Political Styles and Strategies of Suburban Unified School District Superintendents and Board Members: A Mixed Methods Study

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Political Styles and Strategies of Suburban Unified School District Superintendents and Board Members: A Mixed Methods Study

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During this doctoral journey there have been so many challenges and hurdles to overcome. From three job changes to an absolutely life changing medical emergency, I’ve really broken all the rules of “what to not do during a dissertation process.” My wife Holly, and kids Autumn and Noah have been the ones who have weathered the brunt of this time consuming, family-time derpiving process. Through it all, they have continued their activities, doctor appointments, athletic contests, and social lives with a physically and mentally absent husband and father. Even though cohort mentors try to warn us of the commitment, one can’t understand until being in the heat of it.

I’d like to take this opportunity to thank God, my wife, and my children for weathering the storm. I promise to give the priority and time back and more. I could not have completed this process without their full support. To Navy Ensign Elijah Jones, thanks for the boost at a time when I was stuck. I’d also like to thank my cohort mentor, Dr. Skip Roland, who is the most supportive and challenging mentor in the most caring and positive manner. I’d also like to thank dissertation committee member, Dr. George Sziraki, who I connected with early in the program and received guidance and encouragement from throughout. My dissertation chair, Dr. Patricial White, handled me with extra care and expertise building confidence while keeping me to the fire which is much appreciated. Lastly, my doctoral cohort, The Real OC Zetas, have become my family that will always be special in my heart. Becca, Tika, Tammy, Leisa, Robert, Nick (Dude Zetas), Tricia, and QueenE we are bonded for life after traveling this journey together. Onward and upward to you all.
ABSTRACT

Political Styles and Strategies of Suburban Unified School District Superintendents and Board Members: A Mixed Methods Study

by Reginald Thompkins

Purpose: The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to understand the political styles of suburban unified school district superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies suburban school district superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

Methodology: This explanatory sequential mixed methods study served to identify political styles of suburban unified school district superintendents and board members. The collection and triangulation of data included digital survey responses, face-to-face interviews, artifacts and observations. The quantitative and qualitative data was then analyzed.

Findings: Survey and interview data from five exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents resulted in some major findings: (a) Superintendents strengthen communication with school board members by utilizing multiple methods; (b) Superintendents work to bridge individual relationships with and between each school board member; (c) Superintendents focus on listening skills in order to fully comprehend school board member priorities and concerns; (d) Superintendents prioritize building trust with school board members by utilizing a variety of approaches; (e) Superintendents meet the needs of school board members by valuing their opinions, concerns, and priorities and political responsibilities as elected officials; and (f) Superintendents differentiate their strategies to match the styles of their board members.
Conclusions: It can be concluded, based on the findings of this study, that politically intelligent suburban unified superintendents must differentiate their strategies to match the styles of their school board members. To accomplish this, they must focus on using excellent, attentive, listening skills in order to fully comprehend school board member needs, priorities, and concerns.

Recommendations: It is recommended that meta-analysis research be conducted to compare the findings of studies completed by all 10 thematic dissertation team members. It is also recommended that a replication of this study be conducted with superintendents in the central region of California and other states to examine differences in how superintendents work with board member political styles.
PREFACE

*The Politically Intelligent Leader* (White, Harvey & Fox, 2016) served as the framework for this dissertation. Working with two Brandman University faculty advisors and 10 peer researchers we utilized the political style matrix that was introduced in *The Politically Intelligent Leader* by applying it to superintendents and school board members. The purpose was to identify and explain the political styles of superintendents and school board members and the successful strategies superintendents use to work with the varied political styles. Supports for new and veteran superintendents to be politically savvy are lacking but necessary in public education leadership.

While all 10 peer researchers, including myself, conducted this study on exemplary superintendents, I focused on suburban unified school district superintendents. Other researchers in this thematic study focused on high school district superintendents, small rural, Latino superintendents, small suburban southern California, female suburban unified, and a Regional Occupation Program.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

School district superintendents continue to face many critical challenges in today’s educational landscape. Increasing pressures related to inadequate resources, student and staff safety concerns, education reform regarding accountability for academic achievement, and ever-changing demographics all rank high (Berlau, 2011; Wright, 2017). Additionally, Jackson (2016); Kouzes and Posner (2002) found the complexity of meeting diverse community needs and increasing student supports as a growing challenge for superintendents. Meeting the expectations of the superintendent position requires time commitment and emotional and mental fortitude (Given, 2016). Navigating politics between school boards and local communities remains a daily responsibility that if not managed effectively, can impact the tenure of superintendents. Moreover, research from Council of Great City Schools (2014) reported the average tenure of superintendents from three states at 3.18 years. This is a serious problem, since bringing about effective reforms and school improvement requires a longer commitment of time and leadership. While a recent study by Chingos, Whitehurst, and Linquist (2014) determined superintendents only make a small difference in actual student achievement, Rooney and McKenna (2007) assert that longevity of five years or more is important for superintendents to improve and sustain effective instructional practices. Failure to navigate district politics can result in higher turnover rates for superintendents which can negatively impact student achievement, community trust, and culture (Hoyle, 2007). For superintendents who hope to remain in their positions and lead their districts forward in pursuit of successful change, White, Harvey, and Fox (2016) stress the importance of
political awareness and strategizing around local internal and external politics within the organization.

Superintendents need to be politically adept or savvy in dealing with the aforementioned critical challenges. White et al. (2016) describe a politically intelligent or adept leader as “one who uses a moral compass to lead while tending to competing interests of followers and stakeholders” (p. 3). Similarly, Tucker (1995) characterized Plato’s thoughts on politics as “ideally, politics has a positive function to perform for the community of citizens in which the ruler exercises power” (p. 2). The ability to identify and anticipate political blind spots, whether from board members, staff, and or community members, impacts a superintendent’s ability to move priorities forward to improve student outcomes (DeLuca, 1999; White, Harvey, & Fox, 2016).

It is important for superintendents to exhibit political adeptness while facing critical challenges. Of equal importance is the superintendent’s ability to develop a coherent leadership focus within their organizations. M. Fullan and Quinn (2016) discovered effective organizations focused on five areas which included: (a) leadership, (b) accountability, (c) pedagogy, (d) collaboration, and (e) aligned fiscal oversight. However, in order for a superintendent to be successful in all of these responsibilities, he or she must maintain the confidence and support of board members (Nava, 2017). Therefore, understanding their own political style and those of individual board members is important as superintendents consider strategies for working effectively with their boards (DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016).

New and future superintendents need to build their political skills and strategies in working effectively with school boards. Lack of political savvy can impact
organizational progress in a negative fashion and limit the longevity of sitting superintendents (Deluca, 1999; Kriesky, 2018). By building their skills, superintendents will increase their chances of success in improving outcomes for students.

**Background**

Historically, the superintendent position has evolved through a progression of duties and responsibilities. These political and social structures required superintendents to develop skills to address multiple levels of educational responsibility as leaders (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). The first state superintendent was appointed in 1812 in New York (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). Duties included managing public funds and updating the legislature on school progress. The first local superintendent, hired in 1837, took on a myriad of duties in running the school district but was theoretically a secretary to the board of education (T. Glass, Bjok, & Brunner, 2000). Over the years, school district relationships between boards and superintendents have evolved and often include conflict and political issues (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; Tallerico, 1989). Elected school boards continue to be pressured by politics of special interest groups, which can inhibit effective leadership to improve student outcomes (Bjork, Bell, & Gurley, 2002). According to G. Petersen and Fusarelli (2005), interest in the topic of politics and the superintendent began in the 19th century.

**Evolution and Importance of Politics**

It is important to understand the history of politics and the deep-rooted influence it has played in society and leadership. The early thinking about politics originated in Greece and mutated to political science over the last century. Politics has been described, and is often perceived, as seeking out power in the interest of oneself (Tucker, 1995).
Garfield, von Rueden, and Hagen (2018) found throughout history leaders fought to acquire and maintain their status in organizations through politics. However, over time the ability to inspire and connect with the heart of constituents has been linked to influencing politics. As examples, leaders like Martin Luther King, Ghandi, Mother Teresa, Cesar Chavez and others challenged politically incorrect societal norms as their life purpose which was far from self-serving. Plato, according to Tucker (1995) described political statesmanship as “tending to and curing diseases of the soul” (p. 2). Tending to the interests and problems of their community can be viewed as the main responsibility of political leaders. The ever-changing political landscape continues to evolve and be influenced by local and national concerns.

**Theoretical Foundation**

An understanding of political and leadership theory can help to provide clarity on how styles and strategies can influence the success or failure of superintendents. Many leaders share a distaste for organizational politics (DeLuca, 1999). However, political theory can be very helpful in providing leaders with research-based methods to operate more effectively.

**Power and Influence**

Finkelstein (1992) and Galbraith (1983) have similar definitions of power as the level in which individuals influence or impose their will on others. According to Stark (2016), the accumulation of power is connected to “influence, decision-making, communication and empowerment” (p. 136). Wheatley (2006) added that power earned through strong relationships needs to be continuously nurtured and valued. Similarly,
Kirtman and Fullan (2016) added effective leaders secure power by developing human capital through trust building, empowering individuals and strong relationships.

Many theories that lay the foundation for a study in organizational politics reference the types and varying levels of perceived influence or power individuals or groups have over the political environment that drives society. Tucker (1995) asserts that, according to elite theory, a separation exists between a small contingency of those who hold a majority of power, and the majority who become submissive to them because of coercion. Wallace (2016) focused on Finkelstein’s (1992) power theory regarding chief executive officers (CEO). He described four dimensions of power that all CEOs are given within organizations: (a) structural, (b) ownership, (c) expert, and (d) prestige. A deeper exploration of the aforementioned theories will be included in Chapter II.

Political Frames

L. G. Bolman and Deal (2008) proposed the idea of a multifaceted approach to resolving conflict in organizations. They propose four frames: (a) structural, (b) human resource, (c) political, and (d) symbolic areas of focus. Political framing is described as a mindset based on assumptions that assist with anticipating and managing issues within organizations. The idea of political framing suggests managing competing interests by using political skills such as conflict management, leading negotiations, and reaching compromise (L. G. Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

White et al. (2016) suggest a model of political intelligence that involves developing a flexible political style and skill in using a variety of political strategies to
influence a noble and ethical direction. They describe nine political styles utilized by leaders of organizations:

- analyst
- adaptor
- supporter
- planner
- balancer
- developer
- challenger
- arranger
- strategist

White et al. (2016) further stated all leaders possess “back up or default styles” (p. 63) which can be a positive aspect for organizations when used strategically. The political intelligence model asserts that trust building is the most essential political strategy.

**Politics and Public Education**

White et al. (2016) warned of the importance of superintendents maintaining a realistic perception of the level of support around their work. In public education organizations there is a difference between “doing the right thing” versus making “politically correct” decisions. Some of these decisions can be characterized as “playing it safe to avoid upsetting people rather than challenging the status quo” (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016, p. 20). Aligned personal and organizational values serve as a key foundational principle for superintendents and school boards as politics infiltrate public
school operations. Key decisions should be based on what’s considered best for the organization and aligned to priorities and values (White et al., 2016).

**School District Governance**

In California, the majority of school district governance teams are comprised of elected board members and the district superintendent appointed by them. Although the board has the legal authority to make decisions for the district, effective boards work very closely with their superintendent on decisions to best address the needs of students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2019).

**The Role of the School Board**

There are over 13,600 school boards across the United States (California School Boards Association [CSBA], 2019). Local school boards serve as extensions of state governance (Butts & Cremin, 1953). School boards must abide by state laws and regulations, establish local policies, and employ a superintendent (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). School boards have five main duties including: (a) setting direction, (b) ensuring efficient organizational structures, (c) providing necessary support, (d) setting and monitoring expectations, and (e) focusing on the wellbeing of students and the community as a whole (CSBA, 2019). School board members, like other elected officials, are influenced by the political dynamics of community opinion regarding the superintendent’s job performance. Board members must balance expectations of constituents that voted for them and the best interests of the entire district.

