governance

According to Timar (2002),

Education governance is a vastly complex enterprise that is shaped by many forces—among them, the legislature, Governor, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Board of Education, multiple levels of bureaucracy, various levels of government, the courts, public and private interest groups, textbook publishers, test developers, testing services, foundations, think tanks, colleges and universities. (p. 1)

With such a large group of players, who is in charge of public school districts? What should school district governance look like? While local officials have important management roles, the old American tradition of local school control has increasingly meant to implement other people’s goals and priorities (Epstein, 2004). Ideally, local control is the governance model used by school districts in California. The court has affirmed the state’s responsibility for the quality of educational services in schools—schools are responsible for delivery of educational services (Timar, 2002). Local school boards set the vision, and superintendents carry out the day to day functions to ensure the board’s vision is met.

Trust Between Superintendents and School Boards

Effective superintendents know that a strong relationship with their school board, along with trust, is most important to achieving greatness for themselves and for the school district (Griffin, 2005; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Building interpersonal trust and maintaining good relationships with each board member will assist in providing a positive working atmosphere where student achievement can be a top priority.
Relationships between the superintendent and school boards may be turbulent. Usdan, McCloud, Podmostko, and Cuban (2001) stated,

District leaders are in an arena that is perpetually besieged by a potpourri of often conflicting forces: state laws and regulations, federal mandates, decentralized school management, demands for greater accountability, changing demographics, the school choice movement, competing community needs, limited resources, partisan politics, legal challenges, shortages of qualified teachers and principals and a general lack of respect for the education profession. (p. 26)

However, one of six strategies to build communication and trust, which in turn develops relationships, was shared by David Else, Director of the Institute for Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Iowa. Else (1993) shared that developing and molding a cabinet that at times serves as a link between board members and superintendents to build a trustworthy support system to rely on can benefit both parties. It is imperative a superintendent communicate effectively with school board members to build trust and ease the navigation through difficult times (Kowalski, 2005b).

Superintendents must master communication, stated Waters and Marzano (2006), in order to hear, organize and operationalize the interests of the board. Ray (2003) stated, “A superintendent can possess all the necessary competencies to be an effective leader, but it is the school board’s perception of success that really matters” (p. 5). It is important that the interpersonal relationships are strong and the key is that they are built on mutual trust and respect.
Statement of the Research Problem

California has 1,024 public school districts (California Department of Education [CDE], n.d.-b), which are governed by school boards and led by superintendents. The average school district superintendent’s longevity is 3 years in urban school districts while those from rural districts remain in their positions for an average of 6 years (Winter, Rinehart, Keedy, & Björk, 2007). Through developmental work over a decade of researching school districts, Fullan (2007) arrived at the conclusion that it takes schools and districts many years to get turned around and demonstrate increased student performance data after a new superintendent arrives. Fullan’s (2007) research showed that it took elementary schools about three years, high schools approximately six years, and districts about eight years to implement change upon new leadership. Therefore, superintendents departing their districts after just 3 years are limiting the amount of effective work needed to fully implement meaningful and sustainable change.

With the average superintendent’s longevity just 3 years, it is difficult to establish sustainable change in such a short period of time. It is imperative to understand why a superintendent transfers from a district so quickly and what causes such rapid turnover. Weisman (2016) stated, “Changing a culture takes time, earning trust takes time, and time is a precious commodity for most businesses today” (p. 3). Superintendents with longevity longer than 3 years have learned that the single most important factor to effective change is positive relationships (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Successful leaders build positive relationships across the organization including those diverse people and groups who think differently and enrich organizational possibilities. Emotional intelligence is an essential component to developing relationships across organizations,
thereby creating leadership effectiveness (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Fullan (2002) suggested that emotional intelligence was critical to effective leadership in the complex times of the 21st century.

School superintendents provide the best leadership to a school district through strong relationships with members of the school board. A school board is a group of community representatives elected to oversee the school district and usually comprises five to seven individuals who bring varying viewpoints, especially since many board members are not from the educational field. This governance team, working together in a climate of trust, focuses the district’s energies and resources on ensuring all students an equal educational opportunity. Trust plays a major role in developing and maintaining strong relationships. Baird (2010) used the metaphor that “trust is like air: invisible but essential” (p. 2).

According to Kowalski (2006), “Trust is essential because without it, there are suspicions, misinterpretations, accusations, insecurity, and political behavior that can run rampant. Studies have found that superintendents and board members share that their most important element in a positive working relationship is trust” (p. 150). Board members are elected by the community at large to establish policies for the district. It is a crucial job for the superintendent to guide board members through the maze of legal mandates, instructional expectations, and the enormous number of policies to move the district forward to meet the vast needs of students and parents in his or her district (Townsend et al., 2007). This can only be done through constant communication and effective leadership (Garcia, 2012).
The importance of superintendents’ longevity with a school district can be summarized by the Spencer Foundation-funded study of change in education over 3 decades (1970s, 1980s and 1990s) in eight high schools in the United States and Canada. The Spencer Foundation study determined leadership, leadership sustainability, and leadership succession as the three most important influencers to district success (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2004). According to Hargreaves and Fink (2004), “Sustainable leadership goes way beyond individuals in chains of influence that pull together the actions of leaders to their predecessors and successors” (p. 11). Trust influences sustainability, and sustaining superintendents’ leadership should be a goal of school boards. There is a gap in the literature on how superintendents create trust with and between school board members to support the success of the school district.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust between school board members.

**Research Questions**

The research questions used in this study were designed to fully explore the topic of trust and to learn about strategies used by exemplary superintendents from rural school districts who build trust with and between school board members.
1. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?

2. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?

3. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?

4. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?

5. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

**Significance of the Problem**

Superintendents and school boards form a governance team. Working as a team is important to the overall function of any school district. The primary example of cooperation among students, district employees, parents, and the community must come from the governance team—demonstrated through the relationship between the school board and superintendent (Houston & Bryant, 1997). Trust is one component of the relationship between school board members and superintendents. Once the superintendent and school board members have established trust, it continues to build. When one considers how many individuals are affected by the successful nature of this trust relationship, it is easy to see why this study is essential.

In the state of California during the 2016-2017 school year, there were 1,024 public school districts containing 10,477 schools, employing 274,246 teachers and serving 6,228,235 students (CDE, n.d.-b). The average governing school board in
California had five elected members, which equals just over 5,000 (California School Boards Association [CSBA], n.d.). While this study focused exclusively on rural superintendents and school board members in California, the findings will relate to over 6,000 superintendents and school board members combined (CDE, n.d.-b; CSBA, n.d.). In California, the study will also indirectly apply to 10,477 school principals, 274,246 teachers and may have an impact on 6,228,235 students, not including their parents, grandparents, and family members (CDE, n.d.-b; CSBA, n.d.).

A research study, beginning in 2006, demonstrated out of 215 superintendents studied, 45% exited within 3 years (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). In yet another study, the sustainability of school improvement and reform initiatives on change in education found that leaders typically stayed in a school for less than 5 years (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). In Hargreaves and Goodson’s (2006) 30-year study, the usual longevity of superintendents in one specific district makes it difficult to build trust with school board members. This study provided valuable information for present and future superintendents; a deeper understanding of actions and activities may produce relational trust with school board members (Ament, 2013).

Researchers McCurdy and Hymes (1992) proposed that the demands of the superintendent may be such that many superintendents are worn down and leave their jobs under duress or by nonrenewal of their employment contracts (McCurdy, & Hymes, 1992). According to Natkin et al. (2002), “Successful change on so many fronts requires constancy of purpose and stable and predictable leadership over a sustained period of time” (para. 4). Henderson (2011) stated, “In other words, individuals and groups seek stability and meaning” (p. 37).
According to research conducted by McREL, a nonprofit research group based in Denver, the longevity of superintendents has a positive effect and deeper changes on student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The study also determined a positive correlation between longevity and academic achievement. School district superintendents who focus on the right goals, manage change effectively, and remain in their positions in the same district to see student achievement results and typically have higher-performing students (Pascopella, 2011). Relationships, trust, and a superintendent’s tenure or stability are all interrelated. The positive associations between the length of superintendents’ working in one district and student achievement endorses the value of leadership stability. It is important for superintendents to remain in one district long enough to witness the positive impact of their leadership on student achievement. Equally important is the implication that school boards are equally important as they often determine the length of a superintendent’s tenure in his or her district (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Studies have supported various leadership roles of superintendents and the traits to ensure success, yet few studies show what strategies superintendents use to build trust with and among their school board members in rural school districts.

In summary, by understanding how superintendents use competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection to lead their organization and build trust with and between board members, superintendents will be successful in maintaining and creating environments of success within their schools and districts. The results of this study will provide associations like NSBA, CSBA, and ACSA (Association of California School Administrators) with valuable information to support the development of school board
and superintendent relationships through trust. Researchers will also benefit and, in turn, provide valuable information for university training programs that will benefit superintendents and their ultimate impact on all stakeholders but particularly on the over 6,000,000 students they serve.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

**Competence.** The ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (S. M. R. Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Consistency.** The confidence that a person’s pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable, and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Concern.** The value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability, support, and motivate and care for each other (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; S. M. R. Covey, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016).

**Candor.** Communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Connection.** A shared link or bond in which there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).
**Rural school districts.** The technical definition of a rural school district corresponds to a general understanding of rural areas, which is characterized by geographic isolation and small population size. There are three types of rural school districts. The three are as follows:

- **Fringe** - Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.

- **Distant** - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.

- **Remote** - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006, p. 1)

In many rural communities, people are literally related to each other in many ways. In a rural town of 2,500 or fewer, just about everyone knows everyone else. Town citizens attend the same church, regularly see neighbors on the streets and grocery store, and serve on the same local volunteer organization. These intertwined connections in the community do not exist in urban areas. In rural school districts, superintendents are a fabric of the community; they simply cannot hide (Kollie, 2007).

**School board member.** A locally elected official charged with governing a public school district and ensuring that the district respectfully responds to the priorities, values, and beliefs of the community. This elected official determines policies, makes strategic and fiscal decisions, requires accountability from the superintendent and
interacts with the community in a leadership role. Most importantly this elected official governs as a member of a group, not as an individual (CSBA, n.d.; Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011).

**Superintendent.** An appointed executive hired to operationalize the policies and decisions of the school board. This executive leader serves as the board’s educational expert, charged with overseeing the management of business affairs, interacting with the community in a politically and culturally aware fashion, as well as fulfilling the role of communicator in chief (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Kowalski, 2013; Wright & Harris, 2010).

**Trust.** Defined by Weisman (2016):

An individuals’ willingness, given their culture and communication behaviors in relationships and transactions, to be appropriately vulnerable based on the belief that another individual, group or organization is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable and identified with their common values and goals. (p. 1)

**Delimitations**

This study is delimited to 15 California exemplary rural superintendents from Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties in California for the online survey and a subset of five rural superintendents for the face-to-face interview, all of whom have successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members. To qualify for the study sample, the exemplary rural superintendents must meet four of the five following criteria:

1. Three or more years in their current district;
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training;
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA Conference;
4. Evidence of positive superintendent, board, and community relationships;

5. Recommended by a retired superintendent who is a member of a North/South Superintendent’s Group and county superintendents.

Geographical proximity and the participant’s availability led the researcher to choose a purposeful convenience reputational sample (Patton, 2015).

**Organization of the Study**

This study was organized into five chapters, a bibliography, and appendices. Chapter I provided the introduction of trust, the theoretical frameworks of trust, the five domains of trust, and posed the research questions used in the study. Chapter I also provided both theoretical and operational definitions used in the study. Chapter II provides an extensive review of the literature and research that has been conducted on trust and the domains of trust used by exemplary superintendents. Chapter III describes the methodology used to collect and analyze the data used in the study. Chapter IV presents the data collected as well as the research findings and an in-depth analysis of the results of the study. Chapter V concludes the research study with the significant findings, conclusions, research gaps, and recommendations for future studies.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II provides a review of literature on trust and strategies used by exemplary leaders to establish trust through competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. The literature review begins with the history of trust and how trust affects people in the workplace, specifically between superintendents and school board members. The literature review evaluates and focuses on the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection and relates to how these domains are utilized by exemplary leaders. The review of literature evaluates the use of trust and the five domains to understand how a superintendent uses trust to work with the board to establish a strong working relationship. Finally, the review of literature provides a theoretical framework from which to understand how exemplary superintendents use competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection to create trust with their board members.

Trust Defined

In S. M. R. Covey’s (2006) book, *The Speed of Trust*, he identified trust as the one thing that, if missing, will “destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love” (p. 1). Leaders must find ways to build trust to sustain organizational success. One method of building trust was described by authors Heifetz and Linsky (2002) in their book *Leadership on the Line* that stated leaders need to attain “the capacity to deliver disturbing news and raise difficult questions in a way that people can absorb, prodding them to take up the message rather than ignore it or kill the messenger” (p. 145). The authors also shared, “Receiving
people’s anger without becoming personally defensive generates trust” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 145).

In Weisman’s (2016) book, Choosing Higher Ground, the author defined trust as “a belief in the reliability, ability, or strength of someone or something” (p. 33). Weisman went on to say, “Trust is what differentiates a healthy, long-term relationship from something fleeting and shallow that never develops” (Weisman, 2016, p. 34).

Similarly, Tschannen-Moran (2014), in her book Trust Matters, shared her definition of trust as “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (pp. 19-20). S. M. R. Covey (2006), in his book The Speed of Trust stated, “Simply put, trust means confidence” (p. 5). Covey believed, “When someone trusts another individual, they have confidence in that person and in their integrity and abilities” (p. 5). He also believed a person knows when trust is evident because they feel it.

Weisman (2016) stated, “A company’s leaders drive its culture, and their values influence its decisions” (p. 71). Employees look to the organization’s leadership team to set the tone and culture of the organization. The leaders must incorporate the values of the organization in daily practices. Mineo (2004) stated, “When a leader speaks, it is important to be able to have confidence in the honesty, truthfulness, and sincerity of the words. This is the essence of trust” (p. 1). Studies have shown that when subordinates have trust in their leadership team, there will be more affective commitment toward the organization, thereby leading to better performance overall (Weisman, 2016; Xiong, Lin, Li, & Wang, 2016). Trustworthy leaders inspire employees to be committed to the organizational goals.
S. M. R. Covey (2011) stated, “Establishing, growing, extending, and restoring trust among stakeholders is the critical competency of leadership. Engendering trust is a competency that can be learned and applied, measured and improved. You simply can’t be an effective leader without trust” (p. 1). S. M. R. Covey (2008) also believed that trust affected everything within an organization, from decisions made to relationships among the team members. Thus, it is critical leaders establish and build trust with their employees.

In summary, though there are numerous definitions of trust, the term can best be captured as Weisman (2016) stated,

An individual’s willingness, given their culture and communication behaviors in relationships and transactions, to be appropriately vulnerable based on the belief that another individual, group or organization is competent, open and honest, concerned, reliable and identified with their common values and goals. (p. 1)

Trust can also best be emphasized by Weisman (2016) who stated, “Building trust is not an option anymore; it’s a necessity” (p. 3). Trust, therefore, is an essential element in creating and sustaining relationships and organizational success.

**History of Trust**

Since man began documenting history, trust has been discussed as an integral part of relationships. According to O’Neill (2002),

Confucius once remarked that rulers need three resources: weapons, food and trust. He stated, the ruler who cannot have all three should give up weapons first, then food, but should hold on to trust at all costs: ‘without trust we cannot stand.’

(para. 1)
Since recorded time, countless authors, philosophers, and researchers have described the importance of trust and how successful relationships have been built between two parties trusting each other. Throughout the years, numerous authors have studied trust and agreed people need trust in order to live at all (S. M. R. Covey 2008; Kowalski, 2006; O’Neill 2002; Weisman, 2016). Since ancient times, individuals working together either trusted or distrusted one another. Today is not much different. Brian Tracy (as cited in Jenkins, 2017) once said, “The glue that holds all relationships together—including the relationship between the leader and the led—is trust” (p. 30). As the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1979) remarked, “A complete absence of trust would prevent anyone from even getting up in the morning” (para. 7). Luhmann continued,

For that reason, human beings tend to face the world with an attitude of trust.

Unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, we assume when we go out of the front door that no gunman will be waiting in the street to shoot us. (para. 7)

To understand trust and the elements leaders use to create trust, it is important to understand the historical foundations of trust.

Trust has been studied and documented for centuries—from the works of Aristotle and Confucius through the centuries to today’s authors like Covey and Weisman. Johnstone (2011) shared thoughts on economics and politics once flourishing in ancient Greece because of unique systems of impersonal trust. Further, Johnstone stated that personal trust exists between people because of the familiarity of knowing the person. Impersonal trust exists even though familiarity is not present with unknown individuals through systems that allow people to interact recurrently as if they trusted one another.
Through the history of trust comes a history of distrust. Trust and distrust can be treated as opposites (Johnstone, 2011). Johnstone (2011) stated,

“There are contingent, unpredictable, and historically specific relationships between trust and distrust. . . . Both, after all, arise from personal familiarity and provide resources for making decisions and taking actions. . . . Distrust is not always and necessarily dysfunctional. (p. 5)

However, the need for trust is critical for leaders to build organizational stability and sustainability (S. M. R. Covey, 2006; Hurley, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

S. M. R. Covey (2011), in his article “Build High Trust—Cost Drops—Speed Increases,” believed the primary task of a leader is to inspire trust. Covey also believed there are two elements that are needed for trust: character and competence. Character embraces integrity, motive, and intent while competence consists of capabilities, skills, results, and an individual’s reputation. Both character and competence are critical to trust (S. M. R. Covey, 2011). Leaders must lead the way. They must show the way to extend trust first. This does not mean a blind trust without expectations and accountability but instead, a smart trust having clear expectations and holding others accountable. As Abraham Lincoln once said, “The people when rightly and fully trusted will return the trust” (Sones, 2013, p. 34). S. M. R. Covey (2011) stated, “The best leaders lead with an intentional tendency to trust” (p. 1).

Theoretical Foundations

Trust has many key components in relationships: honesty, openness, reliability, truthfulness, credibility, sincerity, values, principles, vulnerability, integrity, and ethical
behaviors (Crowley, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Four theoretical foundations of trust are shared in this chapter and include social capital theory, interdependence theory, social cognitive theory and trust theory. Each theory is briefly discussed to provide the reader context and a better understanding of the theoretical foundation of trust used in this study.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory, according to Six, van Zimmeren, Popa, and Frison (2015), includes “features of social organization, such as trust, networks and norms that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (para. 1). In the book Making Democracy Work, Putnam et al. (1993) suggested that social capital can be understood as those “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (p. 167). Similarly, another definition has social capital relating to the value of social networks, bringing similar people together and bridging a diversity of people with norms of reciprocity (Dekker & Uslaner, 2001; Uslaner, 2001). Falcone and Castelfranchi (2011) stated, “The notion of taking another person’s perspective is to be considered important given the number of social science research studies that link trust with social capital related issues” (p. 402).

Trust is how many people determine whether or not to do business with an organization. If an individual trusts the company, he or she is more likely to do business with the organization (Weisman, 2016). The same holds true for government entities. For the most part, the less dishonest (more trustworthy) a country is perceived to be, the more flourishing is that nation’s economy. On the other hand, the more corrupt (less
trustworthy) a country is perceived to be, the less wealthy is that country’s economy (S. M. R. Covey & Link, 2012). Trust is essential to a company’s success and enables individuals to have confidence in organizations with which they work.