**The Role of the Superintendent**

Suburban school district superintendents face a variety of challenges that can be attributed to size, demographics, resources, and academic achievement gaps. Building a
a coherent approach that focuses on a well-balanced strategy is key in developing a true shared vision (M. Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Leadership development, instructional focus, budget alignment to priorities, accountability and collaboration are included as examples of what should be coherent practices. Of equal importance, is the prioritization of pursuing educators who mirror the ethnic background of the students in historically underserved subgroups (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014). The number of low-income students continues to rise in suburban districts, which intensifies the importance of the Superintendent’s role in aligning resources to address their needs (Holme, Diem & Welton, 2014).

The Superintendent and Effective Leadership

In a study of 100 of the largest school districts in the United States covering 2003-2017, The Broad Center (2018) found that superintendents who completed their tenures served an average of 6.16 years and current superintendents had been on the job an average of 3.76 years. During the 1960s, over 35,000 superintendents existed to lead in districts across the United States (Houston, 2010). Over time political and social structures began to require superintendents to develop skills as teachers, scholars, business officers, and truant monitors (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). Superintendents now must extend their duties, understanding the role of teacher, political statesman, and community leader all while perfecting communication practices (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). Researchers found that school boards with a desire for an impactful leader sometimes seek what’s referred to by Cronin and Usdan (2003) as a “highly effective medicine man” (p. 177). However, the most important role of the superintendent is to influence the lives of the students (Ceglarek, 2004).
Castallo (2003) discovered superintendents become concerned when school board members become excessively involved in the administration of schools. Hence, it is important for superintendents to work with the school board to set clear boundaries for board members regarding the daily operations of the organization. An effective governance team, inclusive of the school board and superintendent, is the foundation for improving academic outcomes for all students according to Goodman and Zimmerman (2000).

Politics of the Superintendent and School Board

Politics has been defined as the “use of power for and through other people, both internally and externally of organizations” (White et al., 2016, p. 4). Organizational politics is defined by DeLuca (1999) as “how power and interests play out in the organization” (p. 43). Balancing politics and power is one of the most critical skill sets necessary in navigating the school superintendent position. Therefore, it is not surprising that Aleman (2002) suggested superintendents need to become more politically savvy in dealing with board members. The superintendent role has been viewed as not being about politics but the reality is opposite (M. D. Thomas, 1985). Many superintendents resent the political nature of leading an organization (The Council of State Governments, 2004). Although renewals of superintendent contracts should be based on yearly evaluations, politics seem to find its way in as a factor. Therefore, managing politics may be considered a critical aspect of evaluation for superintendents.

The Board/Superintendent Relationship

Strong board/superintendent relations are predicated on both groups clear understanding of their roles and positive relationships that serve to accommodate
differing opinions (G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005). Cultivating relationships by building trust, communicating consistently, and genuinely understanding the priorities of each board member can be effective in developing a strong rapport. L. G. Bolman and Deal (2008) refer to relationship building as the combination of like-minded people united by shared beliefs and similar culture. The synergy of culture and collaboration between the board, superintendent, and school district can be an influential dynamic. Utilizing political savviness is a key characteristic in successfully working with school boards. Superintendents must develop these skills while focusing on supporting the work to maximize student outcomes.

Gaining the trust and respect of the board is critical in leading them on important issues. Superintendents must have strong communication skills to strategically guide boards through difficult decisions. A non-trusting relationship and ineffective communication between a superintendent and his or her school board can become a barrier to building effective schools who improve outcomes for students (J. P. Danzberger et al., 1992). When relationships break down, conflict increases over district vision and purpose (Morgan & Petersen, 2002; G. J. Petersen, 1999). Ironically, Bowers (2016) cautions when the board and superintendent appear too close, community members may feel their particular interests are not a priority, which can present another kind of political problem. More information is needed on the strategies a superintendent might use to effectively build and maintain a trusting relationship with the board.

**Effective Political Strategies Used by Leaders**

Jackson (2016) stressed the importance of superintendents being comfortable with the political nature of the job without the title of politician. Leaders of organizations
manage various political situations as a main duty. Therefore, whether they view politics in a positive light or not, leaders know politics are unavoidable (Stark, 2016). To be effective, leaders must utilize political strategies such as gauging the surroundings, prioritizing fiscal needs, building alliances, balancing influence/power, seeking compromise, and building consensus around decisions (L. G. Bolman & Deal, 2008; Stark, 2016).

**Research Gaps**

There is no shortage of research information regarding superintendents’ roles and effects of relationships with school boards. However, understanding perceptions of political styles, and strategies related to board/superintendent relations represents a deeper discussion where additional research is necessary. Political styles employed by the superintendent and board members as they interact around critical matters represents a strategic practice that can be difficult to navigate. T. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) found that professional development for superintendents in general lacked hands-on experience, related to practice. Further research is needed to identify how superintendents can be more effective in navigating political landscapes with their board.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

School district superintendents are facing an ever-changing complicated political landscape. With dwindling resources, increased accountability and public scrutiny, superintendents must be skilled in working alongside their boards while minimizing interference in the operations of the district (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016, Puckett, 2016). Unforeseen political issues can result in their demise if superintendents fail to increase their own awareness. Poor relations with board members contributes to an average
turnover rate of three to five years for superintendent tenure (Council of Great City Schools, 2014; Grissom & Mitani 2016). This crisis of frequent superintendent changes for districts inhibits the continuity needed to meet organizational goals (Given, 2016; Jackson, 2016; Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Natkin et al., 2002; G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005).

Previous studies point to the importance of superintendents recognizing and managing political conflict when working with board members (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; T. Glass et al., 2000; Jackson, 2016; White et al., 2016). Hall and McHenry-Sorber (2017) refer to this as the “political dance” (p. 13). In their study on leadership and politics, G. Petersen and Fusarelli (2005) concluded effective superintendents are flexible in their leadership role and understand how to adjust to fit the need of the board and community. Additionally, a study on cross-cultural political styles revealed a combination of styles as effective (Paramova & Blumberg, 2017) but failed to address how specific strategies are used with boards. An urgent need exists for superintendents to understand how to utilize political styles and strategies that align with board member interests, while adhering to organizational values (DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016).

Building strong relations with board members is an important responsibility for superintendents. K12 superintendents have identified conflict with the board as a major reason for leaving the position (Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Given, 2016; Jackson, 2016). Recent studies revealed various reasons for conflict including financial decisions, lack of trust, personal agendas, and issues with their communities (DeKoninck, 2009; Puckett, 2016; Wright, 2017). In a review of the literature, no studies were discovered that explored how superintendents used political styles and specific strategies to work
successfully with school boards. Therefore, more research is needed to identify political styles of superintendents and specific strategies they use to work effectively with their school boards.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods study was to understand the political styles of southeast, California suburban school district superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies suburban school district superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

**Research Questions**

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do superintendents in suburban school districts perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?
2. What are the strategies superintendents in suburban school districts use to work successfully with the different school board member styles?

**Significance of the Problem**

Over the years, the school district superintendent position has evolved to encompass a multitude of roles. Consequently, current political and social structures require superintendents to develop skills as teachers, scholars, business managers, and intervention specialists (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). Therefore, as political leaders, superintendents must be adept at building strong connections with all stakeholders, including board members (L. G. Bolman & Deal, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2006).
White et al. (2016) contend it is critical to understand and utilize political styles and strategies to increase opportunities for success as organizational leaders. The current education landscape requires politically savvy superintendents who are up the challenge of working effectively with school boards to improve outcomes for students (Aleman, 2002).

School board members may possess political beliefs that sometimes conflict with those of the superintendent (DeKoninck, 2009; T. E. Glass, 2010; Puckett, 2016). Further, Puckett (2016) asserts managing elected officials requires the ability to embrace the political nature of the job. All leaders possess “back up or default styles” (White et al., 2016, p. 63) which can be a positive aspect for organizations when used strategically. Alarmingly, political pressures can lead to fractured superintendent and board relations contributing to high turnover rates (T. Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young & Ellerson, 2010; Reeves, 2009). Twenty-first century superintendents need to overcome the risks of their political responsibilities to remain on the job longer than the 3.18 years reported by the Council of the Great City of Schools (2014). The results of this study will provide critical information for superintendents regarding the positive impact of understanding superintendent and board member political styles and strategies required to be successful. Current superintendents may also use key findings of this research to design workshops to build a high-functioning governance team. Conversely, understanding political styles can also benefit school boards when conducting searches for new superintendents.

Regional organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), Urban Education Dialogue (UED), California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators (CAAASA), and National
Association of School Superintendents (NASS) are centered on professional development and collaboration around best practices in leading school districts. Therefore, their interest in the results of this study can be shared nationwide if not worldwide. Additionally, the California School Boards Association (CSBA) can use this information in building critical information on how to utilize political styles to benefit school districts rather than personal agendas that do not align with organization priorities.

**Definitions**

The following section defines terms as they are used in this study. These terms were collaboratively developed by a team of peer researchers studying political styles and strategies of superintendents, as noted in the preface. The definitions are organized around the nine political styles matrix based on initiative and interested. The styles are listed as self-interest, blended interests and organizational interest for each initiative: passive, engaged, assertive and other.

**Passive Political Styles**

**Analyst.** Analysts are passive and oriented toward self-interest over organizational interest. They are primarily focused on tasks over relationships and will seek evidence, proof, and detailed analysis before risking a change (L. G. Bolman & Deal, 1991; Boulgarides & Cohen, 2001; DeLuca, 1999; A. Rowe & Boulgarides, 1992; White et al., 2016).

**Adaptor.** Adaptors are pragmatists who generally support organizational changes and team decisions, provided they do not perceive personal risk. An adaptor is one who presents a passive, cooperative political style balanced between self-interest and
organizational interests (Bobic, Davis, & Cunningham, 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirton, 1976; White et al., 2016).

**Supporter.** Supporters are characterized as risk-averse, selfless, and passive devotees, backers, or advocates of the organization’s visions and goals. Supporters seek harmony and hesitate to take sides, though make decisions and provide resources that align with the organization’s goals (CSBA, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016).

**Moderately Engaged Political Styles**

**Planner.** Planners demonstrate modest initiative in political ventures and are typically focused on self-interests rather than organizational interests. Planners gather and analyze data for potential personal risks, putting constraints on decision-making (J. R. Hackman, 2002; J. R. Hackman & Wageman, 2005; White et al., 2016).

**Balancer.** Balancers blend self and organizational interests. Focused on the prevention of disequilibrium, balancers use their knowledge of the organization’s culture to diplomatically shift their support, when needed to maintain stability, harmony, and equanimity (Sheehan, 1989; White et al., 2016).

**Developer.** Developers work behind the scenes to coach or challenge others to build skills that can positively advance organizational interests to which they are fully committed. Developers exhibit a high level of self-awareness of their own knowledge and skill (DeLuca, 1999; Goleman, 2000; Rath, 2007; White et al., 2016).

**Assertive Political Styles**

**Challenger.** Challengers are characterized by self-interest, assertive behavior and confidence in their own vision, ideas, and goals, which inspires a strong desire to lead and make decisions quickly. Challengers see themselves as movers and shakers,
efficient, politically strategic, aggressive, and willing to confront the views of others in an attempt to influence outcomes (DeLuca, 1999; Jasper, 1999; Meyer, Jenness, & Ingram, 2005; Polletta, 2004; White et al., 2016).

**Arranger.** Arrangers use a political style in which they are assertive in pursuing their goals that are a blend of both organizational priorities and their own self-interests. They build a power base by connecting with many people. Arrangers will take risks to advance their goals and are strategic in combining resources (DeLuca, 1999; Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014; White et al., 2016).

**Strategist.** Strategists are visionary, open to new ideas, and collaborative. They empower others and model the organization’s values. Supporting organizational interests over self-interests, they strategically use a variety of approaches to propose new initiatives, engage diverse stakeholders, elicit commitment, and make purposeful decisions (DeLuca, 1999; Dergel, 2014; White et al., 2016).

**Other Definitions**

**Politics.** Politics are the activities, actions and policies through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live, and are used to achieve a desired outcome through reconciling differences and engaging others in dialogue. Politics also involves the use of power to influence or to improve organizational interests (Duke, 1976 as cited in Fairholm, 2009; White et al., 2016).

**Power.** Power is the ability to mobilize resources to accomplish organizational outcomes and influence others to overcome resistance (Emerson, 1962; Fairholm, 2009; Kanter, 1979; Mintzberg, 1983; J. Pfeffer, 1981, 1992).
Ethics. Ethics are moral principles of right and wrong, based on shared or agreed upon values, beliefs, and norms that guide a leader’s behavior (L. Bolman & Deal, 2017; Brierton, Graham, Tomal, & Wilhite, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; Duffy, 2006; White et al., 2016).

Political strategy. Political strategy is the method one uses to work towards obtaining a desired goal or objective. Political strategy may consider both internal and external factors including the views and opinions of others. While effectively navigating issues and situations to obtain the identified objective, a person uses political strategy to adapt their plan of action based on changing dynamics (DeLuca, 1999; Fairholm, 2009; White et al., 2016).

Political style. Political style is the way one’s values, character, and beliefs are manifested into actions and behaviors to influence others and achieve desired outcomes. Political style impacts how a leader might view and respond to different circumstances and the opinions of others. Additionally, political system may require varying levels of motivation and initiative (DeLuca, 1999; Grenny, Patterson, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2013; G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; White et al., 2016).

Political intelligence. Political intelligence is a set of skills and ethical behaviors used to achieve organizational and/or personal goals. Political intelligence is the way that a leader negotiates policy, standards, rules and regulations within organizational life, while considering the wants, needs, values, motivations and emotions of all stakeholder to accomplish organizational goals (DeLuca, 1999; Fairholm, 2009; Tucker, 1995; White et al., 2016).
Delimitations

Delimitations for this study restricted participation in the research by setting specific boundaries for the study. This study was delimited to five southern California suburban school district superintendents with evidence of exemplary leadership defined as superintendents of districts who have met four of the following criteria:

• Evidence of successful relationships with school board members.
• Identified by county superintendent as exemplary in working with board.
• Received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as ACSA.
• Recognition by their peers.
• Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
• Participated in CSBA Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
• Membership in professional associations in their field.
• Has a minimum of three years of experience as superintendent in his or her current district.

Organization of the Study

This study was divided into five chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study, along with background information, the statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, definitions of terms, and study delimitations. Chapter II provides an examination of the literature on political styles of school superintendents and board members and successful strategies superintendents utilize when working with
them. Chapter III presents the methodology used in the study, including the population and sample as well as the criteria for selection of the individuals interviewed for the study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, including a detailed analysis of the data. Chapter V provides an interpretation of the data, draws conclusions based on the analysis, presents implications for actions, and offers recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Meeting the expectations of the superintendent position requires time commitment and emotional and mental fortitude (Given, 2016). One aspect of that mental fortitude must include political intelligence. According to White et al. (2016), a politically intelligent leader is guided by their moral foundation while tending to the priorities and needs of others as they move their organization toward a common vision. In working with school boards, Kirtman and Fullan (2016) contend superintendents must gain the autonomy to lead while guiding the board to strategically focus on the surrounding community and local politics. Achieving this goal requires political skill and effective strategies on the part of the superintendent. This study focused directly on political styles of school board members and superintendents. Furthermore, this study examined strategies exemplary superintendents utilize in working with individual political styles of school board members.

Chapter II provides a review of the literature regarding politics in school district governance and how exemplary superintendents utilize political strategies to work with their school boards. This chapter begins with a brief examination of the historical background of politics before introducing theoretical foundations and frameworks related to power, leadership influence, and organizational politics. The review includes the Political Styles Framework based on nine political leadership styles, including:

- analyst
- adaptor
- supporter
- planner
• balancer
• developer
• challenger
• arranger
• strategist

The Chapter II review concludes with a comprehensive examination of information identifying the role of politics, school district governance and effective political strategies utilized by leaders.

The Evolution of Politics

Ancient Greeks defined politics as “concerning matters relating to the polis or city” (Cherry, 2012). Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle have long been viewed as the earliest Greek philosophers to provide a deep perspective of the influence of politics on leadership (Bass, 2008; Tucker, 1995). Interpretations of Plato’s writings reflected the idea of politics as necessary for leaders to guide communities in conducting their daily business (Tucker, 1995).

According to Tucker (1995) Greek philosophers viewed politics and leadership as synonymous terms related to the process of one influencing society through the “art of persuasion” (p. 2) to a desired outcome. In its evolution, current politics can be similarly defined as the activities, actions, and policies through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live, and are used to achieve a desired outcome through reconciling differences and engaging others in dialogue. Politics also involves the use of power to influence or to improve organizational interests (Duke, 1976 as cited in Fairholm, 2009; White et al., 2016).
Leaders in today’s society face many critical challenges in navigating the rapidly changing political landscape. Notable political scientist and historian Robert Tucker (1995) described political leadership as “directing a group at times of choice, change and decision” (p. 16). He further explained that at times circumstances require protocol to be developed, agreed upon, and implemented within the political landscape of the community by its leaders.

Garfield (2018) found throughout history leaders fought to acquire and maintain their status in organizations through politics. Politics is often described as seeking out power in the interest of oneself (Ellen, 2014; Tucker, 1995). However, over time the ability to inspire and connect with the heart of constituents has been linked to influencing politics. Courageous leaders like Martin Luther King, Ghandi, Mother Teresa, Cesar Chavez and others challenged what they felt were politically incorrect societal norms as their life purpose, which was far from self-serving.

**The Importance of Politics**

Organizational politics are a key facet of organizations and society. Perceptions of politics within organizations can impact conduct, mindset, and internal attitudes of employees (Swiderski, 2014). Overall, a negative perception of organizational politics exists (Bancroft-Turner & Hailstone, 2008; White et al., 2016). A highly politicized environment can be perceived as an unfair environment by those who feel they have been negatively impacted by organizational decisions, lack of individual recognition and promotion opportunities (Swiderski, 2014). Additionally, Swiderski (2014) found that understanding and anticipating potential negative effects of political behavior in organizations can lead to an improved work climate by minimizing employee turnover.
and increasing job satisfaction. Social factors like shared trust and supportive environments can influence an individual’s willingness to utilize politics as a strategy to accomplish tasks within organizations (Drory & Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). High levels of trust can serve to minimize members’ negative perceptions of actions by colleagues whose deep purpose may have been to achieve the goals of the organization.

**Leadership and Politics**

Organizational politics have historically been perceived as a negative aspect of the workplace setting because of perceptions of fairness and bias in decisions (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandley, & Toth, 1997; G. Ferris & Treadway, 2012). G. Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, and Gilmore (2000), reminded us “only in America do we use the word ‘politics’ to describe the process so well; ‘poli’ in Latin meaning ‘many’ and ‘tics’ meaning blood-sucking creatures” (p. 25). Many leaders claim a distaste for politics (DeLuca, 1999). However, politics, depending on the level of self-interest or interest of the organization can have a negative or positive impact on individuals and workplace culture (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; D. DeMatthews, 2018; DeLuca, 1999). Zaleznik (1970) boldly asserted, organizations cannot avoid the realization that they are in essence, political structures. Thus, Ellen (2014) suggests leaders acknowledge and embrace the political issues of their workplace environment and work to integrate politics to improve the performance and opportunities for all whom they lead. Research results support the idea that leaders who project a deep level of political skill increase chances of career success while withstanding existing organizational environments (Blass & Ferris, 2007; Liu et al., 2007; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009).
Qadri (2016) asserts political leadership implies guiding employee mindsets and the conduct of the entire organization. He further describes eight political leadership styles including

- autocratic
- bureaucratic
- cross cultural
- religious
- community
- laissez faire
- situational
- team

Each style represents different subgroups of society requiring skilled leaders to navigate the existing political landscapes within them. The main challenges for all political leaders include (a) clear communication, (b) strategy formation, (c) facing challenges, (d) attitude concerns, and (e) appropriate communication (Qadri, 2016). Successful strategic use of political skill is essential to a leader’s career longevity (G. Ferris et al., 2000). In a healthy organization the political ethics of organizations, including equity, and accountability should be paramount (Cavanagh, Moberg & Velasquez, 1981).

**Theoretical Foundations**

A deep understanding of theoretical foundations regarding political leadership and influence help to identify strategies that impact the success or failure of those who choose to lead. Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011) stated, “when politics get hijacked, inequality of opportunity will follow as power becomes a means to achieve self-interests of those
who possess it” (p. 252). Many foundational theories regarding organizational politics make reference to varying levels of perceived influence or power individuals or groups have over society’s political environment. Therefore, political theory can be very helpful in providing leaders with research-based methods to operate more effectively.

**Power Theory and Influence**

Power has been defined by multiple researchers as the level in which individuals influence or impose their will on others (Finkelstein, 1992; Galbraith, 1983; Shafritz, Ott & Jang, 2016). According to Stark (2016), the accumulation of power is connected to “influence, decision-making, communication and empowerment” (p. 136). Wheatley (2006) added that power earned through strong relationships needs to be continuously nurtured and valued. Similarly, Kirtman and Fullan (2016) added effective leaders secure power by developing human capital through trust building, empowering individuals and strong relationships. In essence individuals or groups must comply willingly to be influenced or led in order for power to remain a productive cog in any environment (Shafritz et al., 2016). Lastly, Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011) remind us that currently, similar to previous decades, money has an increased impact on the accumulation of political power.

**Sources of power.** Galbraith (1983) described the three main sources of power as property, personality, and organization. Possession of property coupled with wealth gives access to influence the daily lives of others through the power of ownership. Leaders with strong personalities persuade and attract believers into what Galbraith describes as “submission” (p. 40) by voluntarily giving away power. According to Galbraith, the most important source of power is organization because property and
personality only have effect in combination with those united in the work or organization of the purpose of the work (Galbraith, 1983). A combination of two or even all three can serve to strengthen the level of power over any group or movement. Finkelstein’s (1992) power theory regarding CFOs focused on four dimensions of power that all CEOs are given within organizations: (a) structural, (b) ownership, (c) expert, and (d) prestige.

Structural power is based on hierarchy within the organization. Ownership power reflects the accrual of power by mid-level leaders who represent stakeholders. Expert power reflects the individual skill level and ability to tap resources in addressing strategic initiatives and prestige power is accrued based on reputation and perceptions within organizations.

**Elite Theory**

According to elite theory or the concept of ‘elites,’ a separation exists between a small contingency of those who hold a majority of power, and the majority who become submissive to them because of coercion (Lopez, 2013; Polsby, 1980; Tucker, 1995). During the beginning of 20th century the belief of elite theory rose as a dominant leadership thought before subsequently declining in popularity amongst political activists. Social and political occurrences on the international stage following the World Wars contributed to what Higley and Pakulski (2012) describe as a ‘prolonged eclipse’ of elite theory.