**Interdependence Theory**

The interdependence theory stems from social psychologist and researcher Morton Deutsch. In 1949, Deutsch developed the theory of cooperation and competition. According to Deutsch’s theory, social interaction typically takes one of two forms:

(a) tending to promote interdependent behavior when individuals can only attain goals if everyone else achieves their goals and (b) being completely interdependent. This second form of interdependence is when individuals can only attain their goals if some or all others involved do not achieve their goals (DeOrtentiis et al., 2013).

Rusbult and Van Lange (2008) believed in most psychological theories a “within-person” perspective is used to analyze human behavior, meaning individual actions and experiences are referenced. They stated, “Interdependence theory analyzes the relations between people in terms of situation structure, describing structure using variables such as dependence, covariation of interests, and information certainty” (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008, p. 2049). Two thirds of a person’s average days are spent interacting with others. This is why the interdependence theory focuses on between-person relations—interdependence is as meaningful as the individuals themselves.

Working in teams has been found to be far more productive than working in solitude. The concept of working in teams is based on the belief that employees working cooperatively can achieve goals much more efficiently than working alone (Marks et al., 2001). Interdependence, as seen within a team, is related to team effectiveness (Beersma
et al., 2003; Wageman, 1995), and it can be argued that trust, cohesion, and satisfaction all characterize dissimilar ways in which interdependence affects team results. DeOrteniis et al. (2013) stated, “The relationship between trust and effectiveness has been explored at both individual and group levels of analysis, and organizations experience benefits from the development of trust” (para. 5).

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Canadian-American psychologist Albert Bandura was responsible for contributing to the concept of social cognitive theory. The theory states that a percentage of an individual’s knowledge is obtained by directly observing another person within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences (Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). According to Ng and Lucianetti (2016), “The social–cognitive theory also suggests that individuals hold beliefs about their ability to make things happen through their own actions, also known as self-efficacy” (p. 14).

According to work conducted by Bandura (2012), “Social–cognitive theory suggests that self-efficacy beliefs determine behavioral intensity, particularly when the domains of those beliefs and the type of behavior in question are in accordance” (p. 14). Additionally, social–cognitive theory suggests that individuals who experience an increase in apprehension and distress are unlikely to experience progress in self-efficacy because of negative emotions indicating they are susceptible to poor performance (Bandura, 1977). Insights of self-efficacy influence people’s choices—the way individuals think about themselves, including the goals they pursue and the determination they put forth, including how long they are willing to work toward the goals while facing
adversity, and the outcomes they expect. Consequently, self-efficacy influences individuals’ inspirations to achieve actions and their belief in their ability (Vinney, 2018).

**Trust Theory**

Trust theory is when trust and commitment exist, two fundamental factors that are needed for a successful relationship (Mack, 2018). In the literature, two principle forms of trust are distinguished (Chowdhury, 2005; Lewis & Weigert 1985; McAllister, 1995). The first principle form of trust is cognition-based trust. Cognition-based trust is evident when one individual trusts another based purely on good reason and past evidence of trustworthiness (Kim, 2005). According to Hill and O’Hara (2006), “A person’s assessment of another’s trustworthiness is sometimes mostly a prediction as to the other’s behavior, something we label ‘trust that’ trust” (p. 1721). For example, one might say, I trust that the hamburger I just bought at McDonald’s will taste just perfect. Other times, people assess more internally, such as, I trust in Mrs. Snelling to arrive at our scheduled parent meeting early. These two assumptions would be based on prior routines and actions by McDonald’s and Mrs. Snelling. In the education world, trust theory states that the staff, parents, and community need to believe they are heard and treated fairly and the superintendent and school board members are consistently reliable in performing all duties of which they are in charge (Pittman, 2012).

The second principle form of trust is affect-based trust. Paliszkiewicz (2010) stated, “Affect-based trust is grounded in the emotional bonds between individuals involving mutual care and concern” (p. 317). Mayer et al. (1995) differentiated between two key components of trust: *benevolence*, which has an affective component, and *competence*, which stresses the cognitive component. Likewise, Cook and Wall (1980)

Interpersonal trust occurs when there is a readiness on one person’s part to accept vulnerability or inherent risk based on expectations regarding another person’s behavior (Borum, 2010). Trust provides people opportunities to commit to others based on a simple handshake in lieu of implementing formal contracts. Trust also decreases the need for additional resources and continual monitoring of employees and business partners as well as often avoiding additional costs for enforcing formal and informal contracts in the court system (Hill & O’Hara, 2006).

To summarize leadership and trust research thus far, researchers have examined how trust plays an important role in the success of business and relationships (S. M. R. Covey & Link, 2012). Using social capital theory, researchers discussed how leaders could generate, store, and utilize trust through building relationships and social networks (Putnam, 2004; Six, 2015). Researchers shared how with interdependence theory two thirds of a person’s average days are spent interacting with others. This is why the interdependence theory focuses on between-person relations. Interdependence is as meaningful as the individuals themselves (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Researchers Ozyilmaz et al. (2018) described social cognitive theory as a percentage of an individual’s knowledge being obtained by directly observing another person within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences. In the discussion of trust theory, researchers came up with various definitions for trust along
with different components of trust. What is needed is a framework to draw together all
the different trust theories with information on how leaders build and maintain trust.

Theoretical Framework

Values Institute Framework

In Weisman’s (2016) book *Choosing Higher Ground*, he described Five Cs that
are critical to developing and maintaining trust. He used a graphic design that was
developed by the Values Institute. The graphic is titled The Pyramid of Trust (see Figure
2). Weisman stated, “The five domains—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and
connection—should not be separated from one another in the final analysis, because they
are individual stages of a single journey toward the ultimate goal: trust” (Weisman, 2016,
p. 139). The pyramid is divided into five parts. The bottom two forming the base are
competence and consistency. The two middle sections of the pyramid are concern and
candor. At the top of the pyramid sits connection. Weisman asked a simple question for
each section of the pyramid: “Concern—How do I know they care about me? Candor—
Are they honest and upfront? Connection—How deep is our relationship?
Consistency—Are they reliable, can I depend on them? Competence—Do they deliver
on what they say?” (Weisman, 2016, p. 149).

O’Toole and Bennis (2009) stated, “Of the five elements of trust, developing a
culture of candor begins with oneself that works outward towards others” (p. 1). This
candor-creating culture includes being truthful, encouraging others to tell the truth to
their superiors, rewarding those who challenge the status quo, practicing having difficult
conversations, communicating with different groups to remain unbiased, admitting when
one is wrong, encouraging and modeling transparency, and sharing all information freely unless it involves employee privacy rights (O’Toole & Bennis, 2009).

Figure 2. The Pyramid of Trust developed by the Values Institute depicting the five domains of trust. From “The Hierarchy of Values,” by The Values Institute, 2018 (http://www.thevaluesinstitute.org/values-2#science-of-trust).

**Competence**

Competence is the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (S. M. R. Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Sheldon & Farnsworth, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). According to Romero and Mitchell (2018), “Competence (or ability) is universally regarded as a facet of trust” (p. 156). When considering a leader’s competence, the following should be asked, as Weisman (2016) stated, “Are you providing the service or product that you promised?” (p. 144). Leaders
who follow the rule of *walking their talk* ensure that what they say follows with action to deliver on their word. Consistency is important to demonstrate competency with others.

Whether a superintendent is from a rural, suburban, or urban district, competence measures a leader’s quality and capacity to provide what a school board wants and needs. When competence in a superintendent is studied, his or her efficiency and responsiveness to feedback as well as his or her ability to achieve what he or she promised is determined (Weisman, 2016). A study by Bolman and Deal (2003) found that superintendents who possess critical personal qualities important to leadership such as competence, vision, commitment to core beliefs, the ability to inspire trust and build relationships, work ethic, and genuine concern for their work and for other people prepare them to be successful in their field.

Sorek, Haglin, and Geva (2018) stated, “Competency can serve as an umbrella for a variety of qualities used to evaluate a leader” (p. 662) and “leaders having higher levels of perceived competency are less effected by inconsistent behavior” (p. 669). Data from a 2016 study by Adams and Miskell and were used by authors Romero and Mitchell (2018) to hypothesize that benevolence, competence, and integrity best describe three conceptually distinct components of trust. Romero and Mitchell (2018) were confident that these three qualities are “at least interrelated but substantially independent factors to be considered as distinct components of trust” (p. 156). A commitment to consistent behavior by the leader provides a higher level of perceived competency.

Along with competency comes the need for commitment. According to George and Simms (2007), “Competence counts. But what ultimately distinguishes the great leaders from the mediocre are the personal inner qualities—qualities that are hard to
define but are essential for success, qualities that each of us must develop for ourselves” (p. xvii). There is research on Abraham Lincoln’s leadership behaviors, and one finding is clear: demonstrating one’s competence or personal example is the most powerful human resource an individual can demonstrate to lead an organization (Alvy & Robbins, 2010). Lincoln showed the importance of inner reflection and evaluation from others to expand his own good leadership practices as he was self-motivated to improve. Alvy & Robbins (2010) stated, “Lincoln also wanted his team members, and others with whom he worked, to let him know how his own performance could improve. This attitude is critical to establishing team trust and team capacity building” (p. 136). Behaviors that Lincoln once demonstrated, which confirmed his competency, are those needed for commitment, being a role model, and building trust.

**Commitment.** According to S. M. R. Covey (2006), “Keeping commitments is based on the principles of integrity, performance, courage and humility. It is the perfect balance of character and competence. The ability to do what you say you are going to do—competence” (00:03:34). Hank Paulson, Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs, stated, “It is a leader’s responsibility to demonstrate what it means to keep your word and earn a reputation for trustworthiness” (S. M. R. Covey, 2009, p. 216). As Fullan (2002) noted, leaders who are effective are able to synergize commitment with a strong vision and higher accountability and performance standards, to go further beyond and build an everlasting legacy.

**Consistency**

Consistency is the confidence that a person’s pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable, and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). In the book
Choosing Higher Ground, Weisman (2016) asked, “Are you dependable? Do your actions reflect your values?” (p. 144). Organizational trust is built as a daily endeavor and ongoing process. Leaders need to demonstrate dependable and reliable actions whether times are good or bad. When the traits of a leader are evaluated by others, consistency is highly valued. Consistency determines the likelihood that the leader’s actions will be predictable (Heider, 1958).

Dubrin (2001) stated, “Given that so many people distrust business leaders, as well as political leaders, gaining and maintaining trust is a substantial challenge” (p. 30). Therefore, the author believed leaders need to be consistent with their intentions. Leaders need to practice what they preach and set examples by letting others know of their intentions and welcoming feedback to improve their skills as a leader.

Some considered Abraham Lincoln a consistent leader who “welcomed arguments within his Cabinet, but would be ‘greatly pained,’ he warned his colleagues, if he found them attacking one another in public” (Kearns Goodwin, 2018, p. 131). His actions were predictable. Consistent leaders understand congruency between what they say and what they do, which affirms their leadership characteristics. Alvy and Robbins (2010) stated, “When a leader’s behavior is predictable, organizational members can count on a soothing consistency” (para. 36).

**Concern**

Concern is the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability and to support, motivate, and care for each other (Ackerman


Respect. By demonstrating respect and showing genuine concern and kindness to others, one builds trust. As S. M. R. Covey (2006) stated in his book Speed of Trust, it is important to treat everyone with respect and kindness, especially those who cannot do anything for you as it demonstrates true respect for others. Bennis, O’Toole, and Goleman (2008) stated, “Showing respect for people by including them in the flow of relevant information is the essence of transparency and trust” (00:40:43). Further, Bennis et al. stated that “trust is created by the behavior of leaders towards followers. When leaders treat followers with respect followers respond with trust” (00:40:41).

Candor

Weisman (2016) asked, “Are you honest? Candor is the measure of how the public perceives the genuineness and transparency of a brand” (p. 147). Further, candor
involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O’Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Candor is necessary in building trust in relationships (S. M. R. Covey, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

Weisman (2016) stated, “Research constantly shows that the trust gap between senior management and employees hinges on a perceived lack of open and honest communication” (pp. 147-148). Candor involves the ability to communicate honestly and with transparency, integrity, and care. The author of Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills, Dubrin (2001), encouraged leaders to always tell the truth. Dubrin stated, “It is much easier to be consistent when you do not have to keep patching up your story to conform to an earlier lie” (p. 31).

**Truth.** Leaders who are consistently honest in their communications develop confidence among their employees (Bennis et al., 2008). Candor begins with telling the truth. Everyone has impulses to tell others what they want to hear, yet it may not always be candid. Once one develops a reputation for providing straight talk, people will typically do the same in return (O’Toole & Bennis, 2009). In order to create a culture of candor, leaders are encouraged to practice having courageous conversations that others are not harmed by, owning up to mistakes, encouraging organizational support for open communication, and sharing any and all information that is not legally confidential (O’Toole & Bennis, 2009). Bennis et al. believed that “when leaders are candid, open, consistent and predictable in their dealings with followers, the results will almost always be a condition of trust” (Chapter 2, 00:38:49).
**Transparency.** Transparency is a term often used to define candor. According to O’Toole and Bennis (2009), “Transparency is defined as the degree to which information flows freely within an organization, among managers and employees, and outward to stakeholders” (p. 2). Though organizational transparency is rational and ethical and makes businesses run more efficiently and effectively, some leaders tend to resist it by hoarding and controlling information as they may see this as a source of power. Some leaders believe access to information is a source of power. These are the leaders who believe they are smarter than their followers. The truth is, secrets are nearly impossible to keep—in large part because of the Internet (O’Toole & Bennis, 2009). Transparency is built on honesty and integrity and free flow of information in the organization.

Transparency and honesty are closely related qualities. Researchers and authors, Zenger and Folkman (2009) drew conclusions from data based on more than 200,000 workers who rated more than 25,000 leaders who provided information on the top 10% of leaders. Zenger and Folkman identified integrity and honesty as the top traits that employees respect from their leaders.

**Integrity.** Integrity comes naturally to leaders who know themselves and what they believe in (Bennis et al., 2008). Employees expect and respect leaders who are always honest and candid and look for these traits from leadership. Greenleaf (2014) coined the term servant leadership in 1970: “lead with integrity, respect, and authenticity, but also by providing service” (p. 24). Zenger and Folkman (2009) stated,

A lack of integrity or honesty is the classic fatal flaw. Indeed, we still believe that to be true. When people talk of the qualities they most admire, the most frequently noted characteristics are honesty, integrity, being a “straight shooter,”
saying what you really think, and never fudging the truth to please the group you are with. (pp. 159–160)

Deep integrity and fundamental character strengths must be present to have long term success (S. Covey, 1989). Integrity, authenticity, and establishment of connections with servant leadership in mind shows leaders care to do the right thing.

As described in the paragraphs above, transparency, honesty, and integrity are three key leadership characteristics. Additional behavioral traits are identified in successful leadership characteristics. They are all interdependent with honesty and integrity to build and develop solid leadership skills (Zenger & Folkman, 2009). All 16 leadership behaviors are shown in Figure 3.

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<th>Sixteen Leadership Behaviors</th>
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*Figure 3.* Behavioral traits interdependent with honesty and integrity that build and develop solid leadership skills.
Connection

Connection is a shared link or bond in which there is a sense of emotional engagement and interrelatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White et al., 2016). The best leaders are regularly around those they lead, making connections with employees. Leaders have to work alongside employees to make a positive impact on their work and careers. According to Ventura (2008), “No matter how many additional duties and responsibilities that comes at a leader, they must strike a balance . . . and still stay connected and accessible to their employees” (p. 44). This can be challenging at times, but it is necessary to ensure leaders establish trust and stay connected with their employees.

Weisman (2016) believed that “connection is the measure of how well brands identify with the relationships they value most” (p. 149). Weisman added, “Do your customers feel like they have a personal relationship with you?” (p. 148). Connection is the most difficult of the five domains to achieve since there is no way to build or improve it in isolation because it is a cumulative of all other domains. It must be a conscious decision by individuals; it just doesn’t happen (Weisman, 2016).

Team building and relationships. Leaders who establish trust with and between members of their team increase the effectiveness of the organization, which encourages greater cooperation and team building among members (S. M. R. Covey, 2006). According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), “Organizations exist to accomplish tasks that are too big and costly for individuals alone. When a new member joins an organization, a level of interdependence is established immediately by virtue of the shared purpose embodied in the organizational mission” (p. 48).
According to S. M. R. Covey (2006), leaders and employees in organizations need to “respect the dignity of every person and every role and treat everyone with respect” (p. 151). A person with a high disposition to trust is more likely to see good points and to overlook flaws in another person that could threaten the development of trust (Johnson-George & Swap, 1982; Rotter, 1980). The Berkeley Human Resources Department shares (2019), by building an environment of increasing communication, cooperation, trust, and respect team relationships are strengthened.

According to Weisman (2016), “Trust takes time to develop, and customers may not immediately react to new initiatives or messages. You can only see movement in a relationship if you stop more than once” (p. 146). By pausing occasionally and reflecting, leaders identify that satisfaction does not come from higher salaries, Weisman (2016) added, “but in most studies workers say they would trade a higher salary for less tangible more values-based rewards like appreciation and a sense of camaraderie with a team” (p. 121).

Workplace relationships built from trust. Heathfield (2018) from the publication *The Balance Careers*, stated, “Trust forms the foundation for effective communication, employee retention, employee motivation, and contribution of extra effort by employees” (para. 2). When employees have trust in their leaders, they are more motivated and contribute more, supporting the bottom line of the organization. When trust exists in an organization or in a relationship, almost everything else is easier and more comfortable to achieve (Heathfield, 2018). As a result, it would behoove an organization to establish a culture of trust.
Americans spend one third of their day at their workplace working with colleagues. According to a Gallup August 2013 workweek study, working 41 hours or more is the norm for half of Americans today. In fact, the survey of 1,271 full-time employed adults found Americans spend an average of 47 hours a week with their coworkers (Lavoie, 2015). Spending much of an employee’s waking hours at work leaves employees with the need for a trusting environment (Heathfield, 2018). Tway (1994) found in his research that trust is the foundation for a positive work environment that leaders expect in their organization. Trust is the prerequisite for the ability to rely on coworkers, teamwork and synergy within a group, carefully planned risks, and integration of credible communication among coworkers.

Leaders who have a deep understanding of their employees’ talents and unique contributions create a culture where the norm is for employees to demonstrate transparency, vulnerability, trust, value, individualized communication, and leveraged diversity. A leader who serves will nurture an environment where staff engagement and collaboration thrive. In the end, the team will function at a high level without the direct supervision and presence of their supervisors (Retts & Retts, 2011). Retts and Retts (2011) stated, “Although having too much of a personal connection with a subordinate can be dangerous, the other extreme of too much distance can prove to be nonproductive and harmful to overall unit performance” (p. 52).

The Berkeley Human Resources Department shared in their 2019 article “Steps to Building an Effective Team,” as teams and relationships form, leaders must remember to encourage trust and cooperation among employees. The relationships that team members establish among themselves are just as important as the relationships the leader develops.
with employees. As teams come together, a leader needs to pay close attention to the ways in which team members work together and must take action to increase communication, cooperation, trust, and respect in those relationships (Berkeley Human Resources, 2019).