**Pluralist Theory**

In today’s political environment there continues to be a significant effort from groups looking to advance specific interests of their communities. A pluralist based
movement can be driven by competing groups attempting to grasp the momentum in influencing the process of governing decisions (Perry, 1991).

The pluralist ideology resurfaced following World War II with a much different interpretation than earlier generations. The idea of one definition versus multiple interpretations of power politics was challenged by this new ideology. Dahl (1961) contends several points of centralized power exists with various individuals yielding more power within the community or groups.

**Political Management Framework**

The Academy for Political Intelligence (API) outlined the critical political skills and behaviors leaders must possess to effectively manage politics within their organizations. It is critical for leaders to provide clarity for members on how decisions are made and accurately recognize the multiple sources of individual power within the organization. Additionally, organizational leaders must know how to use political skills to influence others, stay connected to the information highway within the work environment, and embrace their role as a political leader within the organization (Bancroft-Turner & Hailstone, 2008). The intent is to utilize political behavior to benefit everyone in the organization.

**Organizational Leadership Framework**

Effective leaders can communicate clear guidelines and expectations through structures or frameworks to focus their organizations on what they have identified as critical areas of need. Behavior that conflicts with priorities communicated by leaders can sometimes cause confusion for members in efforts to build a unified vision for organizations.
To improve organizational effectiveness, M. Fullan and Quinn (2016) developed the coherence framework citing leadership as the central most important aspect of school districts building effective practices through clearly communicated and aligned priorities. They stress the importance of focusing direction, collaboration, internal and external accountability, and aligning goals for the ultimate purpose of improving student achievement. Similar to other leadership frameworks, building trust is an extremely important aspect of the framework. Building capacity around these focus areas will lead to members of organizations feeling inspired with a sense of purpose, clarity of goals and self-empowerment (see Figure 1).

**Focusing direction.** A concerted effort is made to emphasize purpose, strategies and needed changes for the organization.

**Cultivating collaborative cultures.** There is an overall focus on continuous growth, leadership development amongst all levels of the organization and working together.

**Deepening learning.** A focus on outcomes, building expertise around data driven needs, and organizational buy-in builds an environment with an emphasis on increased learning or all.

**Securing accountability.** Building genuine trust enhances member ability to monitor each other and the raise the quality of work production.

**Theoretical Framework**

In order to lead an organization, effective leaders provide clear direction, purpose and integrity while addressing the needs of those working under their guidance.

Theoretical frameworks serve to provide structure to an idea or theory to address questions of “why” and “how” in research projects (Dziak, 2018). Navigating organizational politics may require intentionality that can be derived from utilization of a theoretical framework.

**Political Styles Framework**

**What are political styles.** Political style is the way one’s values, character, and beliefs are manifested into actions and behaviors to influence others and achieve desired outcomes. Political style impacts how a leader might view and respond to different
circumstances and the opinions of others. Additionally, organizational political environments can be impacted by varying levels of motivation and initiative exhibited by its members (DeLuca, 1999; Grenny et al., 2013; G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; White et al., 2016).

DeLuca (1991) originally developed a political style grid intended to understand diverse political styles of individuals in organizations. Although the grid identified nine specific political styles, it only scratched the surface of how leaders work effectively with specific styles. DeLuca emphasized the importance of self-development of political intelligence and style.

DeLuca’s (1991) work preceded and supported White et al.’s (2016) Political Styles Framework. The Political Styles Framework serves as a model to identify nine individual political styles:

- analysis
- adaptor
- supporter
- planner
- balancer
- developer
- challenger
- arranger
- strategist
Finally, White et al. (2016) identified 18 internal and 19 external strategies to effectively manage the political landscape with trust building identified as the most essential political strategy applied to both areas of focus.

The Two Continuums of Political Style

White et al. (2016) assert that political style emerges from the intersection of two continuums: The Goal Allegiance Continuum and the Initiative Continuum (see Figures 2 and 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basics for Goals</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Interests</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Goal Allegiance Continuum. Adapted from “The Politically Intelligent Leader,” (2nd ed.) by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, and S. L. Fox, 2016, p. 69. Copyright 2016 by Rowman & Littlefield.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basics for Goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passive</strong></td>
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</table>

*Figure 3.* Political Initiative Continuum. Goal Allegiance Continuum. Adapted from “The Politically Intelligent Leader,” (2nd ed.) by P. C. White, T. R. Harvey, and S. L. Fox, 2016, p. 70. Copyright 2016 by Rowman & Littlefield.

The Goal Allegiance Continuum can best be described as the prioritization of individual goals vs organizational goals and how actual behaviors align to each (White et al., 2016). Individual behaviors can reflect varying levels of self-interest, blended interest and organizational interest. White et al. (2016) explain the Initiative Continuum as the amount of energy individuals apply to their priorities. The Initiative Continuum is based on levels of aggressiveness in pursuing their goals from passive to moderately
engaged to assertive behavior. The question is: How important is an issue to the individual and what is the level of commitment or passion to address or change it?

**Nine Political Styles of White, Harvey, and Fox**

White et al. (2016) uses a matrix to demonstrate how the three goal allegiance categories of self-interest, blended interests, and organizational interests intersect with the three levels of initiative—passive, engaged, and assertive—to form a political style (see Figure 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL: INITIATIVE</th>
<th>Self-Interest</th>
<th>Blended Interests</th>
<th>Organizational Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>Supporter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


On the matrix, analysts, adaptors, and supporters represent a passive political style across a range of goals from self-interest to organizational interest. Planners, balancers, and developers are considered an engaged political style across the range of goals and challengers, arrangers, and strategists are considered assertive political styles from self to organizational interest. For the purpose of this study each political style was used with the definition as follows:

**Analyst.** Analysts are passive and oriented toward self-interest over organizational interest. They are primarily focused on tasks over relationships and will seek evidence, proof, and detailed analysis before risking a change (L. G. Bolman &
Adaptor. Adaptors are pragmatists who generally support organizational changes and team decisions, provided they do not perceive personal risk. An adaptor is one who presents a passive, cooperative political style balanced between self-interest and organizational interests (Bobic, Davis, & Cunningham, 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirton, 1976; White et al., 2016).

Supporter. Supporters are characterized as risk-averse, selfless, and passive devotees, backers, or advocates of the organization’s visions and goals. Supporters seek harmony and hesitate to take sides, though make decisions and provide resources that align with the organization’s goals (CSBA, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016).

Planner. Planners demonstrate modest initiative in political ventures and are typically focused on self-interests rather than organizational interests. Planners gather and analyze data for potential personal risks, putting constraints on decision making. (Hackman, 2002; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; White et al., 2016).

Balancer. Balancers blend self and organizational interests. Focused on the prevention of disequilibrium, balancers use their knowledge of the organization’s culture to diplomatically shift their support, when needed to maintain stability, harmony, and equanimity (Sheehan, 1989; White et al., 2016).

Developer. Developers work behind the scenes to coach or challenge others to build skills that can positively advance organizational interests to which they are fully committed. Developers exhibit a high level of self-awareness of their own knowledge and skill (DeLuca, 1999; Goleman, 2000; Rath, 2007; White et al., 2016).
**Challenger.** Challengers are characterized by self-interest, assertive behavior and confidence in their own vision, ideas, and goals, which inspires a strong desire to lead and make decisions quickly. Challengers see themselves as movers and shakers, efficient, politically strategic, aggressive, and willing to confront the views of others in an attempt to influence outcomes (DeLuca, 1999; Jasper, 1997; Meyer et al., 2005; Polletta, 2004; White et al., 2016).

**Arranger.** Arrangers use a political style in which they are assertive in pursuing their goals that are a blend of both organizational priorities and their own self-interests. They build a power base by connecting with many people. Arrangers will take risks to advance their goals and are strategic in combining resources (DeLuca, 1999; Effelsberg et al., 2014; White et al., 2016).

**Strategist.** Strategists are visionary, open to new ideas, and collaborative. They empower others and model the organization’s values. Supporting organizational interests over self-interests, they strategically use a variety of approaches to propose new initiatives, engage diverse stakeholders, elicit commitment and make purposeful decisions (DeLuca, 1999; Dergel, 2014; White et al., 2016).

**Politics and Public Education**

The political system is directly connected with public education where schools have become conduits for political based decisions (G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; P. L. Thomas, 2012). Past examples include the recent shift to the federally mandated Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTTT), and A Nation at Risk. Carter (2018) tags the current political landscape as “the new politics of education” (p. 7).
Activism within the education community has increased amongst stakeholders (Casalaspi, 2018; Ferman, 2017). Though superintendents are inundated with running the daily operations of the organization, some constituents prefer they fully embrace their responsibilities as community leaders. D. DeMatthews (2018) advocates for superintendents increasing their political participation with a focus on holding elected leaders more accountable for decisions that negatively impact students. By the nature of the position, superintendents have a pulse on critical needs of their communities and therefore have a deep responsibility to act at a grassroots level (D. DeMatthews, 2018; M. Fullan, 2006). In public education organizations there is a stark difference between “doing the right thing” versus making “politically correct” decisions. Some of these decisions can be characterized as “playing it safe to avoid upsetting people rather than challenging the status quo” (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016, p. 20). Therefore, M. Fullan (2006) stressed the importance of a strong sense of moral purpose during challenging times as a leader. Mijares (1994) provided a definition for school politics that reflects the following:

School politics are simply defined as those individuals or groups who use public pressure or social and economic influence to control the staff of a school system. They use innuendo, hearsay, subjectivity and emotional persuasion to amass support for their position. School politics operate on the premise of divide and conquer. In fact, politics may account for the majority of superintendent and administrative staff terminations. (p. 39)

K-12 education depends on community, family and adult support to impact student outcomes in a positive manner. Parents, educators, politicians, business owners,
and college leaders all agree on the importance of education (Hill & Jochim, 2018). However, there are many differing views of how to meet the needs of children and levels of community involvement necessary, and it is challenging for constituents to agree on what students should learn. Political discussions also include disagreement on pay for teachers, taxpayer contributions, family responsibilities, and community decision making power. Hill and Jochim (2018) asserts that there is seldom consensus on major issues and minimal possibility of resolution that meets everyone’s satisfaction. School leaders must effectively navigate this dynamic on a daily basis.

White et al. (2016) reminds us of the importance of superintendents maintaining a realistic perception of the level of support around their work. Aligned personal and organizational values serve as key foundational principles for superintendents and school boards as politics infiltrate public school operations. Key decisions should be based on what is considered best for the organization, its priorities and values (M. Fullan & Quinn, 2016; White et al., 2016).

**School District Governance**

**Role of the School Board**

The original concept of the school board was created in 1837 nearly 200 years ago in Massachusetts in order to divide matters of governing from education matters (Carol et al., 1986; J. P. Danzberger, 1992). Likewise, by 1837 the first superintendent was appointed in Buffalo, New York and by 1870 there were more than 20 city school superintendents serving communities. The need for the role of superintendent and school boards continues to grow as diverse student populations increased and the need to educate them increased with more complexity (Callahan, 1966; Frankenberg & Diem,
2013). Currently, the CSBA reports there are roughly 13,600 public school districts in the United States ultimately responsible for educating approximately 50 million students (CSBA, 2019). Land (2002) reported over 96% of U.S. public school district board members are elected by local voters. In California, school district board governance teams reflect five or seven members and a superintendent appointed by them. In California more than 5000 board members serve in more than 1000 school districts that represent in excess of 6 million students.

Most states, with the exception of Minnesota and Wisconsin, have a state board of education. Similar to public school district governance structures, policies for the entire state are discussed. Lastly, state school board members are elected or appointed by the governor unless other circumstances contributed to securing their seat (McGuinn & Manna, 2016).

Who Serves on School Boards

Changes in the political landscape impacting school board election processes as a result of the California Voting Rights Act enacted in 2002 (National Demographics Corporation, 2019) may eventually impact the gender and racial make-up of school boards. Awareness of a school board member’s background can help to understand the context for their decisions and conduct.

Diversity in the racial makeup of school boards has increased somewhat but still fails to align with the demographics of the students they serve. The National School Boards Association (NSBA) (2018) reported the demographic breakdown of 50.7 million entering prekindergarten to grade 12 students. Referring to projections by the Department of Education, NSBA shared that student ethnicity data reflect 47%
Caucasian, 27% Hispanic, 16% African American, and less than 1% Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native. Results of school board member ethnicity demographic responses reflected 78% Caucasian, 10% African American, 3% Hispanic, and less than 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native less who serve on school boards. Compared to 2002, African American school board members saw a steady increase from 7.8% to 12.3% in 2010 and then a slight decline to 10% in 2018. Among school board member survey respondents, 45% reported serving student populations with less than 25% minorities, while 22% reported minority populations as high as 26% to 50%. Lastly, 18% of respondents reported minority populations as high as 51% to 75% and 12% reported 76% to 100% minority student populations (NSBA, 2018).

**Education levels of school board members.** The latest education levels reported by school board members reflected 31% possessing a bachelors and 46% of respondents possessing a master’s or doctorate degree (National School Board Association [NSBA], 2018). Approximately 19% shared they had some college or post high school training including AA or AS degrees from the community college. Only 4% of respondents reported they had only possessed a high school diploma or GED.

**Professions of school board members.** Education remains the largest job category among survey participants at 27% followed by 11% in business and finance, 7% in computer information, and 6% in health care. The remaining 49% fell into the other category representing 22 various jobs of a small percentage of school board members who responded (NSBA, 2018).

**Average income level for school board members.** The career choice responses of the participants report 49% of them with annual household incomes at or above
$100,000. Those participants earning between $50,000 and $99,999 reflected 30% while 8% earn between $25,000 and $49,999. Although just under 2% of survey participants earned less than $25,000 in 2010, none of the 2018 respondents selected that category and 13% took a pass on the income question.

Income levels, education levels, and professional background of school board members can influence their views on issues and proposed initiatives in school districts. Additionally, political styles and strategies they utilize in addressing issues can also be influenced by the same aforementioned factors.

**School Board Responsibilities**

School boards must abide by state laws and regulations, establish local policies, and employ a superintendent (T. J. Kowalski, 2013). Campbell and Green (1994) agree that school board members must command a depth of knowledge of all the complex aspects of school district governance. As a governance team, the school board and superintendent are expected to enforce, adjust, and apply local and federally mandated policies in the best interests of their students. However, Hochschild (2005) noted that in reality school board members actually spent very little of their time creating and monitoring policy. School district demographics have become extremely diverse further adding to the complexity of policy oversight for governance teams.

Concerns regarding educational equity, access and inclusion for student subgroups have risen as critical policy challenges for governance teams to navigate. Additionally, D. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) assert that local community activists take swift and decisive action when inequality exists in the school system. Therefore, it is critical for superintendents and school board members to be well informed.
on community concerns. More often, school board members are forced to perform their jobs amongst challenging and highly political education environments. Hence, Saatcioglu, Moore, Sargut, and Bajaj (2011) noted the importance of school boards collaborating with local organizations, which helps to improve effectiveness in policy alignment and execution. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 is one example of a federally mandated and highly political policy local school boards must monitor and ensure enforcement. To compound leader frustration with similar mandates, most often these priorities come without sufficient funding or not funded at all.

Surprisingly, a clearly defined and consistent definition of the school boards’ role is difficult to find (Campbell & Green, 1994). It appears no common agreement exists on what boards should be responsible for. For example, Yaffe (2015) asserts ideally policy oversight is the role of the board and superintendents oversee district daily business. However, the lines can become blurred as boards attempt to get involved in the day-to-day business in hiring personnel and superintendents lack of collaboration with the board in negotiating contracts. In an effort to define the role of the school board, Hochschild (2005) noted a basic list of duties that school board members perform are:

- Hire and fire superintendents.
- Oversee budgets and prepare voting taxpayers in their districts for bond issues or increases in school taxes.
- Negotiate with teachers, often though not always through unions.
- Explain, justify, and speak for the school system in public.
• Implement, more or less, laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) or court orders and consent decrees.
• Give out contracts for jobs, supplies, and services.
• Attend to reformers seeking to influence the school system, whether by enacting or repulsing their initiatives.
• Charter schools in some states and districts.
• Run for higher political office. (Chapter 13 para 2)

In comparison, a CSBA (2019) taskforce identified a core of responsibilities that must be performed by school boards as:

• The establishment of a long-term vision for the school system.
• The establishment and maintenance of a basic organizational structure for the school system, including employment of a superintendent, adoption of an annual budget, adoption of governance policies, and creation of a climate that promotes excellence.
• The establishment of systems and processes to ensure accountability to the community, including fiscal accountability, accountability for programs and student outcomes, staff accountability, and collective bargaining.
• Advocacy on behalf of children and public education at the community, state, and national levels.

Effective school boards. Highly effective and high functioning school boards work closely with their superintendents utilizing a shared decision approach in order to meet the needs of students (CSBA, 2019; NSBA, 2019). School board members hold the collective responsibility of hiring, and when in the best interest of the organization,
removing the superintendent. The power of the local school board is delegated by the state to act on their behalf to ensure schools are running properly and student achievement needs are being met (G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005).

Campbell and Greene (1994) found that school board members often hold educators to high expectations but fail to hold themselves to the same expectation. For example, some school board members often fail to properly review board meeting agenda packets with detailed back up information prior to board meetings, which can result in un-informed votes on critical items. It is important for school board members to seek continual professional development to stay current on policy and explore research based strategies on effective board governance practices (Griffin, 2005).

As a lead organization on school district governance, CSBA (2019) identified key characteristics that high performing school board members share as:

- Effective board members understand the importance of teamwork.
- Effective board members adopt a positive attitude in the conduct of their business.
- Effective board members understand, appreciate, and respect the role of the superintendent, the district staff, and all other members of the community.
- Effective board members establish an environment of trust within the board and the district.
- Effective board members understand the importance of open and honest communication with everyone.
- Effective board members carry out their responsibilities with a high level of professionalism.
• Effective board members operate with fairness, firmness, stability, and consistency.

**School Board Evaluation Responsibility**

The evaluation of the superintendent is a critical responsibility that if done efficiently and purposefully, can impact performance. T. Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young and Ellerson (2010) reported that two-thirds of public school superintendents surveyed received evaluations from their board. Of those two-thirds, 80% reported the evaluations were completed annually. T. Kowalski et al. (2010) researchers recommended both formative and summative provisions be developed along with opportunities for professional growth for superintendents. Superintendent evaluation ratings of excellence declined 69% to 53% from 2000 to 2010. Ongoing open communication is necessary to provide timely communication on performance to minimize any surprises in the final evaluation process.

**Board Members as Elected Officials**

As elected officials, board members may feel they are responsible to the constituents that voted to put them in their seat. At times this becomes a complex issue as the governance team is tasked with making decisions that reflect a positive outcome considered best for the larger group rather than individuals. Saatcioglu et al. (2011) provide the following opinion on the reality of school board member behavior as elected officials:

School board research has consistently indicated that board members too often function as ‘representatives’ of contending constituencies or special interests, or champions of a single or narrow set of personally compelling issues, rather than
‘trustees’ charged with developing common goals and policies that reflect shared values and interests of the district as a whole. (p. 6)

The intent of school boards is to keep education decisions in the democratic lap of local communities (Hochshild, 2005; Land, 2002; MacKinnon, 2016). Callahan (1966) and T. Kowalski et al. (2010) agreed that larger school districts are more susceptible to increased political activism. Consequently, school board members can be pulled into the complexity of their local political landscape, which has in some instances led to corruption and failure to serve the needs of the true interests of the community as a whole (J. P. Danzberger, 1992; Hess, 2008; Land, 2002; Urban & Wagoner, 1996).

**The Role of the Superintendent**

The role of the public school superintendent has transformed over the years. Superintendents originally oversaw responsibilities including business management, aligning teaching strategies, business management, and developing legally aligned structures for tracking finances and expenditures (T. E. Glass, 2010). Over time the superintendent position evolved to serving as lead educator, teacher trainer, pedagogical specialist, and ultimately the overseer of the quality of education offered in local communities (Callahan, 1966; T. Kowalski et al., 2010). District size, demographics, resources, and academic achievement gaps and increased politically charged federal mandates are just a few of the challenges faced by current superintendents. Ultimately, the role of superintendent requires developing a system that increases student achievement, aligning and managing resources, and building working relationships with board members (Jackson, 2016; T. Kowalski et al., 2010). The bottom line, according to
T. J. Kowalski (2006) is that the superintendent, as commander and chief of the district, is charged with implementing district policy and oversight of efficient operations.

**Who are Superintendents**

Similar to school board members, the political styles and strategies of superintendents can be impacted by their life experiences. Deep-rooted beliefs may be the result of negative or positive life experiences as a result of race or gender. The AASA (2019) conducted a survey to look at gender, race, and diversity of 1400 educators who responded. Results reflect women make up 77% of the education workforce, but only 33% serve in superintendent roles.

Additionally, in the same report, AASA (2019) reported the majority of superintendents are 89.3% Caucasian and 77% male. African Americans respondents represented 3.3%, Hispanic 2.7%, 1.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native and 0.4% representing Asian (see Figure 5). Although the data points to an over representation of certain ethnic groups, organizations like AASA and national search firms are working actively to recruit more minorities into seeking superintendent positions as diverse student populations continue to rise. Of equal importance in meeting student needs, is the prioritization of pursuing educators who mirror the ethnic background of the students in historically underserved subgroups (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014).
Superintendent as Lead Learner

The superintendent should serve as lead learner amongst their district and site leaders. Thompson and France (2015) stressed the importance of district officials’ oversight and support of site principals in suburban districts. As a governance team, the superintendent and board members share the charge of allocating resources for the professional growth of teachers, administrators and each other to meet the learning needs of students they serve (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Of equal importance is the superintendent pursuing educators who mirror the ethnic background of the students in historically underserved subgroups (Diarrassouba & Johnson, 2014). The number of low income students continues to rise in suburban districts, which intensifies the importance of the superintendent’s role in aligning resources to address their needs (Holme et al., 2014).

Superintendent as Chief Financial Officer

Superintendents confess one of their biggest hurdles is managing insufficient funding for their school districts (Farkas, Johnson & Duffet, 2003, T. J. Kowalski, 2006).
With dwindling resources and financial catastrophes continually looming, superintendents must work closely with their board members in making decisions on prioritizing staffing, programs, and facilities (Zeehandelaar, 2012). One of the roles of the superintendent during these challenging financial times is to keep the board well informed on expenditures and the importance of being fiscally responsible in the best interest of all stakeholders, especially students.

**Suburban Public Unified School District Superintendents**

**What is Suburban**

Suburban school districts are located inside an urbanized area but are outside of a principal city with populations ranging from 100,000 to 250,000 and greater. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (n.d.) ranks school districts according to three categories: (a) small suburban school districts with populations less than 100,000 people; (b) midsize suburban with 100,000 to less than 250,000 people; and (c) large suburban school districts with populations of 250,000 people or more. This particular study focuses on large suburban school districts.

According to NCES (n.d.) there are 2,497 large suburban, 342 midsize suburban, and 246 small suburban school districts in the United States. In California, there are 236 large suburban, 42 midsize suburban, and 31 small suburban public school districts.

**What is Unified**

There are three types of public school districts in California including (a) elementary, (b) high school, and (c) unified. The California Department of Education (CDE) (2019) describes unified school districts as those serving students kindergarten
through grade 12. There are approximately 344 listed as unified school districts in the California (CDE, 2019).