**Trust and Leadership**

**Trust**

According to S. M. R. Covey (2006), “If trust is developed and leveraged, it has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life” (p. 1). JetBlue chairman, Joel Peterson stated, “Trust is the glue that holds an organization together. It turns deflection into transparency, suspicion into empowerment, and conflict into creativity. With it, a tiny company like John Deere grew into a worldwide leader. Without it, a giant corporation like Enron toppled” (Stanford Graduate School of Business, n.d., p. 1). Trust is vital for successful leadership. Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated, “Trust matters most in situations of interdependence, in which the interests of one party cannot be achieved without reliance on another” (p. 20). According to Sinay, Presley, Douglin, and De Jesus (2016), “The foundation for trust is rooted in the strength, cohesiveness, and pervasiveness of an organizational culture” (p. 7). Trust, or lack thereof, permeates the culture of an organization. Alvy and Robbins (2010) stated, “Attributes that others “feel” or “perceive” and that influence opinions of the school leader and the assessment of whether that person’s actions are characterized by integrity. If they are, respect and trust are earned” (p. 64). As author Ernest Hemingway once stated, “The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them” (Hemingway, n.d., p. 1).
The Importance of Trust

Trust is the foundation of an organization’s culture, which is defined by leadership. Leaders want to believe that their employees are focused on the same vision and goals as management; therefore, building trust is crucial to an organization’s success. Most of the literature on trust is general and from a business standpoint. There is limited research on how superintendents establish and maintain trust with their school boards. Research is even more limited regarding superintendents in rural school districts establishing and maintaining trust with their school boards. However, S. M. R. Covey (2006) shared, “Trust is becoming the vital component in customer loyalty and brand strength” (00:08:25). In other words, if superintendents and school leaders foster trust with their constituents, the reputation of districts and schools will improve and trust will increase.

School communities trust that students are learning, are cared about, and are growing into responsible people at our public schools. According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), “As a society, we invest much of what we value most in our schools” (p. 17). Parents send their children to school trusting they will be safe from harm, as well as believing they will be receiving a quality education. Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated, “Trust facilitates communication and contributes to greater efficiency when people have confidence in the integrity of other people’s words and deeds” (p. 18).

According to Hurley (2006), “When employees were asked how the work environment from a high trust organization feels, the participants most frequently say ‘fun,’ ‘supportive,’ ‘motivating,’ ‘productive,’ and ‘comfortable’” (p. 55). In contrast, low trust can lead to dysfunction in an organization. In 2002, the University of Chicago
surveyed 800 Americans and learned that more than 80% had barely any confidence in the people leading mainstream organizations (Hurley, 2006). This understanding of low trust is important for superintendents to understand and to work on maintaining a high level of trust with school board members.

Bennis et al. (2008) stated,

In the absence of trust, all ambiguous behavior is viewed with suspicion and by definition, all behavior is ambiguous. That’s why the failure to include people is the second most common source of mistrust, close behind the failure of leaders to tell the truth consistently. (p. 63)

Pollsters report that trust is in tatters everywhere in the economy: in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Trust, therefore, is more valuable than ever (Karlgaard, 2014b). Superintendents must realize that trust is vital to the culture and health of organizations, including school districts.

Bennis et al. (2008) found that when leaders ask their employees to rank the important factors in a leader, trust is always at the top of the list. A leader’s behaviors and actions all funnel to trust. It is well known that parents send their children to school trusting they will be safe from harm, as well as believing they will be receiving a quality education (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Therefore, school leaders, in particular superintendents, bear the largest responsibility for setting a positive tone of trust in their school districts (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Role of Superintendents**

**History of superintendency.** Houston (n.d.) indicated the position of superintendent developed shortly after the creation of public schools in the early
seventeenth century. There were originally no superintendents of schools. State boards of education had the initial responsibility to run schools; then, the responsibilities shifted to local lay boards. Neither of these groups have had professional assistance to run their schools.

Carter and Cunningham (1997) shared that state legislatures passed laws for public education and provided small amounts of money to support community education needs. A number of communities in northeastern states that received funds used the money to pay a state officer to handle the accounting activities of state education funds as well as an increasing number of other responsibilities. This state officer position commanded a full-time job, which led the state of New York to appoint the first state superintendent in 1812. Other states began to plan for similar positions. As education grew, the state position became burdensome and led to the creation of a paid county position to handle the workload. Prior to the Civil War, more than a dozen states adopted the county form of educational supervision and had created county superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

The title of the local superintendent came into existence just as the offices of state and county superintendents were developed. Superintendent positions were established by local initiative, not by constitution or statute, as opposed to how state and county superintendents were appointed. There were inconsistencies as some local superintendents supervised a single school district while others managed numerous schools (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

In 1837, the cities of Buffalo, New York and Louisville, Kentucky established the first local superintendents. By 1870, there were more than 30 large cities with designated
superintendents (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Until the 1870s, it was believed that since local school boards had the authority to operate schools, they should also have the authority to hire superintendents to manage the schools.

Initially, superintendents were not a formally organized group of individuals for the purpose of networking. Most professional positions have organizations advocating for their work. Superintendents are no different. Shortly after the conclusion of the Civil War, a group of city and state superintendents met in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania at the National Teachers Association meeting. The superintendents in attendance believed there was a need to form an organization made up of individuals who worked in supervisory roles in schools. In February 1866, the organization was created and was titled the National Association of School Superintendents.

Houston (n.d.) provided information stating as the number of communities that received funds increased, the time required of the local committees became too time consuming. A paid state officer was then assigned to assume the responsibilities for accounting activities of state education funds as well as many other duties. These increasing responsibilities led to a full-time job, and the state of New York is credited with appointing the first state superintendent in 1812. Other states soon planned for similar positions (Houston, n.d.).

According to the American Association of School Administrators (2006), in 1870, the National Association of School Superintendents along with the American Normal School Association merged with the National Teachers Association to create the National Education Association (NEA). Within the NEA, the Department of Superintendents was formed. Decades later in the 1930s, the administrators decided to break away and
became the American Association of School Administrators known today as AASA, The School Superintendents Association. Today, AASA (2006) serves as the voice for public education and school superintendents at the national level. Organizations such as AASA provide superintendents a link to networking groups of peers to discuss issues such as building and maintaining trust with board members.

Administrators in California had long talked of forming an umbrella organization that encompassed their varied professional functions. Formed in July, 1971, ACSA became the first operative united administrator organization in the nation. A majority of California superintendents are members of the Association of California School Administrators [ACSA] and attend the organization’s yearly Superintendent Symposium (ACSA, 2019). ACSA is the largest school administrator organization in the United States and serves approximately 17,000 California educators. The organization’s number one priority is to advocate for students in grades kindergarten through Grade 12 as well as adult learners attending California public schools. The mission is to be the driving force in California education. ACSA provides superintendents professional development, networking opportunities, legal advice, and more (ACSA, 2019).

Superintendents have professional organizations such as AASA and ACSA to learn from in order develop into natural leaders, risk-takers, and individuals who seek social change. Superintendents must also have good communication skills and be flexible but at the same time have strong core values to make it through the tough times and hard decisions. Superintendents also need strong family support because the superintendency is a 24-hour and 7-day-a-week job (Melendez, 2008).
Superintendent Thelma Melendez (2008) noted that historically, the vast majority of superintendents were White male Protestants. As of 10 years ago, only 15% of superintendents were female. Today, more women and minorities are becoming school superintendents than ever before. As the nation’s population becomes more diverse, women and minorities are moving into the role that has been called the most male-dominated executive position in the United States (Melendez, 2008).

Houston (n.d.) indicated the evolving role of a superintendent has shifted from being a leader whose primary job was to manage to the primary goal of educating “all children.” This shift has called on superintendents to be greater educational leaders. Further, today’s political climate requires the superintendent to clearly understand how to navigate school and community politics and be adept at the art of persuasion. Most of a superintendent’s work focuses on the ability to create and maintain relationships (Houston, n.d.). Today’s superintendent not only manages a district, but he or she also needs to be proficient at understanding the science of student learning.

**Who are superintendents.** As of 2015-2016, according to the California Department of Education, there are 1,024 school districts in California that educate over 6,000,000 students (California Department of Education, n.d.-b). These 1,024 superintendents are the highest-ranking persons in a school district responsible for making managerial decisions. They are the appointed executives hired to operationalize the policies and decisions of the school board. Superintendents are responsible for executing policy and vision according to school board direction and are leading administrators in the district office and schools. Grissom and Andersen (2012) stated, “As the school district’s ‘chief executive,’ superintendents oversee key aspects of district
operations” (para. 3). This executive leader serves as the board’s educational expert, charged with overseeing the management of business affairs, interacting with the community in a politically and culturally aware fashion, and fulfilling the role of communicator in chief (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Cuban, 1976; Kowalski, 2005a, 2013; Wright & Harris, 2010).

A study conducted by researchers Gall, Gall, and Borg (2006), surveyed 276 out of a possible 869 school board presidents (31.8%) in Illinois and revealed five important competencies in superintendents:

1) Establishing and communicating high expectations for effective teaching and student learning around the district’s instructional goals.

2) Inspiring and modeling high expectations for staff, students, and school Board members.

3) Ensuring that financial, human, and material resources are directed toward achieving the school district’s mission, vision and goals.

4) Developing, monitoring, and sustaining effective teamwork among administrators, teachers, parents, and school board members.

5) Demonstrating self-confidence and transparency in leading the school district.

(Gall et al., p. 46)

Superintendents are in the business of trust (Ament, 2013; Kowalski, 2006; Waters & Marzano, 2006). They are expected to be honest, straightforward, and trusted individuals. It is also important that a superintendent be competent in his or her position, achieving what he or she was hired to do. Competence is measured by the quality of the superintendent’s quality and capacity to deliver what is expected by the board as a whole
Furthermore, superintendents and school board members must demonstrate a true concern for others and assist in shaping, enhancing, and maintaining the district’s culture (Krajewski & Trevino, 2004). Superintendents who do not receive unanimous endorsements for hiring or for their initial contracts are starting off with an organizational challenge that is difficult to overcome. Beginning a superintendency without a unanimous decision by the school board signifies a rocky relationship from the onset and a lack of foundational trust from which to build. Connection is measured by how well a board feels attached to its superintendent and demonstrates the association with the superintendent. For example, if the board attends a conference with their superintendent, do they have a desire to be with the superintendent as much as possible or are they trying to avoid the superintendent’s presence? The same is true for a superintendent’s consistent behavior and decision-making. Over time, a school board may evaluate their leader’s performance. Is it consistent over time? School boards want to know their superintendent follows through with what they say and are consistently truthful and candid in their conversations.

Grissom and Andersen (2012) stated that historically, school district superintendents have demonstrated short-term commitments to individual districts upon being hired. In 2006, superintendents were studied and 45% of them left their positions within 3 years (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Retired superintendent, Santiago Wood, who served four different school districts as superintendent stated,

There is a “honeymoon” period for superintendents with their school boards immediately after being hired. This “honeymoon” lasts between 12 and 18 months, before political interests and dysfunction show up. A board may have
hired a superintendent to institute reforms, but when interest groups such as
unions or community organizations complain, the elected board gets
uncomfortable. (Frey, 2012, p. 1)

The problem of short-term superintendents is similar in other states as well. David Plank,
executive director of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), based at Stanford
University and UC Berkeley, said he observed turnover of superintendents in Michigan in
2002 when he was an assistant professor at Michigan State University, where he founded
the Education Policy Center. He found that the average superintendent’s longevity was
about 2 1/2 to 3 years (Frey, 2012). The short-lived longevity of superintendents is the
purpose of discovering the importance of trust.

Superintendents serve in a variety of geographical/demographic settings with
unique circumstance. According to Theodore Kowalski (2005a), chairman of educational
administration and a professor at the University of Dayton, superintendents from rural
school districts typically have smaller salaries and more limited resources to meet the
needs of students, teachers, administrators, and the community. Grissom and Andersen,
(2012) found that these superintendents are likely to leave their current positions for a
larger school district as a career advancement. Other reasons for leaving include
retirement, resignation or dismissal, or a shift into another professional career (Guerrero,
2016). Guerrero (2016) stated,

The direction of the districts is at stake with the new superintendents—whether it
be in the classrooms or in the main offices. With the change in the size of their
paychecks comes newfound responsibilities of retooling, reshaping, maintaining
the status quo, or a combination of all three. (para 8)
Multiple authors have suggested that superintendents who successfully execute their duties with central management functions such as recruiting staff, managing finances, serving as an instructional leader, and strategically planning to create a positive learning environment within their schools may have a direct impact on student learning (Alsbury, 2008; Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Petersen, 2002). Serving as a superintendent is an all-encompassing profession that requires multiple skills.

**What superintendents do.** When hiring new superintendents, school boards typically seek candidates who are skilled in fiscal management, public relations, and the fortitude to make tough decisions. School boards seek leaders who have expertise in K-12 curriculum and know how to improve student achievement (Black, 2007). Black (2007) asserted, “The best superintendents are those who have the prerequisite knowledge and skills and the drive and commitment to improve teacher quality and raise student achievement” (p. 59).

Tschanen-Moran (2014) stated, “School leaders bear the largest responsibility for setting a tone of trust” (pp. 13-14). Trust within the organization will ensure the districts and schools are creating an environment where the students are able to thrive. According to Augustine-Shaw (2015), “Through a culture build on trust, the school leaders can ensure the effective development of the curriculum, instruction and other priorities for the staff, with a focus on learning outcomes” (p. 1).

As the leader of the organization with a lot of responsibility in building a healthy organization through trust, it is vital that a superintendent also maintain a strong professional network of professional contacts. According to Melendez (2008),
Superintendents understanding the importance of having a professional network cannot be overstated. Frequently, the friends and professional network you create are the means by which you are alerted to superintendent openings. Once you become a superintendent, when difficult situations occur, well-connected educational leaders can turn to their professional networks for advice and support. Their networks are professional organizations, educational foundations and the personal contacts they have made across many districts. (p. 26)

Having informal mentors, others with professional experience, is also critical. Mentors share a passion for educating children and are role models who assist superintendents in navigating the political landscape and difficult decisions that come with the position.

**Role of the School Board**

**History of school boards.** According to National School Boards Association ([NSBA], n.d.), history tells us that local democratic control of public education was a strongly rooted tradition in our country long before it became an independent nation. In 1647, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring towns to establish and maintain schools. These early schools were managed by citizens through meetings held in their town. NSBA (n.d.) also stated that as school issues became more difficult, control was given to the citizens who were elected representatives, the selectmen, and later to committees of townspeople who hired a schoolmaster. The elected representatives also provided schoolhouses and attended to other school-related matters.

By the early 1800s, school committees developed into oversight groups that were separate from the rest of the town’s government. NSBA (n.d.) shared that in 1826, Massachusetts formally established the system of school committees, requiring each town
to elect a separate school committee to have “the general charge and superintendence” of all the public schools in the town (NSBA, n.d., para. 22). This successful model over time spread to the rest of the country, assuring local citizens would have a direct voice in the development and governance of their public schools (NSBA, n.d.).

According to Meier (2003), in 1930, there were 200,000 school boards in the United States. Today, there are only 15,000 school boards in the United States with twice the population and three times the number of students in public schools. Meier also shared statistics stating there are approximately 90,000 school board members who govern school districts over the 50 states. At one point, one out of every 500 citizens sat on a school board. Today, one out of every 20,000 serve on a school board (Meier, 2003). The 90,000 school board members across the United States derive their power and authority from the state. According to NSBA (2013), “In compliance with state and federal laws, school boards establish policies and regulations in which their local schools are governed” (p. 38).

**Who are school boards.** School boards are the governing body of a school district. They are the superintendent’s bosses who represent the public interest and are typically elected to serve the diverse values and needs of their community (Great Schools, 2018). Meador (2018) added that school board members are charged with governing a public school district and ensuring that the district respectfully responds to the priorities, values, and beliefs of the community. It was once very likely to personally know a member of the board, but not anymore (Meador, 2018). Many believe the downscaling of participation by citizens serving on school boards is increasing the gap between citizens and government and for democracy itself. This lack of participation and
inclusiveness is the center of why some feel public education is failing. These same individuals believe it is what needs to change in order to improve public education (Meier, 2003).

According to California School Boards Association ([CSBA], 2007), school board members who have elections every 4 years choose to remain in their seat, vacate their seat, or are not reelected for varying reasons. On occasion, when a standing board member resigns, retires, or is removed by a recall process that originates from votes, the board has the option of appointing a new member for the remaining period of the absent board member or opening an election to fill the vacated position. Griffin (2005) stated that board members changing every 2 years combined with the average superintendent turnover being 3 to 6 years results in regular change in district leadership. Griffin (2005) believed this constant change in a district’s leadership has shown to produce low student success rates. This continual change may seem to provide an illusion of progress but often does not address a district’s fundamental needs. This constant change within the school’s governance team can weaken local control and the potential for increased community engagement and student achievement (Griffin, 2005). Griffin (2005) believed there are four essential areas that must be top priorities for school boards and superintendents to focus on:

1) Student achievement must be job one.

2) A shared vision is essential.

3) Roles must be clearly defined.

4) Board members need training. (p. 55)
It is the responsibility of the school board to elect one school board president. Krajewski and Trevino (2004) postulated that the board president should lead with a philosophy of servant leadership to encourage collaboration, trust, and the ethical use of power. Trust within the board, as a result, starts with the board president and flows through the organization, developing a sense of respect. Furthermore, Krajewski and Trevino (2004) stated that trust and respect take a long time to build and, if one is not careful, can be lost in an instant. Most importantly, “Once lost, they probably are not retrievable” (Krajewski & Trevino, 2004, p. 34). Therefore, it is important to have a strong school board president and school board members who feel trusted and want to stay with the organization. Members who have longevity on the board can strengthen the leadership of the district by respectfully providing consistent vision and direction to the superintendent on behalf of students.

**What school boards do.** According to NSBA (n.d.), one of the chief functions of a governing board is to hire, monitor, and evaluate the superintendent of schools, the chief executive officer (CEO), and to set policy for hiring other personnel in the school district. Boards are also responsible for additional governing responsibilities that include the following:

1. Overseeing the development and adoption of policies;
2. Establishing and adopting budget priorities;
3. Setting the direction for and adoption of the curriculum; and
4. Providing direction and adoption of a collective bargaining agreement.

School boards work in tandem with the superintendent and the district office staff to design policies that govern all aspects of the school district (NSBA, n.d., 2013;
Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011; Sell, 2005). School boards also require accountability from the superintendent and expect interaction with the community in a leadership role. Most importantly, school board members govern as a group, not as individuals (CSBA, n.d.; Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011; Heiligenthal, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2010).

School district boards seek exemplary superintendents to lead their schools. School boards typically search for superintendents who will move the district to a new level of excellence (Black, 2007). Black (2007) stated, “The board of education says that, first and foremost, the new superintendent must make decisions that are in students’ best interests and that will improve academic achievement in all classrooms (p. 56)

Exemplary superintendents lead change efforts with a clear, deliberate articulation of their vision and goals of reform and their desired culture for the district (Portis & Garcia, 2007). Exemplary superintendents also build strong, positive relationships and trust with their school boards. Healthy relationships are built on trust, not just by time or consistency, but by who we are as people and groups—something bigger (Weisman, 2016).