**Challenges Faced by Suburban Unified Superintendents**

Suburban public unified school district superintendents face a plethora of challenges related to the geographical characteristics of the region and demographic make-up of the students and families being served. Specifically, Przybylski, Chen, and Hu (2018) assert suburban public school district superintendents face increased politically charged challenges, constituents focused on self-serving interests, unstable and dwindling resources, and demands for greater responsibility to increase student achievement amongst ever-changing local and federal standards based reform efforts.

The California Voting Rights Act enacted in 2002 required school districts to be divided into trustee areas to eliminate the impairment of a protected class’ ability to influence results in school board elections (National Demographic Corporation [NDC], 2019). The intent was to increase the diversity of school boards to potentially mirror the racial makeup of the community. As a result, school board members voted into their seats by voters in specific trustee areas may have agendas that align with their individual area priorities rather than overall district priorities.

Current and aspiring suburban unified public school superintendents will need to not only understand how to navigate what L. Bolman and Deal (2017) describe as “mapping the political terrain” (p. 7), but also master how to develop a comprehensive plan to educate large diverse communities that can sometimes include many unique socio-economically based needs, that if not met, tend to be barriers to maximizing student achievement. Within large suburban districts, smaller regions within the boundaries can
represent cities or communities whose unique needs and wishes are not aligned with the needs of the larger community nor with available resources. How can superintendents build a system that addresses the poor, middle class and rich families all together?

**Diverse community dynamics.** In suburban areas, school superintendents must rally diverse groups to support the vision of the district. Although challenging, if done well the superintendent is able to leverage bargaining within an environment of diverse interests and build pockets of support for potential changes that may require action from those groups (Hill & Jochim, 2018). In the same respect, L. Bolman and Deal (2017) shared leaders must have “friends or allies to get things done” (p. 210) while being able to bargain with those who oppose proposed changes. In order to bargain effectively, superintendents must communicate a clear plan or vision, be willing to collaborate in a genuine fashion, and hold to their ethical standards (L. Bolman & Deal, 2017). Concerns brought to board members can span from across all corners of the city, must be prioritized in a balanced manner by the superintendent.

**The Superintendent and Effective Leadership**

The importance of building a coherent leadership approach with a well-balanced, and clearly communicated focus is paramount for public school superintendents (M. Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Qadri (2016) defines leadership as “having a vision, sharing that vision and inspiring others to support your vision while creating their own” (p. 18). In other words, leaders must have a strong knowledge of the needs of their organization and the ability to execute a well thought out plan. Clear and coherent communication of that plan is a key component. Leadership development, instructional focus, budget alignment
to priorities, accountability and collaboration are included as examples of coherent practices.

Effective leaders provide a comprehensive roadmap, well thought out steps, inspiration around new ideas, positive relationships with employees, calm during stressful times, and build confidence and positive spirit amongst followers (Qadri, 2016). Consequently, Fusarelli (2006) believed superintendents who fail to secure a deep understanding of their school district structures, culture and surrounding community, along with building strong personal connections with key groups, will fail as leaders. Therefore, superintendents must enlist stakeholders including teachers, district office administrators, community members, and board members to build a collaborative relationship.

**Political Strategies Used by Superintendents**

“Politics and bureaucracy are reported as the main reasons superintendent colleagues have left the field” (Farkas et al., 2003). White et al. (2016) contend it is critical to understand and utilize political styles and strategies to increase opportunities for success as organizational leaders. The current education landscape requires politically savvy superintendents who are up the challenge of working effectively with school boards to improve outcomes for students (Aleman, 2002). All leaders possess “back up or default political styles” (White et al., 2016, p. 63) which can be a positive aspect for organizations when used strategically.

**Superintendent Political Skills**

Politically savvy superintendents exhibit skilled leadership in navigating the existing political dynamics of their school board, communities, including participation in
community organizations, increasing parent engagement, shielding board members from politically charged issues, and organizing support for continuous change management.

Unfortunately, politics in education has had a negative impact on superintendent tenure (Byrd et al., 2006). Effectively managing and navigating politics is vital to extending superintendent tenure. Research from Council of Great City Schools (2014) and Yaffe, (2015) reflect the average tenure of superintendents to be between three and four years. As a consequence of that low average, time is short to build sustainable systems for continuous improvement (Yaffe, 2015). Therefore, Aleman (2002) found that new and aspiring superintendents must sharpen their political skills to remain successful in the seat for extended periods of time. He further stated that “without political sophistication or expertise they will not maximize their effectiveness” (Aleman, 2002, p. 320).

Effective communication skills for the superintendent are critical in working through the political nature of school boards, building connections with public and private community partners, and serving as the advocate for the surrounding community (T. E. Glass, 2010). It has not always been as critical for superintendents to be politically well rounded, but with the increase of accountability reform efforts, civic disagreement, and dwindling of financial resources to support meeting student needs, their political responsibilities have increased.

**Politically Savvy Superintendents Build Trust**

To be politically savvy, superintendents must exhibit and garner trust amongst those they intend to influence. Farkas, Johnson, and Duffet (2003) summarized their perception trust between the public and leaders in our society with the following statement:
All leaders in all professions have systematically betrayed the public confidence they have been entrusted with, including our religious leaders, military leaders, industrial leaders, business leaders, banking leaders and political leaders. So there is natural suspicion of leadership in society. (p. 15)

According to Harvey and Drolet, (2005) trust can only be built through behavior. They include five specific behaviors as a result of their research. First, by focusing on building listening skills and awareness of the needs of others, superintendents can develop a relationship of mutual dependence and increased trust amongst those they oversee. Second, superintendents must behave consistently by following through on what they commit to or say. Being a trusting and dependable partner with strong follow through allows effective superintendents to resolve issues while still aligning to the goals and vision of the district (Hill & Jochim, 2018). Third, superintendents cannot be seen as dishonest in order to build integrity and trust. Fourth, superintendents build trust through affability or ability to be liked which supports trusting interactions. Lastly, in order to be trusted, superintendents must trust others even at the risk of being burned (Harvey & Drolet, 2005). With these five aspects in place, Harvey and Drolet agree “the soil is fertile for trust” (p. 11).

**Politically Savvy Superintendents are Ethical**

Ethics are moral principles of right and wrong, based on shared or agreed upon values, beliefs, and norms that guide a leader’s behavior (L. Bolman & Deal, 2017; Brierton et al., 2016; DeLuca, 1999; Duffy, 2006; White et al., 2017). M. Fullan (2003) mentioned the need for a solid “sense of moral purpose” (p. 19) amongst the highest ranking school district leaders. Superintendents must exhibit the courage to make the
right decision no matter how unpopular it may appear to constituents. White et al. (2016) developed four reflection questions for leaders to refer to when faced with tough ethical decisions:

- What are my values?
- Are my values consistent with good ethical principles?
- Are the political strategies I have chosen consistent with my values?
- Will I be serving my own self-interest or the goals of the organization (pp. 113-116).

The loneliest times of serving as superintendent can be when big decisions have to be made and the pressure of “the buck stop here” looms over their seat as the leader. Aligning those decisions to personal ethics and organizational values, when made clear ahead of time, can minimize potential challenges and misinterpretations as to the reasoning.

**Politics of the Superintendent and School Board**

Balancing the expectations of voters and what is best for students is a continual challenge for school board members. Castallo (2003) discovered superintendents become concerned when school board members become excessively involved in the administration of schools. Therefore, Houston (2001) suggests superintendents establish clearly defined roles for school board members while building strong relations without trying to control them. Superintendents must also pay attention to concerns brought by school board members or it could cause conflict in the interactions between the two and slow working through various issues (Wilson & Watkins, 2010).
A strong connection between the superintendent and school board members is critical (L. G. Bolman & Deal, 2008; Marzano & Waters, 2006). Stark (2016) discovered four themes that impact superintendent and school board relations while navigating local politics including “interpersonal relationships, communication skills, cultural awareness and superintendent accountability” (p. 168). Building a personal relationship with each school board member requires time and effort. Keeping the board informed and out front on politically charged issues can assist them in making sound decisions around facts rather than emotions. Being culturally aware of the local community is important in avoiding what DeLuca (1999) describes as “political blind spots” (p. 27) where one fails to see the extent to which informal influence shapes the decision making process. Awareness also relates to superintendents maintaining ongoing, current knowledge of local politics (Stark, 2016). Lastly, in good and bad times the “buck stops” with the superintendent and that is all a part of the accountability and political landscape when they accept the position.

As elected officials, school board members can be influenced by the political dynamics of community perspectives regarding the superintendent’s job performance. Hence, Jackson (2016) acknowledged the influence special interest groups and unions have on board members. Additionally, Jackson and Green (1992) alluded that board members regularly use their roles for self-interest as stepping stones to higher profile political positions, which can adversely affect critical decision making. Therefore, it is important that the superintendent is aware of board member political intent and focus on leveraging their relationship to influence the board as a whole.
School board members may not always share the political beliefs of the superintendent, which can cause conflict amongst the governance team (DeKoninck, 2009; T. E. Glass, 2010; Puckett, 2016). Therefore, political pressures can lead to fractured superintendent and board relations contributing to high turnover rates (T. Kowalski et al., 2010; Reeves, 2009). Twenty-first century superintendents need to overcome the risks of their political responsibilities to remain on the job longer than the 3.18 years (Council of the Great City of Schools, 2014). In order to be successful, Puckett (2016) suggests superintendents learn to embrace the political nature of working with elected officials. Those political dynamics and rituals between school board members and superintendents include various aspects that if not handled effectively can lead to the demise of the relationship. Existing literature points to the importance of superintendents recognizing and managing political conflict when working with board members (Feuerstein & Opfer, 1998; T. Glass et al., 2000; Jackson, 2016; White et al., 2016). Hall and McHenry-Sorber (2017) refer to this as the “political dance” (p. 13). Levels of school board member participation, the process or structure followed, and the distribution and sharing of power are all equally important in dealing with politics between the superintendent and the board. Another factor to consider is to what extent and around whom is that power centered as the result of alliances or tight relationships (Zaleznik, 1970).

Summary

Chapter II explored politics in school district governance and how exemplary superintendents utilize political strategies to work with their school boards and community. A brief review of the historical background of politics before introducing
theoretical foundations and frameworks related to power, leadership influence, and organizational politics was provided. Specifically, an examination of the role of the public school superintendent in relation to the school board and the level of political skill necessary to be successful was covered extensively. The Chapter II review highlighted White et al.’s (2016) Political Styles Framework based on nine political leadership styles, including:

- analyst
- adaptor
- supporter
- planner
- balancer
- developer
- challenger
- arranger
- strategist

While extensive research exists on the importance political awareness and skill related to the public school superintendent position and working with school board members, there is a significant gap in the literature that explores how superintendents used political styles and specific strategies to work successfully with individual school board member political styles. The Chapter II literature review included specific challenges and effective practices recommended for suburban unified school district superintendents who serve larger and more diverse communities in urbanized areas.
Additionally, the synthesis matrix (Appendix A) summarizes the review of literature for this research study. The synthesis matrix lists the references and significant connections to political styles and strategies utilized by leaders and shows the relationship between each of the references.

Chapter III will focus on methodological elements of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study to identify political styles of superintendents and board members and political strategies exemplary superintendents utilize to work board members. The purpose statement and research questions will be reviewed to show alignment to the study and chosen design. The data collection and analysis process will be clarified and summarized in detail for both the identified strands of the study. Chapter III includes the study population, sample criteria, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and limitations. Chapter IV discusses detailed descriptions of the data and research findings, while Chapter V includes: conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design to identify political styles of superintendents and board members as perceived by superintendents in addition to identifying and explaining political strategies utilized by superintendents in working with perceived political styles of board members based on the political styles matrix (White et al., 2016). This mixed methods research design was used because it aligned well with the purpose and research questions and provided statistical quantitative data alongside descriptive qualitative data to enrich the findings. The goal of the study was to identify effective strategies in working successfully with the various political styles of school board members.

Chapter III discusses the methodology of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study. This chapter provides a review of the purpose statement and research questions. Additionally, the research design, population, sample, participant selection procedures, and instrumentation are explained in detail. Data collection and analysis procedures are also reviewed including the interview and survey development and procedures. Steps to ensure validity and reliability for the study are explained. Lastly, the limitations of this study are presented.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify the political styles of exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the
purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies suburban school
district superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

**Research Questions**

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do superintendents in suburban unified school districts perceive their
   own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?
2. What are the strategies superintendents in suburban unified school districts
   use to work with the different styles of school board members?

**Research Design**

This study used a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design to
identify strategies exemplary unified suburban school superintendents use to work with
school boards. This particular study is part of a larger thematic study on identifying
political styles and effective strategies utilized by exemplary school district
superintendents. Ten peer researchers along with two faculty advisors discussed and
arrived at the decision to conduct a sequential explanatory mixed methods study. The
types of exemplary superintendents in the thematic study included suburban unified,
small suburban, high school district, Latino, female suburban, regional occupational
program (ROP), small rural, and mid-size school district (see Appendix B).

**Mixed Methods Design**

The first step in identifying a proper research strategy was to determine if the
design should reflect a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approach (see Figure
6). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a mixed methods design where the
qualitative data could explain the quantitative findings as “providing a more complete
investigation” (p. 25). Additionally, J. W. Creswell and Creswell (2018) found that mixed method studies provide a deeper understanding beyond what is secured by an individual research method such as qualitative or quantitative alone. When little is known regarding a topic, the advantage of mixed-method studies is that the quantitative result is enhanced with the qualitative information that explains it (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the quantitative aspect is preliminary and the qualitative research is emphasized.

**Figure 6.** Mixed Methods Design Process.

**Quantitative Design**

Quantitative methodological designs “emphasize objectivity in measuring and describing phenomena” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 21). Quantitative research focuses primarily on numerical data from surveys, trials or examinations (Roberts, 2010).
While Patten and Newhart (2018) state “in a quantitative study, the data will be used to either support or reject a hypothesis as potential explanations for the possible causes and solutions” (p. 25), in this research study, the thematic peer researchers collected quantitative data using a survey instrument deployed by email to suburban unified school district superintendents to determine their own and board members’ perceived political styles.

**Qualitative Design**

Qualitative methodological design gathers data through open-ended questions, observations, artifacts, and review of documentation (Patton, 2015). J. W. Creswell (2008) asserts qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldwide view, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and study of research problems which inquired into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. A qualitative method provides the researcher an opportunity to attain a deeper understanding of responses provided during information gathering. The order in which the qualitative and quantitative data is gathered for a mixed methods study depends on the purpose of the study. The resulting information serves as a comprehensive picture of the problem being explored (Roberts, 2010). In this study, the purpose of the study was best served by using the quantitative survey as a preliminary step to the more important qualitative interviews.

**Rationale.** A mixed methods design was used because it offered the greatest opportunity to both identify perceived political styles of key players and develop a rich understanding of the lived experiences of superintendents in dealing with those styles at the highest levels of a school district. For this mixed methods study a sequential
An explanatory approach was utilized by 10 peer researchers to initially collect quantitative data through survey monkey on five exemplary suburban school district superintendents’ perceptions of their own and their board members’ political styles. Subsequently, qualitative data was additionally collected through face-to-face interviews to further explain the responses and learn about the strategies they use in working with their board members’ styles.

The quantitative data for this study was gathered through direct responses to a digital survey administered to five exemplary unified suburban school district superintendents to identify perceived political styles and specific strategies they used to work effectively with board member political styles. Qualitative data was obtained through interviews that included open-ended questions with five suburban unified school district superintendents serving in the southeast California areas of Riverside and San Bernardino County. J. W. Creswell and Creswell (2018) insists, the intent of the mixed methods design is to have qualitative data help to provide more depth and insight into quantitative results. Using a survey to gather preliminary data about each board member, as well as the superintendent, provided a launch pad to engage in interviews that would produce thick, rich descriptions of the styles and politically effective strategies.

**Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define population as, “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized” (p. 489). The population for this study is public school district superintendents in California. The population was further narrowed to only unified school district superintendents. The superintendent serves as the chief administrator who manages their district. For the
2017/18 school year the CDE (2019) reported 1026 total public school districts led by superintendents with 344 being described as unified school districts.

**Target Population**

McMillian and Schumacher (2010) describe the target population as a group that meets similar criteria established for the study. Attempting to research all 344 unified school districts would be unattainable in a mixed methods study that emphasized qualitative research. Therefore, the target population for this study was narrowed to superintendents of unified school districts located in southern California. For the purpose of this study, southern California included San Bernardino and Riverside counties located in the southeast sector of the state with a combined total of 37 superintendents of unified school districts (CDE, 2019) (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7. Population, Target Population, and Sample](image)

**Sample**

The sample is the subgroup of the target population the researcher plans to study that will provide information that can be generalized for the larger group (J. W. Creswell, 2012, p. 142). J. Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size between three to five for mixed methods research, when the focus of the research is on analyzing qualitative data. This smaller sample size provided valuable information on this chosen topic (Myers, 2000). Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth
of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences able to be explored of superintendents working with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained rather than the total number of participants in research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The ideal method of random sampling allows for the equal probability for individuals in the population to be selected. However, this study used non-probability sampling because it allows respondents who meet required criteria to be chosen based on their geographic convenience or availability, which helped to narrow the subjects and increase likelihood of participation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

In this sequential explanatory mixed methods study quantitative and qualitative data was gathered from five superintendents who share similar criteria as a subgroup of the target population focused on in the research (J. W. Creswell, 2012). Due to time and geographic constraints for the researcher, a convenience sampling process was used to restrict the population to an area that facilitated access for face-to-face interviews with study participants. Using a mixed methods approach, a digital survey (see Appendix C) and subsequent face to face interview (see Appendix D) were conducted with superintendents of suburban unified school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties who met four of the following exemplary criteria established by the 10 peer researchers of the thematic team:

- Evidence of successful relationships with school board members.
- Identified by county superintendent as exemplary in working with their school board.
• Received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as ACSA.
• Recognition by their peers.
• Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
• Participated in CSBA Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
• Memberships in professional associations in their field.
• Has a minimum of three years of experience as superintendent in his or her current district.

Participants meeting a majority of the criteria were suggested by a county superintendent who was well aware of the superintendent and board political dynamics in the geographical area and initially approved by the research committee chair. Further screening was conducted to verify remaining criteria for final approval. Following completion of verification of at least three of the six criteria by the researcher an email invite was sent to secure participation (see Appendix E). Informed consent was obtained for all volunteer participants (see Appendix F). Of the overall number of unified school district superintendents, five who met the criteria were invited and committed to participating in the study. Although this is a small sample, the strength of the study was enhanced by triangulation of the data including at least one observation conducted and at least one artifact collected that served to provide rich information that further explained and confirmed the specific strategies identified (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
**Instrumentation**

A mixed methods instrumentation was utilized for this study. Data were collected and analyzed through quantitative and qualitative processes. In collaboration with faculty, a digital quantitative survey was developed on a SurveyMonkey tool by the 10 peer researchers. Furthermore, the 10 peer researchers and faculty developed scripted semi-structured interview questions aligned to the purpose of the study. Each of the 10 peer researchers then conducted a pilot study to test the survey instrument. The qualitative data from the interview responses was used to further explain the quantitative survey response results (McMillan and Schumacher 2010).

**Quantitative Instrumentation**

Quantitative research involves measuring the relationship between variables with “results presented as quantities or numbers” (Patten & Newhart, 2018, p. 22). The use of a quantitative research digital SurveyMonkey software application was agreed upon and utilized by the group of 10 peer researchers to gather data from five superintendents, each, for a total of 50, who met the criteria to participate in the study. The predetermined Survey Monkey Styles Matrix was based on the nine political styles found in White et al. (2016) and was designed to facilitate superintendents’ matching board members and self to styles in advance of the interviews. Each participating superintendent received a personal survey link (see Appendix G) created specifically for them to respond to questions identifying their own perceived political style and those of each board member. Responses were analyzed by the researcher prior to conducting the follow up face-to-face interviews with the five exemplary superintendents chosen.
Qualitative Instrumentation

Qualitative research involves the exploration and understanding of the meaning ascribed by groups to a social or human problem (Patten & Newhart, 2018, p. 22). The researcher is the instrument who collects the data in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). The 10-member thematic group reviewed and refined the interview questions with the two faculty advisors over several meetings and by email exchange. The interview questions were designed to address the purpose statement and research questions. Semi-structured questions were developed to allow for individual responses (McMillan & Shumacher, 2010). After the two Brandman faculty advisors approved the interview protocol, it was field tested by each of the 10 peer researchers. Follow up question were included but not required unless the researcher needed more detail or clarification on face-to-face interview responses. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), researchers may need to probe or ask additional questions to gain further clarification and detail. The probing questions deepen the understanding of the answers from the main interview questions and provide deeper meaning to the political styles and strategies shared by the subjects.

A script was developed by faculty and the 10 peer researchers to be read verbatim by the researcher prior to each semi-structured interview. The script included an introduction to the interview, a brief overview of the study, an informed consent section, and an opportunity for the interviewee to ask any questions prior to the interview. The protocol was used by all 10 peer researchers during field testing and evaluated for revisions prior to the data collection. The 10 peer researchers agreed to maintain consistency and integrity of the process by following the documented interview protocol.
Field Test

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) contend pilot tests are important to check for and limit the possibility of bias prior to the data gathering phase for research studies. All 10 peer researchers conducted field tests on one leader each who met the criteria but were not part of the final sample. Furthermore, the field test assisted the researcher in establishing confidence in the reliability and validity of the instrument (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The expansive field test by the 10 peer researchers served to add validity and reliability of the data collected in this study.

Quantitative Field Test

Each of the 10 peer researchers administered the digital SurveyMonkey Styles Matrix (see Appendix H) questions by email to one superintendent as a pilot participant. J. W. Creswell and Poth (2018) found that research success is the result of a well-organized field of subjects used to improve questions, format and instructions. The survey was given to a superintendent who met the exemplary criteria but was not part of the study. Additionally, a survey feedback response form was provided for the superintendent and expert observer with a doctorate and research experience to provide feedback on the process (see Appendix I). This information was collected from all 10 peer researchers and utilized to finalize the instrumentation process. Adjustments were made based on field test participants and expert observer responses and feedback. To finalize the instrument, the 10 peer researchers and faculty advisors scheduled a meeting to discuss details and make any recommended adjustments.
Qualitative Field Testing

The pilot interviews were witnessed by an expert observer chosen by each of the ten peer researchers and approved by faculty. Furthermore, the expert observer provided feedback to the researcher regarding the questions, length of interview, interviewer body language, and potential cues from the participants to consider. Finally, the observer provided the researcher feedback on the process and how data could be categorized.

The field test participants and observers received a feedback form developed by the faculty advisors. The feedback form contained information on interview style, delivery and protocol adherence. The information helped the researcher to identify potential bias.

Validity

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) assert quantitative research “validity is a judgement of the appropriateness of a measure for specific inferences or decisions” (p. 173) that result from numerical results. Researchers consider a measurement valid in relation to the extent that it measures what it is designed to measure accurately with the understanding that no test is perfectly valid (Patten & Newhart, 2018, p. 123).