**Need for Trust Between School Boards and Superintendent**

Author and noted expert on school boards Dr. John Carver (2006) believed one major criteria for successful integration of policy governance principles is the necessity for open communication and trust existing between the CEO and board. A community elects school board members through at-large or trustee area elections to set the vision and create policies for the school district. The superintendent’s primary job is to support and navigate the school board through the sea of legal requirements, curriculum initiatives, and wide array of policies in order for the district to make successful progress.
for students and parents, and the school district community (Townsend et al., 2007). It is important to note that “how boards and superintendents work together can mean the difference between exhilaration and frustration for both parties and, more important, between success and failure for the students in our nation’s public schools” (AASA & NSBA, 1994, p. 8). Reid (2000), in her article “Governance Report Calls for Overhaul,” noted that Anne L. Bryant, the executive director of the NSBA, said state laws often unintentionally invite boards to micromanage school systems while parents beg board members to solve their problems. As a result, board members are not sure where their responsibilities end, she said, and superintendents often view boards as enemies rather than teammates. Krajewski and Trevino (2004) reported,

Harold McGraw III, chairman, president, and CEO of the McGraw-Hill companies, was emphatic in asserting that building and maintaining a culture starts with a board that is both independent and accountable and that expects all district employees to be accountable, too. (p. 34)

Griffin (2005) believed that together school boards and superintendents are the solution to steady student achievement. Griffin stated, “Effective superintendents lead. Successful school boards function as the community’s education watchdog, advocating for children and projecting the public’s voice into the debate” (p. 54). Caruso (2005) stated, “Boards of education bring plenty of positives to the table. Sometimes it requires some extra effort by the superintendent to bring out the best in the board” (para. 2).

At the outset of school districts, school boards were typically formed to simply run a district. As expectations of teaching and learning expanded, a large group of professional administrators developed and were just as capable of running school districts
as were local school board members. Caruso (2005) stated, “What boards of education bring to the table is a link with local needs of the community in public education. This is far different from what many board members perceive as their proper role” (para. 3). In today’s educational world of accountability, communities do not necessarily demand reform. Instead, communities expect school district officials and boards to focus on doing a better job of educating the children who live within their community.

Superintendents face this expected demand on a regular basis from their school boards and the local community. It is critical that school boards hire the right superintendent for the community and monitor the superintendent’s performance on a regular basis (Tripses, Hunt, Kim, & Watkins, 2015).

**Rural School Districts**

This study focused on school district superintendents and school boards from rural areas in California. Rural school districts when defined by Teach—Make a Difference (2018), are categorized by a small population size as well as the geographic isolation. There are four areas that schools are categorized into: size, population, density, and location.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) defines these locales by the school’s proximity to a city an “urban-centric” classification system. The four locale categories used by the NCES’ urban centric classification system are city, suburb, town and rural. . . . Rural schools are also all classified as high need schools. (Teach—Make A Difference, 2018, para. 1)

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) revised its definitions of school area types in 2006 after working with the U.S. Census Bureau to create a new area
classification system. The revision capitalizes on improved geocoding technology and
the 2000 Office of Management and Budget ([OMB], 2000) definitions of metro areas
that rely less on population size and county boundaries than proximity of an address to an
urbanized area.

Harrington (2017) stated that rural districts are typically located in “isolated and
under-resourced parts of the state” (para. 4). She added that rural school districts are also
“more likely to rely on support from county offices of education or outside consultants”
(para. 8), as opposed to their counterparts—suburban and urban school districts.

Though there may be some similarities between rural and urban school districts,
urban districts tend to be large, and administrators have specialized areas. A
superintendent typically has a number of assistant superintendents to fulfill various
assigned tasks. However, in rural districts, because of their small size, superintendents
are lucky if they have an assistant superintendent to assist with tasks. The issue of district
size can place the superintendent in a difficult yet positive light because he or she needs
to know a little bit of everything (Kollie, 2007). Referred to as the “urban-centric”
classification system to distinguish it from the previous “metro-centric” classification
system, the new classification system has four major locale categories—city, suburban,
town, and rural—each of which is subdivided into three subcategories as described in
Table 1 (OMB, 2000).

Gap in Research

This literature review described and identified what trust is, the importance of
trust, and the positive impact trust has on individuals, relationships, and organizations.
However, the literature does not speak directly to the issue of effective strategies that
superintendents can utilize to build trust with and between school board members in rural school districts. This study addresses that gap in the research.

Table 1. Exhibit A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Defined</th>
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| Urban    | • **Large** - Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more.  
• **Midsize** - Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.  
• **Small** - Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000 |
| Suburban | • **Large** - Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more.  
• **Midsize** - Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000.  
• **Small** - Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000. |
| Town     | • **Fringe** - Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area.  
• **Distant** - Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area.  
• **Remote** - Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area. |
| Rural    | • **Fringe** - Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster.  
• **Distant** - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster.  
• **Remote** - Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster. |


**Summary**

The literature review reflects studies conducted in areas ranging from the historical aspects of trust, four trust theories (trust theory, social capital theory,
interdependence theory, and social cognitive theory), the five domains of trust (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection) as described by Weisman (2016), roles of the superintendent and school boards, importance and implications of trust, to lack of trust and repairing or regaining of trust. The literature also reviews the role trust plays in relationships between superintendents and school boards.

Chapter III follows and discusses the research methodology and design used to gain information on strategies used by exemplary K-12 Superintendents from rural school districts who build trust with and between school board members. Included in the discussion in Chapter III is a review of the purpose and research questions that provided a focus to the study. Also included in this chapter are the selected instrumentation, population and sample, validity and reliability, the data analyses, and limitations.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III outlines the methodology used in this study to identify the strategies that exemplary superintendents use to build trust with and between school board members. The chapter focuses on strategies employed by exemplary rural superintendents to build trust with and between school board members.

This chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions studied as well as the research design used to answer the research questions. This chapter also describes the population, target population, and how the research sample was determined. Also included in the chapter is a thorough description of the research instruments used and how the data were collected and organized. The chapter then provides an in-depth look at how the data were analyzed. Limitations of the study are discussed including a description of the procedures to protect the human research subjects who volunteered to participate in this study. The chapter concludes with an overall summary of the methodology that was used in this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust between school board members.
Research Questions

The research questions used in this study were designed to fully explore the topic of trust and to learn about strategies used by exemplary superintendents from rural school districts who build trust with and between school board members. The questions were used in both online surveys for quantitative data and face-to-face interviews to collect qualitative data.

1. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the mixed-methods approach allows researchers to make explicit the implicit theories that guide research studies. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods case study combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches, also known as an explanatory method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Numerical data (quantitative), through use of a survey, was used to provide the researcher a broad perspective of how exemplary superintendents build trust with and
between school board members. Also, narrative data (qualitative), in the form of select open ended interviews of exemplary superintendents, were used to determine successful experiences related to building trust with and between school board members. The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design used in this study is demonstrated in Figure 4.

![Figure 4. Type of mixed-method study design.](image)

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “In an explanatory design, quantitative data are collected first, and depending on the results, qualitative data are gathered second to elucidate, elaborate on, or explain the quantitative findings” (p. 25). As Roberts (2010) stated, “Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single method complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth” (p. 145). Roberts (2010) continued, “Combining what with a possible why adds power and richness to your explanation of the data” (p. 145). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) also noted that using a mixed-method approach is “an intuitive way of doing research that is constantly being displayed through our everyday lives” (p. 1). The main thrust of the
The study is quantitative, and the qualitative results are secondary. In this study, a group of exemplary rural superintendents were surveyed via an online instrument. Following the quantitative data collection via the online survey, a group of five exemplary rural superintendents who received surveys were interviewed face-to-face. At the conclusion of the online surveys and face-to-face interviews, the research data were analyzed based on the strategies demonstrated by exemplary rural superintendents on how they build trust with and between school board members.

The use of the explanatory sequential method provides the researcher the ability to triangulate data. This means when both quantitative and qualitative methods are utilized, data are collected, quantitative data followed by qualitative, and the strength of one method strengthens the other. This provides a more comprehensive set of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010), “To the extent that the results from each method converge and indicate the same results, there is a triangulation and thus greater credibility in the findings” (p. 26).

According to Bassey (2003), a case study in the educational context is “investigation in considerable depth into one or a few cases in naturally occurring social situations” (p. 115). The way the inquiry is conducted must be ethical, especially in its respect for persons. A significantly important element in case studies is that the outcomes must be trustworthy. The research results must be meaningful to a particular group. In the case of this study, the particular group is rural superintendents. Finally, the research must be conveyed in a form that is significant to readers that wish to learn about the strategies exemplary superintendents use to build trust with and between school board members.
The mixed-methods design, according to Creswell (2014), calls for multiple methods to ensure that any inconsistency is echoed in the trait and not in the method. The method was later expanded into what Denzin (1978) called “triangulation.” When triangulation is used in research, findings are richer, the information is more accurate, and there is greater practicality. This study’s findings were richer, more precise, and provided a broader view of the strategies used by exemplary rural superintendents to build trust with and between school board members.

**Population**

A research population is known as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics, particularly having common and binding characteristics allowing for generalized results through research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Weiss & Weiss, 2012). Patten (2012) considered the population as the group from which the researcher will ultimately choose the research sample. The population is typically very large, which would be prohibitive in terms of time and effort from which to gather data (Patten, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, the larger population included over 14,000 public school districts and, therefore, over 14,000 superintendents within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Because of time and fiscal constraints, this larger population was unable to be studied. To further narrow the population of this study, there are 1,024 school districts in California, of which 531 are considered rural school districts (California Department of Education, n.d.-b). To survey and interview the entire 531 rural superintendents would have been a monumental task and not feasible because of
fiscal and time constraints; therefore, the population was narrowed even further to identify a target population.

**Target Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a target population as the population that the researcher has narrowed from within the larger population to overcome constraints such as time, money, and geography. For the purpose of this study, the target population was identified as rural superintendents meeting the criteria set by the thematic research team as exemplary.

A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Out of the 14,000 school districts in the United States and 1,024 in California, the target population narrowed to 531 rural school districts in California (California Department of Education, n.d.-b). Further, the researcher then narrowed the target population to a sample population of rural superintendents in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties to be surveyed and interviewed.

**Sample**

According to Patten (2012), the sample “is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested” (p. 45). The use of a purposeful convenience reputational sample was used for this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that purposeful sampling “selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or
informative about the topic of interest” (p. 138). The purposeful sample used in this study was narrowed to 15 exemplary rural superintendents for the survey and five exemplary rural superintendents for the interviews, all within the geographical boundaries of Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties in California. The sample size for the quantitative portion of this mixed method study was limited to 15 superintendents for each of the thematic peer researchers. The sample size for the qualitative interviews was limited to five superintendents for each of the thematic peer researchers. These sample sizes were determined and reviewed by the thematic peer researchers and the faculty advisors.

In this case study, the researcher purposefully sampled exemplary rural superintendents. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), purposeful sampling “selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest” (p. 138). Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that a convenience sample “is a nonprobability sample . . . in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience or availability” (p. 150). It was geographically convenient for the researcher to limit the sample pool to rural superintendents in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties in the state of California in order to address limitations such as time and cost.

The exemplary rural superintendents selected to participate in the study, who have successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members, needed to meet four of the five criteria listed as follows:

1. Three or more years as a superintendent in their current district;
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training;
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA Conference;

4. Evidence of positive superintendent, board and community relationships;

5. Recommended by a retired superintendent who is a member of a North/South Superintendent’s Group and county superintendents.

**Participation Selection Process**

Recommendations to work with exemplary rural superintendents were obtained from a retired superintendent of the North/South Superintendent’s Group and county superintendents and executive search consultants familiar with superintendent leadership. Evidence of positive superintendent relationships with board members and between board members was obtained by inspecting artifacts contained on the district website, board minutes, video recordings of board meetings, newspaper articles, and social media. The data collected in the process of vetting potential participants was also reviewed with a retired superintendent of the North/South Superintendent’s Group and county superintendents. Based on this final review, 15 exemplary rural superintendents were invited to participate in the quantitative survey and five volunteered for the qualitative interview.

After the approval of this study by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (Appendix A), the sample participants, identified through the process mentioned above, were contacted for participation in the quantitative electronic survey. The process for contacting these sample participants for the quantitative electronic survey was as follows:

1. A superintendent/sponsor who knew the superintendent introduced the researcher by e-mail or in person to the participant.
2. The researcher contacted the participant by phone or e-mail to explain the purpose of the study and to confirm participation in the study.

3. If the individual agreed to participate, the researcher e-mailed to the participant (a) an invitation to participate letter (see Appendix B); (b) the Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix C); (c) an informed consent form (see Appendix D) so the participant was knowledgeable about the nature of the study prior to indicating consent on the electronic survey; and (d) a link to the electronic Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey (see Appendix E).

At the end of the electronic Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey, the researcher asked superintendent participants if they were willing to volunteer for a follow-up interview. If more than five superintendents volunteered to participate in the follow-up interview, five were to be randomly selected for the face-to-face interviews. These five participants were contacted for the qualitative face-to-face interview portion of the study in the following manner:

1. The researcher contacted the participant by phone or e-mail to explain the purpose of the study.

2. The researcher scheduled a 60-minute interview with each of the five exemplary rural superintendents. Prior to the interview the researcher e-mailed to the participant (a) an invitation to participate letter (see Appendix B); (b) the Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix C); (c) an informed consent form (see Appendix D) to be signed and collected at the interview; (d) an audio release form to be signed and collected at the interview (see Appendix F); and (e) a copy of
the interview questions and definitions of the five domains of trust contained in the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol (see Appendix G).

**Instrumentation**

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to answer the research questions. According to researchers Ivankova, Creswell, and Stick (2006), an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is highly popular among researchers and indicates researchers first collect and analyze quantitative data, then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within the same study. In this study, the researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “Mixed-method studies combine qualitative and quantitative paradigms in meaningful ways. It is a convergence of philosophy, viewpoints, traditions, methods, and conclusions” (p. 396). The study’s questionnaire produced data pertaining to Weisman’s five domains of trust and addressed the quantitative aspect of the study. In-depth face-to-face interviews of exemplary rural superintendents fulfilled the qualitative aspect of this mixed-methods case study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

**Quantitative Instrument—Survey**

The quantitative survey instrument, the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey, which was cocreated by thematic groups and faculty, was influenced by a culmination of the literature review conducted by peer researchers, the knowledge of faculty advisors, and was based on the Values Institute Theoretical Framework regarding trust (Weisman, 2016). The Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey that was used in this study is a 30-question survey with six questions pertaining to each of the five
domains of trust (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection) from the Values Institute framework and the research questions of this study (see Appendix G).

The respondents to the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey answered via a six-point Likert scale—*strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree, and strongly agree*—to indicate their level of agreement with the questions. The same key for the Likert scale is present for each of the 30 questions. The surveys were disseminated electronically through SurveyMonkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com) and were relatively easy to administer, manage, and secure. Before superintendents completed the survey questions, they reviewed a brief introduction (Appendix E) and signed the informed consent letter (Appendix D).

The thematic research team originally planned to use the Values Institute Pulse survey that was developed for use in the business sector. A thorough analysis of the survey indicated that it was too general and lacked the specificity to uncover what strategies superintendents perceive as most important to building trust with and between school board members. With the guidance and input of senior faculty researchers, a new survey was constructed, still based on the Values Institute. The new survey using the five domains is focused on education and the work of school superintendents in building trust with and between school board members. The new survey was field-tested with a rural school district superintendent, and no modifications were made after the form titled Survey Critique by Participants was completed (see Appendix H). The survey is specific to the role of superintendents as the chief executive officer (CEO) and leader of the governance team, which is composed of school board members.
Qualitative Instrument—Interviews

The qualitative instrument created for this study, the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol, includes a series of open-ended interview questions. Interviews, when conducted well, can provide insight into the perspectives of the study participants, and can discover unique differences in their stories (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) pointed out, there are many advantages in the interview method. One example is, an interviewer can take a response and probe, follow up, clarify, or elaborate to get further details on a superintendent’s response. Interviews have a much higher response rate than survey methods—especially when considering personal qualities or feelings about trust (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The interview questions in this study were based on the research literature about trust and specifically on the Values Institute Theoretical Framework regarding trust. Weisman (2016) developed the Values Institute Theoretical Framework and contended that there are five domains of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. The interview questions were developed in an iterative process involving thematic peer researchers. Each set of questions developed was analyzed by peer researchers and faculty to determine whether the questions successfully addressed the trust domains. After numerous iterations and with the assistance of the faculty, the 10 interview questions were chosen, two questions per trust domain. Finally, the questions were designed to prompt responses that could be used to analyze and determine any themes and similarities between superintendents and school board members that would further improve the study of trust between exemplary district superintendents and school board members from rural school districts.
The researcher conducted all interviews in person in the superintendent’s natural setting. The qualitative interview began with an overview of the study including an explanation of the Research Participants Bill of Rights, obtaining the participant’s signature on the Informed Consent Form, and the Audio Recording Release form. The researcher collected the previously stated documents and proceeded with the interview. The researcher used open-ended questions and discussion prompts identified in the Superintendent & School Board Trust Thematic Interview Protocol to engage the participants in an interactive dialogue. The open-ended questions and discussion prompts were used to elicit adequate depth to each of the responses.

All five superintendent interviews were conducted with Brandman University’s Institutional Review Board’s approval and began with introductions and small talk to create a trusting environment. Each recorded portion of the interviews began with an overview, purpose, and an explanation of the procedural safeguards. The information retrieved from the recorded interviews was transcribed shortly after the face-to-face interviews and coded using the qualitative analysis software program NVIVO.

**Researcher as the Instrument**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher becomes one of the instruments of the study, which could negatively affect the credibility of the study (Patten, 2012; Patton, 2015). The researcher of this study has been in educational leadership positions for 24 years and has conducted hundreds of interviews for numerous purposes in an educational setting. The researcher facilitated the interviews in an environment that was comfortable for the participant. The transcriptions of the interview
were sent to the participant to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the transcriptions and to ensure the neutral and transparent representation of the participant’s responses.

**Field-Testing**

The researcher implemented a field-test of the Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey with a practicing rural superintendent who qualified for the study and was not included in the sample. Upon completion of the survey, the researcher met with the superintendent to gain input about the usefulness of the survey. The researcher asked the superintendent various questions about the survey to elicit responses to ensure the validity of the research instrument. The superintendent was also given a paper copy of the survey to indicate the areas where there were concerns or a lack of clarity. Each of the thematic peer researchers also conducted a field-test of the survey. The researcher and the thematic peer researchers participated in an analysis of the feedback from each of the four participating superintendents regarding the survey statements. Based on the feedback from the participants and the peer researchers, the survey instrument was revised and approved by the faculty and the thematic peer researchers.

The researcher and each thematic peer researcher also conducted a field-test of the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol. The researcher interviewed an experienced rural superintendent well known for building trust with and between board members. Responses were provided by the field-test participant using the Field-Test Participant Feedback Questions (see Appendix I). Feedback was also obtained using the Interview Feedback Reflection Questions (see Appendix J). Finally, the researcher and thematic peer researchers participated in an analysis of the four field-test participants’ feedback on the interview questions and the interview protocol. Based on the feedback
from participants, observers, and peer researchers, the interview instrument was revised and approved by the faculty and the peer researchers.

**Validity and Reliability**

The survey questions developed for this research study were designed by the thematic research team and with the assistance of Brandman University faculty. The survey questions were derived directly from the five domains of trust by Michael Weisman (2016)—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. Because the content of the survey was derived from Weisman’s five domains, the content validity of the survey was established and supported by the literature review in Chapter II of this study.

Creswell (2014) defined validity as whether or not the instrument “items measure the content they were intended to measure” (p. 160) and how different that may look for qualitative contrasted with quantitative data. Confirming the need for both validity and reliability in a study, Creswell also explained reliability as it “refers to whether scores to items on an instrument are internally consistent, stable over time, and whether there was consistency in test administration and scoring” (p. 247).

When quantitative research is collected, validity of data is a concern. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described, quantitative research is easier to analyze because it is relatively straightforward to determine the relationship between independent and dependent variables and to determine whether the effect being sought is influenced by manipulation of these concepts. Because qualitative research can be influenced by interviewers or coder biases, it is important that every method obtainable be used to validate thorough data-collection and data-analysis procedures.
The qualitative interview questions were field-tested for reliability by interviewing a current rural school superintendent who met the criteria standards and was not part of the study. Additionally, an unbiased observer was present during the interview to take notes and provide feedback after the interview on item clarity and bias. The field-test superintendent was provided questions after the interview for clarity of questions and bias. The field-test superintendent reviewed the collected data to ensure that the researcher’s interpretation was correct. The feedback from the field-test yielded no modifications to the interview process.

**Intercoder Reliability**

Intercoder reliability is when a third-party evaluator compares the data and reaches the same conclusions in coding the characteristics as the researcher (Patton, 2015). For the purpose of this thematic study, a peer researcher was selected for intercoder reliability to ensure consistency of the themes. In general, intercoder reliability has reached consistency when a peer researcher has an agreement level of 80% or higher (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research study utilized a peer researcher and obtained an accuracy of themes with an agreement level of 80% or higher.

**Data Collection**

Multiple data sources add to the credibility of the data collected in a case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009). Stake (2005) emphasized the importance of organizing data to prevent the researcher from becoming lost in the data collected. Data collection for this study was through two avenues: an electronic survey for quantitative data collection and face-to-face interviews for qualitative data collection. The data
collection process was created in a straightforward manner in order to reduce ambiguity for both the participant and the researcher.

After receiving approval and permission to proceed with the study from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) the researcher immediately began data collection through the deployment of 15 surveys to exemplary rural superintendents. Confidentiality clauses were included via an e-mail that accompanied the survey link. Following the surveys, the researcher conducted interviews with five exemplary rural superintendents. The researcher took notes during the interview, which allowed the researcher to observe nonverbal cues and make note of body language. Both nonverbal cues and body language notations add to the depth of the interview results. All responses were digitally recorded and transcribed by a confidential transcription service named Rev Voice Recorder.

**Quantitative Data**

Quantitative data were collected through the dissemination of a peer-designed and professionally reviewed instrument in the form of a survey, which was designed and reviewed by the thematic peer researchers and faculty advisors, through the online tool SurveyMonkey. The Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey is a 30-question survey using a 6-point Likert scale—strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree and strongly agree—to indicate level of agreement with the questions. The instrument was administered to 15 exemplary superintendents from rural school districts located throughout four counties in California. Each of the 15 participants was sent the informed consent document along with the link to the survey. The participants were required to indicate they gave consent and were voluntarily
participating in the study before they were able to respond to the survey. All survey questions were protected using a secure, password-protected SurveyMonkey account. The purpose of the study was clearly spelled out at the beginning of the survey, and the confidentiality clauses were made available in an e-mail that accompanied the SurveyMonkey link.

**Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data collected in this study were transcriptions of face-to-face interviews and the electronic coding of those interviews. The interview questions on the Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol were designed and reviewed by the thematic peer researchers and faculty advisors. Patton (2015) reflected upon interviews as “open ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge. Data consist of verbatim quotations with sufficient content to be interpretable” (p. 4). Providing the exemplary rural superintendents opportunities to share experiences, perceptions, opinions, and more were considered when the interview questions were developed.

Coding is the key activity to analyzing qualitative data. The process of coding involves the organization of data by grouping text and word representatives. The groups of data were then collected and processed into categories that were labeled (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), codes should be viewed in three different categories.

1. Codes that may be expected based on common sense and past literature on the topic.
2. Codes that may not be expected or anticipated and appear as a revelation.
3. Codes that are out of the ordinary but may be of interest.
Creswell noted that the coding system allows for data to be presented in a concise manner.

Prior to the interview, each participant received the informed consent document and the audio recording release form, both of which were signed before the start of the interview. These interviews were conducted with five superintendents who met the sample criteria and volunteered via survey. Each interviewer was read the printed interview directions and the same 10 open-ended interview questions. Probes for each question were used if the participant did not address the element of trust contained within the question. Finally, the interview was transcribed with a confidential online transcription service, Rev Voice Recorder, and each participant was sent a copy of his or her transcript to ensure its accuracy and completeness.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the data following the constructs of Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry (2012) in which “data analysis involves identification of patterns in the data from which understandings must be developed and interpretations constructed” (p. 356). In order to apply triangulation to this study, a mixed-methods model was adopted providing data from both qualitative and quantitative sources. The quantitative data were acquired first, followed by the qualitative interviews and their transcription. Upon the completion of the collection of both kinds of data, the data were analyzed to answer the research questions.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

A total of 15 surveys were sent to those exemplary rural superintendents who met the sample selection criteria. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the survey data
obtained. While there are three methods of measuring the central tendency of data in a study: mean, median and mode (Patton, 2015), mean is the most common and is used to describe the average of all data points or in the case of this study, the average Likert score for all participants who completed the survey (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the mean along with the frequency were used in the quantitative analysis of data.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

The goal of the qualitative aspect of this study was to organize the data in order to discover patterns. These patterns allow the researcher to understand and interpret relationships that develop among categories (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher analyzed all data from the five interviews of exemplary rural superintendents collected during the face-to-face interviews. The researcher organized the data by having a third party, online transcription service—Rev Voice Recorder 3.2.1©, transcribe the recordings. The transcription was sent to the participant to provide any necessary feedback to ensure the accuracy and correctness of the participant’s responses to the interview questions.

After reviewing all the data from the interviews, the researcher reflected upon the data and looked for general themes and impressions to develop a complete understanding of the meanings and patterns. The researcher then used coding as a way of organizing the data. Coding allows researchers to identify, name, and categorize data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The patterns and themes from the qualitative data were reviewed based on the statistical findings from the survey. Results were analyzed using standard deviation. Standard deviation is the average distance from the mean based on all the
answers for each individual question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The smaller the standard deviation, the more alike the answers were to each other for each participant. The patterns and themes analysis was also informed by the interrater reliability exercise done with a thematic peer researcher to ensure consistency and accuracy of themes with an agreement level of 80% or higher. The results of this mix-method data analysis guided the researcher in answering the research questions, specifically focusing on how the five domains of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor and connection influence the strategies that exemplary rural superintendents use to build trust with and between school board members.

**Limitations**

Limitations are often out of the researcher’s control and are present in any study. Limitations may have an impact on the results of the research and affect the generalizability of the study (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). This thematic study of trust was replicated by four different peer researchers who utilized the same quantitative and qualitative instruments and methodology. Each researcher focused on a different type of superintendent—urban, suburban, rural and Regional Occupation Centers and Programs (ROCP)—which supported the validity of this study’s findings. In this particular study, the major limitations include the relatively small size of superintendents surveyed (15) and interviewed (five). This small size may affect the generalizability of the study. A variety of other limitations may have affected this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study including the researcher as the instrument, geography, time, and sample size.
Geography

There are more than 14,000 public school districts in the United States (Bureau, 2012). Of the 14,000 school districts, 1,024 school districts are within the state of California, and an analysis of census data shows that 531 of them are considered rural school districts (California Department of Education, n.d.-b; ProximityOne, n.d.; Universal Service Administrative Company, 2018). Because of the geography of the United States, which poses both time and fiscal constraints on the researcher, the sample was narrowed to public rural school districts within the state of California. The researcher chose four counties—Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties—to conduct the study. These geographical constraints aided the researcher in conducting the interviews and surveys within a reasonable amount of time.

Time

Research could not be conducted until after the Brandman University Institutional Review Board granted approval. As a result, data collection had to occur at the start of the holiday season when superintendents were not easily accessible because of work schedules. Superintendents are among the busiest people in education and society; therefore, the interviews had to be restricted to no more than 60 minutes in order to respect their schedule.

Sample Size

The use of convenience sample for this study—15 exemplary rural superintendents for the survey and five exemplary rural superintendents for the interviews, all within the geographical boundaries of Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties in California—could limit the generalizability of the
results to the total population of superintendents. This thematic study of trust was replicated by four different peer researchers, who utilized the same quantitative and qualitative instruments and methodology but focused on different types of superintendents—urban, suburban, rural and ROCP—which supported the validity of this study’s findings. There were a variety of limitations that may have affected this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study including the researcher as the instrument, geography, time, and sample size.

Summary

Chapter III discussed the methodology and design used to gain information on strategies used by exemplary K-12 superintendents from rural school districts who build trust with and between school board members. Included in the discussion in Chapter III was a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions, noted below, which provided a focus to the study:

1. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?
Also included in this chapter were the selected instrumentation, population and sample, validity and reliability, the data analyses, and finally limitations. Chapter IV presents data analysis from the quantitative and qualitative data collected in this study. Chapter IV also summarizes the finding and results of the research. Further, Chapter V discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study identified and described the strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceived as most important to build trust with school board members. The domains used for studying trust included competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. The quantitative analysis surveyed 15 rural exemplary superintendents regarding the most important strategies to build trust. This quantitative analysis resulted in numerical descriptors identifying the order of importance of each strategy.

The qualitative section includes deeper analysis through interviews with five exemplary superintendents from Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties. This chapter begins with a review of the purpose statement and research questions. It also summarizes the population and sample used for the study. The chapter then explores the research methodology and discusses the data collection procedures. The data collected from the quantitative are presented in a narrative summation followed by a table format. Qualitative interviews are addressed in a narrative format and a graphical representation of each domain.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this
study to identify and describe strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust between school board members.

**Research Questions**

1. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?
5. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This research study is an explanatory mixed-methods that was used to answer five specific research questions. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as “the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone” (p. 4). This quantitative and qualitative analysis will enrich the reader to understand the strategies exemplary rural superintendents use to build trust with and between school board members.

The quantitative portion of the study was obtained through the deployment of an electronic survey to 15 exemplary rural superintendents from Ventura, Santa Barbara,
San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties. From these data, an analysis of the mean and standard deviation was generated. The qualitative portion was obtained through a face-to-face interview with five exemplary rural superintendents also from Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties, and each interview was scheduled for 1 hour in length.

**Interview and Survey Data Collection**

The quantitative survey was deployed using the electronic tool SurveyMonkey. The electronic survey was sent to 15 exemplary rural superintendents. The quantitative survey provided to exemplary superintendents summarized the related behaviors to each specific domain being studied. Data collection was anonymous. Data were stored electronically on a password-protected computer.

The qualitative data were collected through five face-to-face interviews with exemplary rural superintendents. The identities of the exemplary rural superintendents remained confidential throughout the study. Each participant was asked the same questions in the same order because the researcher used interview prompts developed by the peer thematic researchers. The interview included two questions related to each domain studied: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. The interviews were recorded using a digital recording device, and the researcher also took notes manually throughout the interview as well as observing behaviors and body language. Audio recordings were then transcribed using the online service called Rev Voice Recorder. Transcriptions were then coded for emergent themes. After compilation of quantitative and qualitative measures, the data were interpreted to ensure consistency and strength (Patton, 2015).
Interrater Reliability

According to Patton (2015), interrater reliability is when a third-party evaluator reads and compares the data and reaches the same conclusion in coding the domains as the researchers. The third-party evaluator was selected to ensure the accuracy of the themes. The themes were identified as being closely related. The peer researcher identified patterns, themes, and conclusions that were closely related to those identified by the researcher.

Population

A research population is known as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics, particularly having common and binding characteristics allowing for generalized results through research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Weiss & Weiss, 2012). Patten (2012) considered the population as the group from which the researcher will ultimately choose the research sample. The population is typically very large, which would be prohibitive in terms of time and effort from which to gather data (Patten, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, the larger population included over 14,000 public school districts within the United States and therefore over 14,000 superintendents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The number of superintendents decreases to 1,024 in California. Because of time and fiscal constraints, it was not possible to study this larger population. To further narrow the population of this study, there are a total of 531 rural school districts in California (California Department of Education, n.d.-b). To survey and interview the entire 531 superintendents would be a monumental task and not feasible because of fiscal and time constraints; therefore, the population was narrowed even
further to identify a target population of exemplary rural superintendents in Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties.

Sample

According to Patton (2015), a sample “is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested” (p. 45). A purposeful convenience reputational sample was used for this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that purposeful sampling “selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest” (p. 138). In this case study, the researcher purposefully sampled rural superintendents. The purposeful sample used in this study was narrowed to 15 exemplary rural superintendents for the survey and five exemplary superintendents for the interviews, all within the geographical boundaries of Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties in California.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that a convenience sample “is a nonprobability sample . . . in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience or availability” (p. 150). It was convenient for the researcher to limit the sample pool to rural superintendents in Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties in the State of California in order to address limitations such as time and cost. The sample size for the quantitative portion of this mixed-methods study was limited to 15 superintendents for each of the thematic peer researchers. The sample size for the qualitative interviews was limited to five superintendents for each of the thematic peer researchers. These sample sizes were determined and reviewed by the thematic peer researchers and the Brandman University faculty advisors.
The exemplary superintendents selected to participate in the study who have successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members needed to meet four of the five criteria (see Table 2) listed as follows:

1. Three or more years as a superintendent in their current district.
2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training.
3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA Conference.
4. Evidence of positive superintendent, board and community relationships.
5. Recommended by a retired superintendent who is a member of a North/South Superintendent’s Group and county superintendents.

Table 2. Criteria Selection for Exemplary Rural Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three or more years as a superintendent in their current district</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent and board have participated in governance training</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent participated in annual CSBA Conference</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of positive superintendent, board and community relationships</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by a retired superintendent who is a member of a North/South Superintendent’s Group and County superintendents</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographic Data

The participants for the quantitative interviews were sent a SurveyMonkey link in an e-mail. A total of 15 surveys were deployed, and 15 surveys were answered for 100% response. The survey asked respondents to report on the degree of importance to which
they believe competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection were used to create trust between a superintendent and his or her school board.

The participants for the qualitative interviews were all identified as exemplary rural superintendents. Five exemplary rural superintendents were selected and met the criteria as noted above in the previous Sample section. The five exemplary rural superintendents who volunteered to participate in the study ranged in years of superintendency experience from 4 to 13 years and have been in education for a minimum of 16 to a maximum of 33 years. Two of the superintendents were female and three were male (see Table 3). The participants who served as exemplary rural superintendents answered 10 questions relating to the five domains of trust.

Table 3. Demographics of Exemplary Rural Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Supe 1</th>
<th>Supe 2</th>
<th>Supe 3</th>
<th>Supe 4</th>
<th>Supe 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in current position as superintendent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total years in education</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The presentation and analysis of data were collected both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative results were obtained through an electronic survey to 15 exemplary rural superintendents. The qualitative data were gathered through five face-to-face personal interviews with identified exemplary rural superintendents. The findings from both the surveys and the interviews are reported below in relation to how each research question was answered.
The quantitative online survey used a 6-point Likert scale and each answer was assigned the following numerical values: *strongly disagree* = 1; *disagree* = 2; *disagree somewhat* = 3; *agree somewhat* = 4; *agree* = 5; and *strongly agree* = 6. The exemplary superintendents were requested to answer 30 questions based on their perception and knowledge of building trust with and between their school board members.

The tables listing the data depict the mean and standard deviation for each set of responses. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that when working with a data set, it can be useful to represent all of the data with a single value that describes the “middle” or “average” value of the entire set. In statistics, that single value is called the central tendency. There are three ways to describe the central tendency (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data on the following pages use the mean to describe the central tendency. To find the mean, the values in the data were added, then divided by the number of participants who completed the survey. The second statistical measure used with these data was standard deviation. Standard deviation is the average distance from the mean based on all the answers for each individual question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The smaller the standard deviation, the more alike the answers were to each other for each participant.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question asked, “What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?” For the purpose of this study, the definition of competence is the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (S. M. R. Covey,
This definition of competence is used to describe both the quantitative and qualitative data.

**Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

The quantitative data analysis for responses from the SurveyMonkey as related to the domain of competence is shown in Table 4. As seen in the chart, the statement with the highest score was “I promote collaborative decision-making with the governance team.” This statement had a mean of 5.67 with 10 superintendents who stated they strongly agree that they promote collaborative decision-making. This question also had the smallest deviation of 0.49, which indicates that the 15 exemplary rural superintendents had similar responses to the statement that they collaborate with the governance team. The collaborative decision-making with the governance team finding is supported through the research by Mark A. Wilson, President of Center for Systems Management (CSM), which serves clients worldwide in project management, systems engineering, and process improvement. Wilson (2003) stated that an effective leader systematically forms decisions from a solid foundation of goals, objectives, and relevant information.

The data result that tied with the total mean of 5.67 was “I work with the board members to achieve the district goals.” Though the mean was the same, the standard deviation varied slightly at 0.62. This finding is supported and evidenced in the article “Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards” (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011), which referenced effective school boards who gave examples of how they connected and listened to the community, but more importantly received information from different sources, including the superintendent.
Table 4. *Summation of the Competence Domain and its Related Behavior*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I focus the work of board members on the quality of services the district provides to students, staff and community</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work with the board members to achieve the district’s goals.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I promote the capability of school board members.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>3 20.0%</td>
<td>6 40.0%</td>
<td>6 40.0%</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I promote collaborative decision-making with the governance team.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>5 33.3%</td>
<td>10 66.7%</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I lead vision setting and manage the strategic actions of the school district.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>8 53.3%</td>
<td>7 46.7%</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall degree of importance</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>5 5.5%</td>
<td>38 42.2%</td>
<td>47 52.2%</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes the number and percentage of respondents as well as the mean and standard deviation.
The third highest degree of importance as found in the survey related to competence was “I focus the work of board members on the quality of services the district provides to student, staff and community.” This statement had a total mean of 5.53, with a standard deviation of 0.64. Leading with vision and managing the strategic actions of school districts had a mean of 5.47 with a standard deviation of 0.52, indicating that the superintendents were nearly split between agree and strongly agree with eight superintendents agreeing and seven strongly agreeing. The two remaining competence domains include, “I promote the capability of school board members” and “I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow.” These two related behaviors had a total mean of 5.27 and 5.20 respectively and standard deviations of 0.56 and 0.77. The question related to “I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow” had the most diverse answers with six each agreeing and strongly agreeing and three agreeing only somewhat. As it relates to the six statements regarding the area of competence, it is evident that all 15 exemplary rural superintendents have similarity in their responses to these statements because the overall area of competence had a total score of 5.47.

Competence is an important aspect (domain) of leadership as supported in evidence from a study by Bolman and Deal (2003) that found superintendents who possess critical personal qualities important to leadership such as competence, vision, commitment to core beliefs, the ability to inspire trust and build relationships, work ethic, and genuine concern for their work and for other people prepare them to be successful in their field. This statement from Bolman and Deal’s (2003) study supports the fact that competence is an important domain for superintendents to work with their board to achieve district goals and to promote collaboration within the governance team.
Qualitative Data and Analysis

Table 5 shows the various themes as they relate to the codes in the domain of competence and the related percentages of the overall domain codes. For the domain of competence, the highest frequency of themes was Communication with 11 of 46 codes related to communication. Superintendent 4 commented, “It is really important to communicate when something affects one or more of the board members personally.” Her further stated, “Making sure I am always available for board members and communication is always flowing.” Credible and reliable came in with the second highest frequency with nine of the 46 codes. Relationships was third with eight of the 46 codes. Governance and Behaviors and Decision-Making appeared at the same frequency of six each. Superintendent 4 stated, “Just being transparent and communicating and being honest and everybody is there for the right reason I think plays a big factor in the success that our district has had.” Superintendent 2 stated, “Getting to competence is making sure a lot of training is involved and processes are used to make the best decisions certainly matters.”

Table 5. Total Number of Codes for the Domain Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible and reliable</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviors and decision-making</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competence Strategy Summary

The trust domain of competence was addressed in Research Question 1. The analysis for both the quantitative and qualitative data discovered the exemplary rural superintendents perceived the most important strategy for building trust with and between school board members for trust. The most important strategies were communication and being credible and reliable. Although all themes in this domain scored very similarly. Superintendent 1 stated,

The Friday Update takes a lot of time to complete because of a lack of time during the week. However, due to the limited communication time with board members during the week and it is vital to provide board members a weekly Friday Update which focuses on agreed-upon goals with the board and providing timely and relevant information.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, “What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?” For the purpose of this study, consistency was defined as the confidence that a person’s pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using this definition.

Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation

Table 6 shows the summation of the data compiled from the SurveyMonkey as it related to the theme of consistency. The prompt, “I keep commitments to board members” rose to the top of the consistency theme with a score of 5.73 and a standard
deviation of 0.46. Eleven of the 15 superintendents surveyed strongly agree that keeping commitments to board members is a top priority. Similarly, the review of the literature supports the same analysis from a quote by S. M. R. Covey (2006): “Keeping commitments is based on the principles of integrity, performance, courage and humility. It is the perfect balance of character and competence. The ability to do what you say you are going to do—competence” (00:03:34).

It is interesting to note that following the importance of keeping commitments to board members, the second highest statement was “I make commitments to board members that I can keep,” which scored 5.4. It is noted that the standard deviation for this statement was 1.3, which was a result of one out of the 15 superintendents surveyed who stated that he strongly disagrees with this statement. “I hold myself and board members accountable for actions” and “I create an environment where board members have an opportunity to accomplish goals and responsibilities” were both equivalent at 5.33 with standard deviations of 0.62. Yet, one superintendent disagreed with the fact that he creates an environment where board members have the ability to accomplish their goals and responsibilities.

The next statement, “I let board members know what is expected from them as members of a governance team” had a mean of 5.2 and a standard deviation of 1.26. Again, 14 of the 15 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, yet there was one outlier who strongly disagreed with this statement causing the standard deviation to increase. The statement with the lowest mean was “I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities.” This statement had 12 of the 15
Table 6. *Summation of the Consistency Domain and its Related Behavior*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I create an environment where board members have opportunity to accomplish their goals and responsibilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I let board members know what is expected from them as members of a governance team.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Agree somewhat</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Total mean</td>
<td>Stand. dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make commitments to board members I can keep.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep my commitments to board members.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hold myself and board members accountable for actions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall degree of importance</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes the number and percentage of respondents as well as the mean and standard deviation.
superintendents who agreed or strongly agreed, yet in this instance three superintendents strongly disagreed causing a large standard deviation.

The statement, “I keep commitments to my board members” as being the highest mean in the survey results aligned with the literature as Fullan (2002) noted, leaders who are effective are able to synergize commitment with a strong vision and higher accountability and performance standards, to go further beyond, and build an everlasting legacy. Similarly, “I make commitments to board members I can keep” also discussed commitments as important but simply scored lower because of one outlying superintendent. So, commitments are a high priority, which was also supported by the literature.

**Qualitative Data**

In the consistency domain communication, as depicted in Table 7, had the highest frequency of responses at 36%. Communication with the board must be consistent. During a face-to-face interview with Superintendent 3, the importance of consistently sharing communication with board members was expressed. Superintendent 3 stated, “It is important to get to know board members on a more personal basis by sharing personal stories and meeting with them regularly. This leads to trust.” The second and third themes, Credible and Reliable and Handles Difficult Situations, both came in with a frequency of 25% each. When speaking with Superintendent 2, she concurred that being credible or reliable is important by stating, “To avoid tough moments, leadership that is reliable and dependable means that no matter how difficult the conversation, the decision and the issue, is to be physically, mentally, intellectually, emotionally present at all
times.” The theme of Governance under the domain of consistency was spoken of least frequently with a response rate of 14%.

Table 7. Total Number of Codes for the Domain Consistency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible and reliable</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handles difficult situations</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consistency Strategy Summary**

Research Question 2 addressed the domain of consistency. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicate exemplary rural superintendents establish strategies of trust through consistent behaviors that include keeping their commitment to board members and a high level of communication on a regular basis. Superintendent 3 stated the importance of having regular communication with board members and provided the example of speaking to every board member (practically daily) when picking up their children from school. He stated the individual conversations establish strong relationships. Superintendent 2 commented, “Making sure that we (superintendent and board) stay connected through the shared understanding of a goal and how the board and superintendent need to be consistent in the messaging to all stakeholders.”

Superintendent 1 said that to be transparent, she shares with the board when making large expenditures and after confirming the district has sufficient funds for the item. She ensures the board that the money is spent wisely. She further commented, “My audits are always clean so that builds credibility and reliability because the board knows I’m going to check every angle.”
Research Question 3

The third research question asked, “What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?” For the purpose of this study, the definition of concern is the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability and support and motivate and care for each other (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; S. M. R. Covey, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016). This definition of concern will be used to describe both quantitative and qualitative data.

Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation

Under the domain of concern, the statement: “I treat each board member positively and with respect” had a mean of 5.73 and a standard deviation of 0.46 as shown in Table 8. Eleven of the 15 superintendents surveyed strongly agree that treating board members with respect is an important strategy for building trust with board members. In his article “Trust, Loyalty, Candor: 3 Must-Haves for Your Business,” Mendoza (2015) stated, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care. That’s how you earn trust: You demonstrate that you care” (para. 3). The statement “I demonstrate respect and concern for each board member” had a mean of 5.67 and a standard deviation of 0.49. Similar to the highest scoring statement, respect and concern aid in building trust with school board members. The next two statements “I am patient with the questions and issues of interest to board members” and “I take time to
Table 8. *Summation of the Concern Domain and its Related Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I take time to meet personally with each board member to understand their concerns.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>1 6.7%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7 46.7%</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I demonstrate appropriate work and life balance.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>1 6.7%</td>
<td>1 6.7%</td>
<td>6 40.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 13.3%</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a good listener.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>1 6.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5 33.3%</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I treat each board member positively and with respect.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11 73.3%</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Agree somewhat</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Total mean</td>
<td>Stand. dev.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am patient with the questions and issues of interest to board members.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I demonstrate respect and concern for each board member.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall degree of importance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes the number and percentage of respondents as well as the mean and standard deviation.
personally meet with each board member to understand their concerns” were very similar at 5.47 and 5.40. “I am a good listener” had a total mean of 5.27 and a standard deviation of 0.59, yet the lowest statement as to the degree of importance of concern comes with the statement “I demonstrate appropriate work and life balance,” which came in at the lowest total mean score of 4.4 and the largest standard deviation of 1.06. Two of the 15 superintendents either disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement, six somewhat agreed, five agreed, and only two strongly agreed. From this data analysis, it would appear that though having a work-life balance may be an important strategy to create trust with school board members, the superintendents surveyed did not score as highly in this regard.

**Qualitative Data**

In the concern domain, as shown in Table 9, respect had the highest frequency of responses at 27%. During a face-to-face interview, Superintendent 4 stated, “Putting everybody in good position to be helpful, I think that’s made a big difference. Just respecting what people bring to the table and making sure that we take advantage of those strengths.” When speaking of concern, Superintendent 5 communicated, “I put the greater good of all ahead of my own self-interest. You have to care about their well-being.” Communication, which was a common theme among all domains, was a close second with a frequency of 25%. As stated by Townsend et al. (2007), it is a crucial job for superintendents to guide board members through the maze of legal mandates, instructional expectations, and the enormous number of policies to move a district forward to meet the many needs of students and parents (Townsend et al., 2007). This can only be done through constant communication and effective leadership (Garcia,
The third and fourth domains, Governance and Relationships, were discussed 14% of the time during the interviews. Interestingly, the theme of Shared Voice was listed seven times for 11%. Superintendent 1 shared,

We sit together, share out, put ourselves out on a limb on an idea, and no one’s going to shoot it down. We are always going to listen, and in the end, though, we come up with a decision as a group that we are going to move forward with.

The sixth and final theme, Taking Ownership, had the lowest frequency of six and a response rate of 9%. Regarding taking ownership, Superintendent 1 also said, “Failures are learning opportunities. Our failures turn into great growth.” In the superintendent’s Friday Update, ownership is discussed often. Superintendent 1 stated, “I really don’t leave anything out. I talk about my failures and how I’ve learned, and what I need to do to improve.”

Table 9. Total Number of Codes for the Domain Concern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared voice</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking ownership</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Concern Strategy Summary**

Research Question 3 addressed the domain of concern. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicate exemplary rural superintendents establish strategies of
trust through establishing mutual respect and consistent communication with the

governing board as a whole.

**Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 asked, “What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive
as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members
through candor?” For the purpose of the study, candor was defined as communicating
information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide
such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran,
2014; Weisman, 2016). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using this
definition of candor.

**Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

The summation of the candor domain and its related strategies are shown in Table
10. The statement, “I engage board members in discussions about the direction and
vision for the district” scored the highest with a 5.73 mean and a 0.46 standard deviation.
All 15 superintendents either agree or strongly agree that engaging board members in the
vision for the district is an important strategy to build trust with and between school
board members. The second most important statement came in with a mean of 5.6 and a
standard deviation of 0.63 and stated “I take on issues head-on, even the undiscussables.”
Three of the statements: “I engage in open communication with all board members,”
“I share openly with board members when things are going wrong,” and “I am open,
authentic, and straightforward with all board members” had equivalent means of 5.53.
The first two statements had a standard deviation of 0.52, and the third had a standard
Table 10. Summation of the Candor Domain and its Related Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candor</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I engage in open communication with all board members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I share openly with board members when things are going wrong.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I engage board members in discussions about the direction and vision for the district.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candor</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I create a safe environment where board members feel free to have differences of opinion.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am open, authentic, and straightforward with all board members.</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>2 13.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I take on issues head on, even the undiscussables</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>1 6.7%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall degree of importance</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>0 0.0%</td>
<td>3 3.3%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Includes the number and percentage of respondents as well as the mean and standard deviation.
deviation of 0.74 because two superintendents only somewhat agreed with being open, authentic, and straight-forward, whereas 13 either agreed or strongly agreed. The lowest mean as to the degree of importance that candor builds trust was 5.40 with the statement, “I create a safe environment where board members feel free to have differences of opinion.” The standard deviation was 0.51 for this statement.

**Qualitative Data**

The theme that had the highest frequency of responses was Communication with 39% of the responses as shown in Table 11. Superintendent 4 summarized this point by saying,

If it’s good for our kids and good for our board, I just really need to be open-minded when communicating. Knowing there’s always other people out there that know more than I do and being able to listen and make decisions that are best for the school, kids, and district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence and engagement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared voice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second highest theme was Relationships at 23%, closely followed by Presence and Engagement at 20%. Superintendent 3 concurred that engagement and presence is important when the superintendent said, “I put a note on every kid’s report card. . . . I’ve been doing it since 1994.” The final two themes of candor include
accessibility at 10% and a shared voice at 8%. Superintendent 2 stated, “making sure we have parameters in place for everybody’s voice is not only heard but that everybody feels and trusts that they can speak candidly.” Superintendent 2 went on to say, “Trust is built when, as a leader, you praise publicly and criticize privately.” Similarly, Dubrin (2001) encouraged leaders to always tell the truth. He stated, “It is much easier to be consistent when you do not have to keep patching up your story to conform to an earlier lie” (p. 31).

**Candor Strategy Summary**

The trust domain of candor was addressed in Research Question 4. The analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data discovered that exemplary rural superintendents perceived the most important strategy for building trust with and between school board members for candor are communication, relationships, and simply being present and engaged.

**Research Question 5**

Research Question 5 asked, “*What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?*” For the purpose of the study, connection was defined as a shared link or bond in which there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White et al., 2016).

**Quantitative Data Analysis and Presentation**

The summation data for the domain of connection are shown in Table 12. In the quantitative data analysis, the theme with the highest score was the statement, “I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues” with a mean of 5.73 and a standard deviation of 0.46. Eleven out of 15 of the exemplary rural superintendents agree that listening
Table 12. *Summation of the Connection Domain and its Related Behaviors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Agree somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Total mean</th>
<th>Stand. dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am accepting to and receptive to the ideas and opinions of all board members.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am truthful, and frank in all interpersonal communication s with board members.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I display behavior that is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school district.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>Agree somewhat</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Total mean</td>
<td>Stand. dev.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give voice to the district vision and shared values of the district.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I engaged board members in recognition and celebrations of school district successes.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall degree of importance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Includes the number and percentage of respondents as well as the mean and standard deviation.
carefully to understand and clarify issues is an important strategy to build trust with and between school board members through connection. Two other statements in the quantitative survey had the same mean of 5.67 and a standard deviation of 0.49. These two statements are “I display behavior that is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school district” and “I give voice to the district vision and shared values.” Both of these statements discussed values of the school district and displayed behaviors that align equally and are strongly supported by superintendents. The next statement regarding the degree of perceived importance of connection is: “I am truthful and frank in all interpersonal communications with board members,” which had a mean of 5.6 and a standard deviation of 0.51. Celebrating success and recognition of board members came in next at 5.47 and a standard deviation of 0.64. Finally, the lowest scoring theme within connection is “I am accepting to and receptive to the ideas and opinions of all board members.” Six out of the 15 superintendents strongly agree with this statement, yet only eight agree and one only somewhat agrees.

**Qualitative Data**

The frequency of the themes in the qualitative interviews as it relates to the domains of connection is shown in Table 13. The highest frequency of the themes for the domain of connection was that of shared vision at 31%. This was significantly higher than the next three, which came in at 18% and were about communication. Superintendent 1 concurred with the importance of a shared vision by stating, “Trust stems from leading by example and being consistent, sharing values, and expressing them on a regular basis.” Following communication, the frequency of relationships was close behind at 16%. Superintendent 5 shared the value and importance of putting the greater
### Table 13. **Total Number of Codes for the Domain Connection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared vision</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty and integrity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Good of all ahead of self-interests. Listening and Honesty/Integrity were two themes under the domain of connection with a frequency of 13% each. Superintendent 3 shared how it is okay for superintendents to be a little vulnerable with their board in an open and genuine way. In Superintendent 1’s Friday Update, the leader stated, “I really don’t leave anything out. I talk about failures and how I’ve learned, and what I need to do to grow as a leader.” Governance was the least frequent theme at 9%. Though still an important strategy, building trust between and with the school board, governance appeared at a lower frequency under the domain of connection. These strategies show that communication and relationships are vital within the domain of connection. As is supported by the research, S. Covey (1989) concurred that deep integrity and fundamental character strengths must be present to have long term success. Finally, when building relationships, leaders identify that satisfaction does not come from higher salaries, “but in most studies workers say they would trade a higher salary for less tangible more values-based rewards like appreciation and a sense of camaraderie with a team” (Weisman, 2016, p. 121).
Summary of Qualitative Data

As the data were tabulated and finalized, the domains were listed in Table 14 from most frequently mentioned to least frequently. All five exemplary superintendents believed all five domains were important; however, during their interviews connection and candor were discussed more often than the other three domains. It is important to note that there were only three tenths of a percentage difference from the first to the last domain.

Table 14. Mean Scores of Quantitative Survey Results for Each Domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candor</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Connection Strategy Summary

Research Question 5 addressed the domain of connection. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis discovered what exemplary rural superintendents perceived as the most important strategy for building trust with and between school board members through connection. These strategies include a shared vision, communication, and relationships, and listening and having honesty and integrity.

Summary

The quantitative and qualitative results in Chapter IV supported the five domains of trust: competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection that exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important to build trust with and between school
board members. It is interesting to note that in the qualitative data analysis, the five domains as discussed by Weisman (2016) resulted in such a similar percentage as shown in the graphic in Figure 5 indicating that all five domains are important. The range from the lowest to the highest domain is only 5% with some of the domains only having a 1% difference.

![Figure 5. Qualitative results of the five domains of trust on overall response codes.](image)

The order of importance by domain as identified by the exemplary rural superintendents through the quantitative data is listed below, showing again that the five domains are very similar in their overall response averages as *agree* or *strongly agree*:

- Connection 5.58
- Candor 5.55
- Competence 5.47
- Concern 5.32
- Consistency 5.28
The overall finding was that connection (Relationships) and candor (Trust, Honesty, Transparency) are most vital in developing trust with and between school board members. Ventura (2008) believed the best leaders are regularly around those they lead, making connections with employees. Leaders have to work alongside employees to make a positive impact on their work and careers. According to Ventura (2008), “No matter how many additional duties and responsibilities that comes at a leader, they must strike a balance . . . and still stay connected and accessible to their employees” (p. 44). Finally, and simply stated, candor is necessary for building trust in relationships (S. M. R. Covey, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Chapter V begins with an overview of the research study, a statement of the purpose statement, research questions, methods, population, and sample. The chapter then describes the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions from the findings, implication for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed-methods study was to identify and describe what strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust with school board members using the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies exemplary rural superintendents perceive as most important to build trust between school board members.

Research Questions

1. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through competence?
2. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through consistency?
3. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through concern?
4. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through candor?

5. What do exemplary rural superintendents perceive as the most important strategies to build trust with and between school board members through connection?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This research study was an explanatory mixed-methods study that was used to answer five specific research questions. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods study is explained by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as “the integration of qualitative and quantitative data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone” (p. 4). This quantitative and qualitative analysis will enrich the reader to understand the strategies exemplary rural superintendents use to build trust with and between and school board members.

The quantitative portion of the study was obtained through the deployment of an electronic survey to 15 exemplary rural superintendents from Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties. From these data, an analysis of the mean and standard deviation was generated. The qualitative portion was obtained through a face-to-face interview with five exemplary rural superintendents also from Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties. The interview was scheduled for one-hour in length through the use of an interview schedule developed by the peer researchers in the trust thematic study.

**Population**

A research population is known as a well-defined collection of individuals or objects known to have similar characteristics, particularly having common and binding
characteristics allowing for generalized results through research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Weiss & Weiss, 2012). Patten (2012) considered the population as the group from which the researcher will ultimately choose the research sample. The population is typically very large, which would be prohibitive in terms of time and effort from which to gather data (Patten, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, the larger population included over 14,000 public school districts within the United States and therefore over 14,000 superintendents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The number of superintendents decreases to 1,024 in California. To further narrow the population of this study, there are a total of 531 rural school districts in California (California Department of Education, n.d.-b). To survey and interview the entire 531 superintendents would be a monumental task and not feasible because of fiscal and time constraints; therefore, the population was narrowed even further to identify a target population of exemplary rural superintendents in Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties.

Sample

According to Patton (2015), a sample “is the group in which researchers are ultimately interested” (p. 45). The use of a purposeful convenience reputational sample was used for this study. Purposeful sampling “selects particular elements from the population that will be representative or informative about the topic of interest” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 138). In this case study, the researcher purposefully sampled rural superintendents. The purposeful sample used in this study was narrowed to 15 exemplary rural superintendents for the survey and five exemplary superintendents for
the interviews, all within the geographical boundaries of Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties in California.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that a convenience sample “is a nonprobability sample . . . in which respondents are chosen based on their convenience or availability” (p. 150). It was convenient for the researcher to limit the sample pool to rural superintendents in Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Monterey Counties in the State of California in order to address limitations such as time and cost. The sample size for the quantitative portion of this mixed-methods study was limited to 15 superintendents for each of the thematic peer researchers. The sample size for the qualitative interviews was limited to five superintendents for each of the thematic peer researchers. These sample sizes were determined and reviewed by the thematic peer researchers and the Brandman University faculty advisors.

The superintendents selected to participate in the study, who have successfully utilized strategies to build trust with and between board members, needed to meet four of the five criteria listed as follows:

1. Three or more years as a superintendent in his or her current district.

2. Superintendent and board have participated in governance training.

3. Superintendent participated in annual CSBA Conference.

4. Evidence of positive superintendent, board, and community relationships.

5. Recommended by a retired superintendent who is a member of a North/South Superintendent’s Group and county superintendents.
Major Findings

Several major findings from this research study were found and are organized by research question. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with five exemplary rural superintendents to answer five research questions. The researcher asked study participants open-ended, guided interview questions about strategies used to build trust with and between school board members using the domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection.

Major Finding 1: All Five Domains Are Important

The first major finding of the trust research with exemplary rural superintendents was that all superintendents concurred that all five domains—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection—were found to be important when building trust with and between school board members. The quantitative data supported the five domains as having a relatively high level of importance, which can be seen in the mean scores, ranging between 5.28 and 5.58, meaning that all superintendents surveyed agree or strongly agree that the five domains overall are important to building trust with and between board members. Further, the qualitative analysis resulted in each domain being very similar in importance to the superintendents who were interviewed.

As Weisman’s (2016) work from the Values Institute indicated the five domains of competence, consistency, concern, candor and connection are all important to developing trust. Weisman (2016) stated, “Changing a culture takes time, earning trust takes time, and time is a precious commodity” (p. 3). With time and effort, superintendents can focus on the five domains to build trust with and between their school board members.
Major Finding 2: Communication is Key

The second major overarching finding from the study was that communication is a critical function and transcends all domains. Communication was consistently mentioned during the qualitative interviews as an important component for building trust with and between superintendents and board members. The superintendents emphasized the need for constant, open, and honest conversations with board members. Similarly, the readings from Tschannen-Moran, S. M. R. Covey, and others support the importance that communication plays in building and maintaining trust in relationships.

Retired school board member Nicolas Caruso, Jr. (2005) said, “Two words come to mind when developing a high-performance team between the superintendent and board are trust and communication. If either is lacking, superintendents must find a way to develop it or face difficult times” (para. 6). As stated by one interviewed superintendent, “My number one method of building trust is communicating regularly—openly and honestly.”

**Be consistent and timely with communication.** The qualitative data demonstrated communication had the highest frequency with 11 of 46 codes. As mentioned earlier, communication was discussed numerous times by all superintendents and across all five domains. Superintendents’ recorded responses related to timely and consistent communication were deemed vital to building trust with their board members. Researcher Kowalski (2005b) shared in his article “Evolution of the School Superintendent as Communicator” that movement toward improving superintendent communication competence is weakened by three deficits: (a) failure to define competency in relation to the position, (b) absence of curricular guidelines for achieving
competency, and (c) the absence of criteria for assessing competency. Current theory and research provide avenues for elevating the value placed on communication in professional preparation for school superintendents.

**Consistently share communications with board.** During a face-to-face interview with Superintendent 3, the importance of consistently sharing communication with board members was expressed. The strategy of using a Friday Board Update to regularly communicate, e-mails or simple text messages with timely relevant information shared as very important to keep board members informed and to reduce the likelihood news would be received from the public before being told from the superintendent. Smith (2012) stated, “Superintendents who focus on their communication skills and develop a trusting relationship with their school board members demonstrate a commonality among successful superintendents” (p. viii).

**Deliver clear, concise communication to board.** Qualitative data supported that communication, which was a common theme among all domains, was discussed 25% during face-to-face interviews. As stated by Townsend, Johnston, and others, it is a crucial job for superintendents to guide board members through the maze of legal mandates, instructional expectations, and the enormous number of policies to move a district forward to meet the many needs of students and parents in their district (Townsend et al., 2007). This can only be done through constant communication and effective leadership (Garcia, 2012).

**Be open-minded when communicating.** It is imperative a superintendent communicate effectively with school board members to build trust and ease the navigation through difficult times (Kowalski, 2005b). During a face-to-face interview,
Superintendent 4 shared, “I think another important thing is whenever we do make decisions to really look at the pros and cons of what the decision could bring. Leaders need to be open-minded.” Superintendents must master communication, stated Waters and Marzano (2006), in order to hear, organize, and operationalize the interests of the board. In other words, be open-minded.

**Listen carefully to understand and clarify issues.** Eleven of the exemplary rural superintendents who participated in the online survey strongly agreed that listening carefully to understand and clarify issues is an important strategy to build trust with and between school board members through connection. School district superintendents are always being observed. Every word and action are listened to and watched by all district stakeholders which includes staff, teachers, parents, and community members. As a result, it is critical for superintendents to strategically think and consider every conversation and action (Henry & Reidy, 2005). There are concrete steps to building trust, including knowing how to listen, knowing when to speak, and owning bias; these action steps are crucial (Bennis, 1999; S. Covey, 2001; Weisman, 2016).

**Major Finding 3: Regularly Use Collaborative Decision-Making**

All exemplary rural superintendents in this study agreed or strongly agreed that collaborative decision-making is important to creating a single vision on which to focus. Similarly, it was stated by Superintendent 1 that collaborating on a shared vision was vital to promoting the mission and vision of the district and providing a focus on common goals and objectives. Superintendents need to avoid making unilateral decisions that do not align with the board’s shared values. Focusing on the board’s shared values provides the superintendent a sense of what to work on for the year. The collaborative decision-
making finding is supported through the research by Mark A. Wilson, President of Center for Systems Management (CSM), which serves clients worldwide in project management, systems engineering, and process improvement. Wilson (2003) stated that an effective leader systematically forms decisions from a solid foundation of goals, objectives, and relevant information.

**Major Finding 4: Work as a Team to Achieve District Goals**

Nearly 75% of the superintendents surveyed strongly agreed that working closely with their board members to achieve district goals is important to build trust. Further, the qualitative analysis supported the same when several superintendents commented on the necessity of demonstrating a team concept. Superintendents working closely with their board members to achieve district goals was strongly supported and evidenced in the article “Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards” (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011), which referenced effective school boards who gave examples of how they connected and listened to the community, but more importantly received information from different sources, including the superintendent.

**Major Finding 5: Keep Commitments With Board Members**

Superintendent participants shared their agreement on the importance of keeping commitments with their board. The quantitative data showed that 100% of the superintendents surveyed either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that one must keep their commitments with the board members. Furthermore, the majority of superintendents surveyed stated they strongly agreed that they make commitments they know they can keep when working with their boards. Trust Theory is when trust and commitment coexist, two fundamental factors that are needed for a successful relationship (Mack,
As Fullan (2002) noted, leaders who are effective are able to synergize commitment with a strong vision and higher accountability and performance standards, to go further beyond and build an everlasting legacy.

**Major Finding 6: Respect Each Board Members as an Individual**

Eleven of the 15 superintendents recorded on the online survey strongly agree that treating board members with respect is an important strategy for building trust with board members. According to Bennis et al. (2008), “Showing respect for people by including them in the flow of relevant information is the essence of transparency and trust” (Chapter 2, 00:40:43). The data demonstrated that respect is a crucial element to building trust. Trust is created by leaders by their behaviors toward their followers. Bennis et al. stated, “When leaders treat followers with respect followers respond with trust” (Chapter 2, 00:40:41).

**Major Finding 7: Engage Board Members in Discussions Regarding Direction and Vision for the District**

The top-rated finding when using strategies that entail candor was to engage board members in discussions that relate to setting the direction and vision for the school district with nearly 75% of the superintendents surveyed answering strongly agree. Further, when speaking with the superintendents in face-to-face interviews, it was stated by Superintendent 2, “Making sure candid discussions happen from a place where we always share the beginning of a shared goal.” Superintendent 1 said, “It’s defining district goals, and when we have those shared values, it’s what builds our trust together.”

The superintendency is public education’s most visible and most influential position (Kowalski, 2006). Timar (2002) stated that successful superintendents often work
together with their school board to develop a vision for the academic success of students. Therefore, local school boards set the vision and superintendents carry out the day to day functions to ensure the board’s vision is met. Thus, the importance for superintendents to work closely and engage their school board members in setting the direction and creating the vision for the district. Being part of the discussions will assist the superintendent in carrying out his/her duties.

**Major Finding 8: Take Issues Head on—Even Undiscussables**

An additional finding recommended for superintendents was to be a leader and take issues head on regardless of the intensity of the concern. The second most important statement listed in the online survey under candor was *taking issues head on*, generating a mean of 5.60 and a standard deviation of 0.63. Further, Superintendent 2 had a conversation with a board member and asked, “To form a positive relationship, how do we work with each other, how do we make sure that we are having our really tough conversations in private so people do not see us having uncivil discourse?” This comment supports the need for taking on issues even if they are not the easiest to discuss. Candor involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O’Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Candor involves the ability to communicate honestly and with transparency, integrity, and care. The author of *Leadership: Research Findings, Practice, and Skills*, Dubrin (2001), encouraged leaders to always tell the truth: “It is much easier to be consistent when you do not have to keep patching up your story to conform to an earlier lie” (p. 31).
Major Finding 9: Display Behavior Demonstrating a Shared Vison That Aligns With Values and Beliefs of the District

The exemplary rural superintendents participating in this study believed it was important to display behaviors and verbalize the district’s shared vision that aligns with the values and beliefs of the district that was created by the board. This final finding was deemed very important by the exemplary rural superintendents in both the quantitative and qualitative data. According to Tschannen-Moran (2014),

Organizations exist to accomplish tasks that are too big, complex, and costly for individuals to accomplish alone. When a new member joins an organization, a level of interdependence is established immediately by virtue of the shared purpose embodied in the organizational mission. (p. 48)

Shared values and beliefs from the board provide superintendents the opportunity to speak the same language and demonstrate loyalty to the board’s work.

Unexpected Findings

The online survey question *I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities* scored a mean of 4.67 and a standard deviation of 1.95, second lowest only to *I demonstrate appropriate work and life balance which had a mean score of 4.40 and standard deviation of 1.06*. The interviewees clearly expressed a desire for some superintendents to live healthier and more balanced lives. However, for three superintendents to answer strongly disagree to *behaving in a manner consistent with a superintendent’s roles and responsibilities* was very unexpected. This may mean three superintendents do not feel comfortable in their current positions, or it could mean a host
of other reasons they do not feel they are meeting the role and responsibilities for which they were hired.

The second unexpected finding was the level of importance placed on communication by the exemplary rural superintendents during the face-to-face interviews. Communication was listed as the number one quality in three of the five domain areas and scored as second most important in the remaining two domains. Over and over again during the interviews, superintendents stated how often they communicate, why they communicate, how they communicate, and the use of different medias with which they communicate (i.e. Friday Updates, text messages, e-mails, phone calls, and face-to-face).

Conclusions

In this section, six conclusions are presented—one for each trust domain and an additional conclusion for communication. During the qualitative interviews, superintendents expressed the importance of all five domains (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection) as necessary to build trust with and between school board members. The superintendents also discussed the importance of how a sixth factor, communication, contributes to building trust. Further, the quantitative data supported the importance of all five domains as important to building trust with and between board members. Mean scores from the quantitative data were all above 5.0 as seen in Table 15, therefore strongly indicating superintendents agree and strongly agree that all five domains are important to building trust.

A key conclusion of this research is that the exemplary rural superintendents who participated in this study believe and use all five trust domains (competence, consistency,
concern, candor, and connection) presented in this research study, including communication as a sixth domain. All five exemplary rural superintendents described during their interviews ways in which they use the five domains and communication to build and maintain trust with and between their school board members. Many of the exemplary rural superintendents’ behaviors were identified during the review of literature and those behaviors are associated with creating trust with and between board members.

Table 15. *Mean Scores of Quantitative Survey Results for Each Domain*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candor</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion 1: All Five Domains Are Vital to Building Trust**

The importance of superintendents consistently demonstrating all five domains—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection—with school board members is clearly noted in the findings of this study. Superintendents who exhibit the five domains will build trust with and between school board members. Weisman (2016) stated, “The five domains—competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection—should not be separated from one another in the final analysis, because they are individual stages of a single journey toward the ultimate goal: trust” (p. 139).

**Conclusion 2: Competence**

Superintendents who promote collaborative decision-making with their governance team, work closely with their board members to achieve district goals, and
communicate in a reliable and credible manner will earn trust from board members to lead their school district. Though competence scored an overall degree of importance of 5.47, third highest of the five domains, it was concluded that superintendents need to demonstrate competence in their position as leaders. Using qualitative results, competence scored the lowest percentage of the five domains with an importance factor of 17% and participants listed communication and being credible and reliable as the top two traits needed to build trust with and between superintendents and school board members.

Data from a 2016 study by Adams and Miskell were used by Romero and Mitchell (2018) to hypothesize that benevolence, competence, and integrity best describe three conceptually distinct components of trust. Further, Romero and Mitchell (2018) stated, “Competence (or ability) is universally regarded as a facet of trust” (p. 156). When considering a leader’s competence, the following should be asked, as Weisman stated, “Are you providing the service or product that you promised?” (Weisman, 2016, p. 144). Superintendents must demonstrate competence to build trust.

**Conclusion 3: Consistency**

Superintendents show consistency by keeping commitments, consistently communicating to their board, and being credible and reliable in order to build trust with and between their school boards. Findings from the quantitative data, though only three tenths below the highest domain, scored consistency as the least used by exemplary rural superintendents of the five domains. The online survey provided data demonstrating that exemplary superintendents understand the importance of keeping commitments with board members, scoring a mean of 5.73. Superintendents also shared during the
qualitative face-to-face interviews the value placed on communicating on a regular basis through the use of Friday Board Updates, text messages, e-mails, or other sources of communication. The superintendents believed that consistent communication builds reliability and credibility as information is kept candid, honest, and consistent and the leader follows through with actions that mirror the communications.

The domain of consistency is supported by Weisman (2016) who shared, “Do your actions reflect your values?” (p. 144). Organizational trust is built as a daily endeavor and ongoing process. Leaders need to demonstrate dependable and reliable actions whether times are good or bad. When the traits of a leader are evaluated by others, consistency is highly valued. Consistency determines the likelihood that the leader’s actions will be predictable (Heider, 1958). Superintendents need to be consistent with their communications and deliver when promises are made to earn credibility and reliability.

**Conclusion 4: Concern**

Superintendents who fail to treat board members with respect and in a positive manner and do not communicate in a regular consistent, manner will find difficulty in maintaining a positive relationship with their board. Results from the quantitative online survey scored treating board members positively and with respect with the highest mean (5.73), closely followed by demonstrating respect and concern to board members (5.67). The face-to-face interviews delivered respect as the number one area of focus for superintendents. Once again, communication was listed as a top one or two focus among the domains. Communicating consistently in a professional, respectful manner was key.
The domain of concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability and to support, motivate, and care for each other (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; S. M. R. Covey & Link, 2012; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016). Further, Krajewski and Trevino (2004) believed that concern is linked to relating, being connected, and being of importance to others. Superintendents must demonstrate concern for governance team members and respect in all forms of communication.

**Conclusion 5: Candor**

Superintendents who include board members in discussions, deal with tough issues, and share open and honest information with board members will have earned trust as the leader of any school district. The quantitative data from this study demonstrated that the top two areas deemed important for the domain of candor were engaging board members in discussions about the direction and vision of the district (mean of 5.73) and taking issues head on and being comfortable discussing even the “undiscussables” (5.60). The qualitative data once again focused on communication followed by building relationships as most important.

Weisman (2016) stated, “Candor is the measure of how the public perceives the genuineness and transparency of a brand” (p. 147). Further, candor involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O’Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Candor is necessary in building trust in relationships (S. M. R. Covey, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016). Superintendents need to be open and honest and have the courage to communicate with
the board about any issue, including student achievement, vision, mission, and any problem that arises.

**Conclusion 6: Connection**

Superintendents who demonstrate good listening skills, clarify issues, and carry out a board’s shared values build trust with and between school board members. The domain of connection scored the highest of the five domains in the quantitative data. The quantitative data for connection also demonstrated a strong belief in being a good, attentive, and engaged listener (mean of 5.73). The online survey data also placed high value on displaying behavior and giving voice to the board’s shared value of the district (both with a mean of 5.67). The qualitative data established shared values as the number one priority for superintendents to focus on. Again, displaying behavior that aligns to the board’s shared values and speaking publicly about the shared values are supported by the data.

Connection is a shared link or bond in which there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White et al., 2016). The best leaders are regularly around those they lead, making connections with employees. Leaders have to work alongside employees to make a positive impact on their work and careers. Ventura (2008) stated, “No matter how many additional duties and responsibilities that comes at a leader, they must strike a balance . . . and still stay connected and accessible to their employees” (p. 44). Superintendents must make positive connections with their board, employees, students, and the community. They are expected to be the face of the district.
Conclusion 7: Communication

Superintendents who fail to provide accurate, consistent, reliable, timely, and honest communication will have severe concerns serving as the leader of a school district and will have difficulty building and maintaining trust with and between board members. Data from both the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study found communication to be a major priority for each exemplary rural superintendent throughout the study. Superintendents discussed the importance of consistent, accurate, honest, and timely information to be critical to their success and to build trust with their board members. Each of the five exemplary rural superintendents shared how important it was to communicate with their board members to build trust over time. The forms of communication vary from day to day. The method of communication changes based on the information and timeliness needed to provide the information.

Smith (2012) stated, “Superintendents who focus on their communication skills and develop a trusting relationship with their school board members demonstrate a commonality among successful superintendents” (p. viii). Further, it is imperative a superintendent communicate effectively with school board members to build trust and ease the navigation through difficult times (Kowalski, 2005b). Finally, Waters and Marzano (2006) stated that superintendents must master communication in order to hear, organize, and operationalize the interests of the board.

Implications for Action

Trust is one component of the relationship between school board members and superintendents. Once the superintendent and school board members have established
trust, it continues to build. When one considers how many individuals are affected by the successful nature of this trust relationship, it is easy to see why this study is essential.

Implications of results will provide associations like NSBA, CSBA, and ACSA with valuable information to support the development of school board and superintendent relationships through trust. Researchers will also benefit and, in turn, provide valuable information for university training programs that will benefit superintendents and their ultimate impact on all stakeholders, particularly on the over 6,000,000 students they serve in California.

**Implications for Action 1: All Superintendents Should Retain a Coach for the First 2 to 3 Years**

The world of a superintendent is an isolated position. Superintendents have a board to work with; however, as open and honest as a superintendent wants to be with a board, many times the superintendent cannot rely on asking his/her board for advice on decisions. After all, the board hires the superintendent to make decisions on behalf of the district, knowing what is best for students. There may be times a superintendent has a difficult decision to make and would benefit from another professional opinion—from someone who has years of experience and has been through similar situations. Every superintendent needs to have a coach during the first few years of superintendency so the new superintendent has someone to share thoughts and ideas with and someone who will provide a different perspective to consider before making a final decision. A coach can also assist and guide the superintendent with strategies that would help build trust with the school board. A coach may also serve as a lifetime mentor for support.
Superintendents need to negotiate an experienced coach into their employment contract with the school board.

**Implications for Action 2: Connect with a Superintendents’ Professional Learning Communities**

As with Implication 1, a superintendent’s world can be a lonely place. There are several search firms in California, a few law firms, along with associations such as the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators (CALSA) and the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) that offer superintendents a professional learning community (PLC) solely composed of superintendents. PLCs needs to be knowledge and skill based to best benefit participants. Each superintendent PLC can set its own number of meetings per year. Some meet quarterly, others monthly, and if needed, more often to discuss leadership strategies—working with difficult board members, building and maintaining trust with board members and other staff, and collectively problem-solving issues regarding school boards, student achievement, and more. Superintendent PLCs can be especially helpful to superintendents who are viewed by boards as the individual who is supposed to know everything and make all the difficult decisions. Joining a superintendent PLC will greatly benefit many superintendents.

**Implications for Action 3: All Superintendents Should Deploy a Trust Survey on a Regular Basis**

Self-reflection is important for all leaders to establish: where the leader has been, where are they now, and what adjustments need to be made to successfully move the organization forward. Superintendents who complete a trust survey or similar assessment provide themselves the opportunity to grow as a leader. An organization like ACSA can
provide and encourage such an assessment and offer professional assistance in reading and evaluating the results using retired superintendents who have had successful careers leading school districts. The evaluation can also be used to decipher personal leadership areas that would assist with building and maintaining trust with board members.

How do superintendents know if they are truly trusted by board members, staff, or the community? Superintendents may assume they are trusted and may believe those around them trust their actions and words. A superintendent can provide cabinet members and site principals the opportunity to complete an online anonymous survey. This would provide the superintendent valuable information to analyze and digest and seek areas to improve. The survey should use the Values Institute five domains and consider containing a sixth domain—communication. A 6-point Likert scale using strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, and strongly agree as options from which to select. The following year, the superintendent should consider including the school board and any parent groups with whom he or she works. Learning and growing as a leader should be every superintendent’s desire to be the best.

**Implications for Action 4: All Superintendents Need to Continue Attending Professional Development Opportunities**

Superintendents, just like teachers and other office staff, have room for growth and learning as an educator and leader. Oftentimes, superintendents are required or requested to stay in the district while other staff receive professional development opportunities. It is important for superintendents to remain current and, more importantly, have opportunities to network and have conversations with other superintendents to discuss ways to increase trust within their organization or to address
issues and concerns and assist one another with making difficult decisions. Attending professional development workshops and conferences provides superintendents these opportunities to learn and grow as a leader.

**Implications for Action 5: All Superintendents Need to Continue Sharpening Communication Skills**

As this research study indicated, communication is a vital strategy to use in building and maintaining trust with and between school board members. Superintendents may have good people skills, but are they truly good communicators? Communication comes in varying methods—verbally, with written words, body language, and listening. As leaders, there is always room for growth, and sharpening communication skills would be extremely vital for all superintendents. As retired school board member Nicolas Caruso, Jr. (2005) once said, “Two words come to mind when developing a high-performance team between the superintendent and board—trust and communication. If either is lacking, superintendents must find a way to develop it or face difficult times” (para. 6).

**Implications for Action 6: Combine Results of Thematic Peer Researchers Trust Studies (Rural, Suburban, Urban, Regional Occupation Centers and Programs)**

Superintendents can benefit from analyzing and evaluating research focused on building trust with and between school board members. It would be valuable to combine results of the thematic group study detailing how exemplary superintendents from rural, suburban, and urban school districts and regional occupation centers build and maintain trust with and between school board members. By studying the combined results,
superintendents will be able to identify strategies to build trust with and between school board members.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher believes there is a void of information that warrants an expansion of research on the superintendency. Future research will provide more breadth and depth and may present a different twist on potential related topics. The following are potential future topics to consider.

**Recommendation for Further Research 1: Replicate the Trust Research Study with Board Members**

The trust study conducted by the researcher was directed from the lens of 15 exemplary rural superintendents. Valuable information may be learned by conducting a replication trust study from the lens of 15 exemplary rural school board members. Comparing the data may reveal likenesses but may also demonstrate differences. New and experienced school board members may be interested in learning how to best build and maintain trust with their district superintendent.

**Recommendation for Further Research 2: Add Communication as a Sixth Trust Domain**

During the course of this research study, the five domains of trust (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection) from the Values Institute were used as the focal point of the study. Throughout the research, exemplary superintendents used the response of communication over and over again. Other research studies have shown that communication is an important ingredient of building trust. Thus, the recommendation for adding communication as a sixth domain should be considered in a future trust study.
This researcher believes, because of the results of this study, communication may be the number one domain used as a strategy by superintendents to build and maintain trust with and between school board members.

**Recommendation for Further Research 3: Comparison Study on Female Versus Male Superintendents—Which Gender Ranks Higher on Trusts Surveys?**

Though the majority of superintendents in California are still male, a large number of female superintendents have been hired in the past 2 decades, and the number of female superintendents continues to climb. While research has shown there are unique differences in leadership styles between males and females, a study would provide valuable information as to whether or not there is a difference in the way school board members trust male superintendents versus female superintendents.

**Recommendation for Further Research 4: Importance of a Work-Life Balance for Superintendents**

As has been stated several times, the life of a superintendent can be an isolated position with many stresses that can negatively affect the health of the superintendent. It is known that human beings need to live a healthy, well-balanced life. With the demands on superintendents from board members, staff, major student issues, the community, and press, many superintendents work long days, often 12 or more hours a day. Leaving home early to arrive to work before others, then leaving the office late and arriving home to eat a dinner after 7:00 p.m. on many evenings does not provide healthy alternatives. The new research study could provide strategies which may prove to be life saving for some superintendents.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Conducting this study was an extremely rewarding experience of learning and a journey of discovery. As a 34-year veteran of public education, 25 years of administrative work, and superintendent of 8 years, I believed I knew quite a bit about leadership and building and maintaining trust before beginning the study. I was wrong! I have learned a tremendous amount about trust and leadership. The learning has come from reading literature, interviewing superintendents, analyzing data, and having professional conversations with peer researchers and Brandman University faculty.

I believe trust is the cornerstone of every successful superintendent. The role of superintendent is not an easy responsibility. However, building relationships by displaying competence, being consistent in one’s actions, showing concern for others, being candid and open with everyone and displaying vulnerability, and making personal connections with board members, staff, students, and the community will assist any superintendent with building and maintaining trust.

In closing, I have used the Values Institute’s five Cs including communication to hone my skills to build stronger, more trusting relationships in order to be a better leader. The relationship with my board members, cabinet members, and site principals are closest to me, and these are the relationships I am working on the hardest to grow and maintain. I am grateful for the opportunity to improve as a professional educator and leader. Sharing strategies to build and maintain trust with and between school board members is what I hope other administrators will gain from reading this study.
REFERENCES


Petersen, G. J. (2002). Singing the same tune: Principals’ and school board members’ perceptions of the superintendent’s role as instructional leader. *Journal of Educational Administration, 40*(2), 158–171.


Appendix A

Brandman University’s Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

BUIRB Application Approved As Submitted: Edwin Cora

Dear Edwin Cora,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at BUIRB@brandman.edu. If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at the following link: https://irb.brandman.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,
Doug DeVore, Ed.D.
Professor
Organizational Leadership
BUIRB Chair
ddevore@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu

Ed Cora <ecora@mail.brandman.edu>
to webmaster, Keith, buirb, Douglas, Vikki

Dr. DeVore,

Thank you.
Appendix B

Invitation to Participate Letter

Letter of Invitation

Study: How Rural Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members

December___, 2018

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a mixed methods research study about *How Rural Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members* using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). The main investigator of this study is Edwin G. Cora, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University’s Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a superintendent within a rural school district who met four of five criteria because of your known expertise in building trust with and between board members.

Fifteen rural superintendents from California will participate in this study through an electronic survey. Five participants will participate through an interview. Participation in the survey should take 15-20 minutes. Participation in the interview should require about one hour of your time. Both are entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify and describe what strategies rural superintendents use to build trust with school board members using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies rural superintendents use to build trust between board members using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to participate in the study, you will be sent an e-mail link to the electronic Survey Monkey survey. Participants will complete the survey and submit their responses. Five participants will be selected to be interviewed by the researcher. If chosen for the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as a superintendent within a rural school district, who builds trust with and between school board members. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions, so for that purpose, online surveys will also be made accessible.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help identify the strategies superintendents use to build trust with and between school board members. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or by e-mail at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx. You can also contact Dr. Keith Larick by e-mail at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx.

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,

Edwin G. Cora

Edwin G. Cora
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University
Appendix C

Brandman University Research Participants Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB

Adopted September 2018
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA  92618

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE:       How Rural Superintendents Build Trust with and Between School Board Members
RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:    Edwin G. Cora, Doctoral Candidate
TITLE OF CONSENT FORM:       Consent to Participate in Research

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:  This study is being conducted for a dissertation for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify and describe what strategies rural superintendents use to build trust with school board members using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies superintendents use to build trust between board members using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model.

PROCEDURES:  In participating in this research study, I agree to partake in an audio-recorded semistructured interview or survey. The interview will take place in person at my school site or by phone and will last about one hour. During the interview or survey, I will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share my experiences as a superintendent, who has experience building trust with and between school board members.

I understand that:

1. The possible risks or discomforts associated with this research are minimal. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at my school site or at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience. Surveys will also be utilized depending upon participants scheduling availability.

2. I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. The possible benefit of this study is to determine whether the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection) have any effect on the Superintendent’s ability to build trust with and between school board members.
The findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

3. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Edwin G. Cora, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mr. Cora may be contacted by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxx or e-mail at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Keith Larick at xxxxx@xxxxx.xxx.

4. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

5. The study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project. Audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator in a secure location.

6. No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

____________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party
Date

____________________
Signature of Witness (if appropriate)
Date

____________________
Signature of Principal Investigator
Date
Appendix E

Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey

Welcome to Thematic Superintendent’s Trust Survey

Successful relationships are dependent on trust. Trust influences a culture which fosters continuous improvement and outcomes. In the field of public education, a trusting relationship between the school board and superintendent enhances the effectiveness of the governance team.

The superintendent and board relationship is a visible signal to staff and community as to the health of the district. How superintendents build trust with and between school board members is a first step in accomplishing the goals of the district.

This survey is part of a thematic dissertation study exploring how superintendents develop trust with and between school board members. This survey solicits your perceptions of the actions and strategies used to develop that trusting relationship.

All responses to this survey are confidential and anonymous. Please read the statement below giving your consent to participate before opening the survey.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

1. Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate.

   If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button. The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate

   □ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

   □ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey.
Competence question battery
1. I focus the work of board members on the quality of services the district provides to students, staff and community.
2. I work consistently with the board members to achieve the district’s goals.
3. I promote the capability of school board members.
4. I create opportunities for board members to learn and grow.
5. I promote collaborative decision-making with the governance team.
6. I lead vision setting and manage the strategic actions of the school district.

Consistency question battery
1. I behave in a manner consistent with my role and responsibilities
2. I create an environment where board members have the opportunity to accomplish their goals and responsibilities.
3. I let board members know what is expected from them as members of a governance team.
4. I only make commitments to board members I can keep.
5. I always keep my commitments to board members.
6. I hold myself and board members accountable for actions.

Concern question battery
1. I take time to meet personally with each board member to understand their concerns.
2. I consistently demonstrate appropriate work and life balance.
3. I am a good listener.
4. I always treat each board member positively and with respect.
5. I am patient with the questions and issues of interest to board members.
6. I demonstrate respect and concern for each board member.

Candor question battery
1. I engage in open communication with all board members.
2. I share openly with board members when things are going wrong.
3. I engage board members in discussions about the direction and vision for the district.
4. I create a safe environment where board members feel free to have differences of opinion.
5. I am open, authentic and straightforward with all board members.
6. I take issues head-on, even the “undiscussables.”

Connection question battery
1. I am accepting to and receptive to the ideas and opinions of all Board members.
2. I am truthful, and frank in all interpersonal communications with board members.
3. I display behavior that is aligned with the values and beliefs of the school district.
4. I give voice to the district vision and shared values of the district.
5. I actively engage board members in recognition and celebrations of school district successes.
6. I listen carefully to understand and clarify issues.
Appendix F

Audio Release Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: How Rural Superintendents Build Trust With and Between School Board Members

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

I authorize Edwin G. Cora, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview, without any linkage to my identity, may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

________________________  ____________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party  Date
Appendix G

Superintendent & School Board Trust Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Script and Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer: Edwin G. Cora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview time planned: Approximately one hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview place: Participant’s office or other convenient agreed upon location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording: Digital voice recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written: Field and observational notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make personal introductions.

Opening Statement: [Interviewer states:] I greatly appreciate your valuable time to participate in this interview. To review, the purpose of this mixed methods study is to identify and describe what strategies superintendents use to build trust with school board members using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model (competence, consistency, concern, candor, and connection). In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and describe strategies superintendents use to build trust between board members using the five domains of Weisman’s Trust Model. The questions are written to elicit this information.

Interview Agenda: [Interviewer states:] I anticipate this interview will take about an hour today. As a review of the process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate via letter, and signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for the purpose of this study. We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent Form, Brandman University’s Participant’s Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release Form. Next, I will begin the audio recorder and ask a list of questions related to the purpose of the study. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue on with the audio recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recorder and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy prior to the data being analyzed. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the questions?
Definitions:

**Competence**
Competence is the ability to perform a task or fulfill a role as expected (Covey, 2009; Farnsworth, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

**Consistency**
Consistency is the confidence that a person’s pattern of behavior is reliable, dependable and steadfast (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Concern**
Concern is the value placed on the well-being of all members of an organization, promoting their welfare at work and empathizing with their needs. Concern entails fostering a collaborative and safe environment where leaders and members are able to show their vulnerability, support, motivate and care for each other (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Covey, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 1988; Livnat, 2004; Weisman, 2016).

**Candor**
Candor involves communicating information in a precise manner and being truthful even if one does not want to provide such information (Gordon & Gilley, 2012; O’Toole & Bennis, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Weisman, 2016).

**Connection**
Connection is a shared link or bond where there is a sense of emotional engagement and inter-relatedness (Sloan & Oliver, 2013; Stovall & Baker, 2010; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).

Interview Questions:

1. Connection is about creating positive relationships & rapport with others. How have you developed positive relationships and rapport with board members?

   **Prompt:** How do you see the establishment of positive relationships and rapport as contributing to trust with school board members?

2. In what ways have you developed shared values with board members?

   **Prompt:** How do you see the establishment of shared values as contributing to trust with board members?

3. Research shows that leaders develop trust when they care for their employees’ well-being. Tell me about some of the ways that you show you care for your board members and their wellbeing.
**Prompt:** How do you share yourself with your employees?

4. What are some of the ways you create a collaborative work environment for your board members?

**Prompt:** Can you provide some examples of how you make teams feel safe to dialogue in a collaborative environment?

**Prompt:** How do you manage failures among board members?

5. The literature for trust indicates that leaders who communicate openly and honestly tend to build trust with their employees. Please share with me some ways that have worked for you as the leader of your site to communicate openly and honestly with board members.

**Probe:** Can you describe a time when you perceive your communication with board members may have contributed to developing trust?

6. Two characteristics for a transparent leader are accessibility and being open to feedback. Please share some examples of how you demonstrate accessibility and openness to feedback.

**Probe:** How would you describe your feedback strategies for board members? Can you give me some examples?

7. The literature for trust indicates that leaders who demonstrate competence by fulfilling their role as expected establish credibility and develop trust with their board members. Can you describe a time in which you feel your competence as a leader may have contributed to developing trust?

**Probe:** Please share with me some examples in which you feel you established your credibility within your role as the superintendent.

8. Competent leaders value the expertise of others and invite participation of team members to solve problems through shared decision-making. Please share with me some ways that have worked for you as the superintendent to invite participation in decision-making with the school board.

**Probe:** Can you describe a time when you perceive school board participation in decision-making may have contributed to developing trust?

9. What are some of the ways that you model leadership that is reliable and dependable?

**Prompt:** How do you establish expectations that help you to lead the board in a way that is dependable?
10. Can you provide an example of a crisis situation when your leadership was dependable and steadfast and developed trust with and between board members?

**Prompt:** How do you ensure that your message to board members is consistent and true during a time of crisis?

“Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings.”

**Possible Probes for any of the items:**

“Would you expand upon that a bit?”

“Do you have more to add?”

“What did you mean by ….”

“Why do think that was the case?”

“Could you please tell me more about ….”

“Can you give me an example of ….”

“How did you feel about that?”
Appendix H

Superintendent & School Board Trust Survey Feedback Form

Survey Critique by Participants

As a doctoral student and researcher at Brandman University your assistance is so appreciated in designing this survey instrument. Your participation is crucial to the development of a valid and reliable instrument. Below are some questions that I appreciate your answering after completing the survey. Your answers will assist me in refining both the directions and the survey items. You have been provided with a paper copy of the survey, just to jog your memory if you need it. Thanks so much.

1. How many minutes did it take you to complete the survey, from the moment you opened it on the computer until the time you completed it? ___________

2. Did the portion up front that asked you to read the consent information and click the agree box before the survey opened concern you at all? ____
   If so, would you briefly state your concern __________________________
   ____________________________

3. Was the Introduction sufficiently clear (and not too long) to inform you what the research was about? ______ If not, what would you recommend that would make it better? __________________________
   ____________________________

4. Were the directions to, and you understood what to do? _____
   If not, would you briefly state the problem __________________________
   ____________________________

5. Were the brief descriptions of the rating scale choices prior to your completing the items clear, and did they provide sufficient differences among them for you to make a selection? ______ If not, briefly describe the problem__________________________________________________________

6. As you progressed through the survey in which you gave a rating of # through #, if there were any items that caused you say something like, “What does this mean?” Which item(s) were they? Please use the paper copy and mark those that troubled you? Or if not, please check here:_____ 
   
   Thanks so much for your help
Appendix I

Field-Test Participant Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview you should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview, ask your field-test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation.** Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview… (I’m pretty new at this)?
Appendix J

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. As the researcher you should reflect on the questions below after completing the interview.

You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your ‘observer’ after completing the interview field-test. The questions are written from your perspective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

1. How long did the interview take? _____ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?
Appendix K

National Institute of Health—Protecting Human Research Participants

(Certificate of Completion)

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Ed Cora successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/21/2017.

Certification Number: 2399375.