J. W. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describes three traditional types of strategies to measure the validity of quantitative instruments including content validity (Was the content intended for the study measured?), predictive validity (Do scores predict a criterion measure?) and construct validity (Do items measure hypothetical concepts?).

Qualitative researchers check for validity of an instrument and accuracy of findings by employing various procedures (J. W. Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Procedures used in qualitative research to check for trustworthiness and credibility of
findings include triangulation, member checking, clarifying bias, spending time in the field, using peer debriefing and external auditors (J. W. Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Roberts, 2010).

The faculty advisors who assisted in development and review of the instruments are experienced superintendents, have worked with CSBA in board governance training, written and presented nationally on politics, and have more than 50 years combined experience in research at the university. Member checking the transcription of each interview added to the validity of the results.

Ten peer researchers also created, revised, and field-tested the instrument. Two faculty expert advisors guided the 10 thematic peer researchers and provided expert validation with the instrument and protocol. Additionally, semi-structured face-to-face pilot interviews were conducted and as a result, questions were modified to improve them for clarity. According to J. W. Creswell and Poth (2018), the multi-method approach serves to enhance validity. Additionally, using the synthesis matrix to develop the questionnaire further supports the validity of the instrument.

**Reliability**

Reliability is described as “the extent to which your measures are free from error” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 179) and considered by McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a critical element to establishing validity. In other words, would the results be the same if the subject was measured again? As an initial step to establish reliability for this study, both the qualitative interview questions and the quantitative survey were piloted a total of 10 times by 10 peer researchers with 10 retired or current superintendents. Comparisons of the feedback results were completed and adjusted were made to increase
reliability as necessary. Additionally, observation feedback on each researcher’s pilot interview was provided by a qualified professional with a doctorate who had qualitative research experience. The expert helped the researcher develop awareness of any body language or vocal inflections that might have biased the interview and provided feedback on the questions to increase clarity and therefore, reliability and validity.

To ensure consistency, the final survey was deployed by 10 peer researchers 50 times and the same interview questions were used for all 50 superintendents. Another precaution taken by each researcher was intercoder reliability. Utilizing a peer reviewer in performing a review of 10% of the transcript and reaching a minimum of 80% consistency on the coding served to enhance reliability of the results. Additionally, comparing coding with others helps to improve the research skills of the researcher.

**Triangulation**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), triangulation of data allows for “cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes” (p. 379). The research design was developed to provide methodological triangulation to reinforce the credibility of collected data (Patton, 2015). Triangulation of the survey and interview data for the sample was conducted by building evidence for themes using artifacts such as governance documents, board agendas, websites, news articles, and social media, as well as observations of board meetings from participants in the study to provide several data types that increased validity of the survey and interview data (J. W. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).
Data Collection

This sequential explanatory mixed-methods study involved both qualitative and quantitative data. A survey developed on the SurveyMonkey software application was used to collect quantitative data and face-to-face interviews were used to collect qualitative data. Before collecting any data, the researcher applied for and received approval from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) (see Appendix J). Institutional Review Board approval ensured the rights of the participants were protected throughout the study. The participant electronically signed a form in the survey to confirm their consent in participating in the study (see Appendix K). The following steps were used to collect data:

1. Suburban unified school district superintendents who fit the study criteria were nominated by experts and contacted by email at their office to explain the purpose, benefits, and possible risks of joining the study. Upon agreement to participate in the study, a letter providing information and consent forms were sent to the superintendent.

2. After agreeing to participate, the participant was sent a link to the survey by email.

3. Once the survey was completed, the researcher scheduled a 60-minute interview with each participant.

4. Interviews were conducted at the place and time arranged with the participant. The interviews were recorded on a password-protected digital device and a back-up, transcribed, and prepared for analysis. This information, including
the survey information, was stored in a locked cabinet in my home office and
destroyed within three years following the completion of the study process.

**Data Analysis**

The intent of data analysis in a mixed methods proposal is to “make sense of and interpret quantitative data using quantitative methods and the qualitative data using qualitative methods” (J. W. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 128). A mixed methods process was implemented resulting in data from quantitative and qualitative instruments. Both were triangulated with at least one artifact collected and observations conducted to strengthen the study. The following will provide in depth detail on how quantitative and qualitative data collected through digital survey and interviews were analyzed.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

Quantitative data was sought from five participants via SurveyMonkey. Descriptive information was identified to analyze and characterize critical data in addressing the research question “How do superintendents in suburban unified school districts perceive their own political styles and the individual styles of their school board members?” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The SurveyMonkey instrument provided a scale listing nine political styles that superintendents used to identify their own political style and each of their individual board members’ political style. The initial section of the survey asked participants to provide demographic data. Lines one through seven represented board members by the corresponding number. Nine columns for political styles were used and labeled challenger, arranger, strategist, planner, balancer, developer, analyst, adaptor, and supporter. For each question, SurveyMonkey calculates the arithmetic mean, median, mode, range, and frequency of responses. Utilizing descriptive
results, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), is the most basic way to summarize data and considered valuable in the process of interpreting results of quantitative studies. Descriptive results will assist the researcher in answering the research question, “How do superintendents in suburban unified school districts perceive their own political styles and the individual styles of their school board members?” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

To capture themes and patterns amongst study participants, researchers must analyze the results to understand and interpret connections from resulting categories (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). The researcher rigorously analyzed 10 hours of responses to the 12 open-ended protocol questions, observation notes, and artifacts. The data analysis process included transcription of audio recordings of interviews, review of handwritten documentation, review of transcriptions, and at least one artifact collected and one observation conducted for each participant. The data were uploaded in the NVIVO software, coded, and organized into themes. The themes were analyzed to identify those behaviors identified by exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents in working with the political styles of each of their individual board members.

**Intercoder Reliability**

Intercoder reliability is a method for researchers to cross check for bias while coding the data. Thematic researchers had another peer researcher code and analyze 10% of the data collected. According to Patton (2015) multiple individuals analyzing the same data helps to “discuss what they see in data, share insights, and consider what emerges
from their different perspectives” (p. 667). A minimum of 80% consistency on the coding was reached and enhanced the reliability of the results.

**Limitations**

Study limitations are features that can negatively impact the ability to generalize results of a study (Roberts, 2010). Generalizations for mixed method studies are limited to the participant’s survey and interview responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Roberts, 2010). The limitations of this study of exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents are time and distance, researcher as instrument, subjective perceptions, and sample size.

**Time and Distance**

There are 1026 school districts currently serving students in California. Superintendents are extremely busy with the responsibility of overseeing the daily operations of their districts. Due to time availability challenges, face-to-face interviews were limited to a 60-minute time frame. Additionally, data collection for the study was limited by the distance of the researcher to study participants. Face to face interviews were conducted by the researcher at convenient locations chosen by the participants. By staying local, the researcher was able to reach the interviewees more expeditiously; however, it limited the generalizability of the results. With more time and greater geographical reach, the researcher could have increased participation, which may have increased rich data collection for this study.

**Researcher as Instrument of Study**

A limitation of this mixed method study was the researcher serving as an instrument of the study. Researcher-as-instrument refers to researchers collecting data by
personally interacting with interviewees in the study process (Pezella, Pettigrew & Miller, 2012). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) assert research bias and personal experiences may adversely influence the research. Steps were taken to minimize potential researcher bias as questions were developed by the 10 peer researchers and faculty advisors. To help maintain a neutral stance while increasing credibility, an observer was used during the field test to detect any potential bias in body language or vocal inflections. Additionally, the transcripts were reviewed by the respondents to ensure that they accurately reflected the intended meaning. Finally, intercoder reliability on 10% of the data reached a standard of consistency in interpretation of at least 80%, which mitigated any potential bias.

**Subjective Perceptions**

For this study, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with scripted questions developed by the thematic peer researchers. Resulting data were limited to the level of honesty and willingness to share openly by the participants during the process.

**Sample Size**

To keep data collection at a manageable level the sample size was limited to five participants. However, a minimum sample size between three to five for a mixed methods research is recommended by J. Creswell (2005) when focused on analyzing qualitative research data. The significance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained rather than the total number of participants in research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). However, the small sample limits the generalizability of the results to the larger population.
Summary

Chapter III discussed the methodological elements of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study to identify perceived political styles of superintendents and board members and the political strategies exemplary superintendents utilize to work with board members. The purpose statement and research questions were reviewed and reflected alignment to the study and mixed method design. The data collection and analysis process were clarified and summarized in detail for both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study. Chapter III included a discussion of the study population sample criteria, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis and limitations. Chapter IV discusses detailed descriptions of the data and research results. Lastly, Chapter V provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, implications for actions, recommendations for further research and concluding remarks from the researcher.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This mixed methods study utilized White et al. (2016) Political Styles Matrix to identify the perceived political styles of suburban school district superintendents and school board members and explain the identified political strategies used by the superintendents in working with their school board members. Chapter IV restates the purpose of the study and the research questions and summarizes the research methodology and data collection procedures. Participant demographics are provided along with the population and sample. An analysis of the data collected is provided, followed by a brief summary of key findings.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify the political styles of exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies suburban school district superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

**Research Questions**

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do superintendents in suburban unified school districts perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?

2. What are the strategies superintendents in suburban unified school districts use to work with the different styles of school board members?
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Using a mixed methods approach, this study combined quantitative data with qualitative data. Triangulation of the data collected included artifacts, surveys, interviews, and observations.

Specifically, this sequential explanatory mixed methods approach combined quantitative data from responses to a digital survey with qualitative data from face to face interviews with five exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents identifying their own political style and what they perceived as the political styles of their individual school board members. In addition, key qualitative data collected from face to face interviews with each superintendent provided in-depth details of political strategies utilized in working with the varied political styles of their school board members.

A mixed methods design was used because it offered the greatest opportunity to both identify perceived political styles of key players and develop a rich understanding of the lived experiences of superintendents in dealing with those styles at the governance level of a school district. J. W. Creswell and Creswell (2018) insist, the intent of the mixed methods design is to have qualitative data help to provide more depth and insight into quantitative results. Using a digital survey to gather preliminary data about each board member, as well as the superintendent, provided a launch pad to engage in interviews that would produce thick, rich descriptions of the styles and politically effective strategies.

In collaboration with faculty, a digital quantitative survey was developed on a SurveyMonkey tool by the 10 peer researchers of a thematic team studying political styles and strategies of superintendents. This survey was designed to identify the
perceived political styles of the superintendents and their board members. The 10 peer researchers working on this thematic dissertation and faculty advisors then developed scripted semi-structured qualitative interview questions aligned to the purpose of the study. The qualitative data from the interview responses were used to further explain the quantitative survey response results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

A total of 50 superintendents, who met the selection criteria, participated in the thematic dissertation study only five participated in this study. The interview protocol reflected five questions about the perceived political styles of each school board member and was repeated for each individual board member to gather specific key information regarding their perceived political style and related conduct. Interview responses included descriptive strategies used by the superintendent to work with each school board member’s political style. Superintendents also responded to four additional questions about their own perceived political style and political strategies that worked well with particular styles or all of the styles. For this study all five of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 47 and 62 minutes.

To validate the initial data collected, additional information was sought from other primary sources. Detailed field notes from observations of a board meeting for each of the five superintendents were utilized in order to triangulate data collected from the surveys and interviews. Artifacts including, board agenda notes, district website information, social media posts and other information reflective of superintendent and school board member political styles were collected to further validate digital survey and interview results.
Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define population as, “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized” (p. 489). The population for this study is public school district superintendents in California. The population was further narrowed to only unified school district superintendents. The superintendent serves as the chief administrator who manages their district. For the 2017/18 school year the CDE (2019) reported 1,026 total public school districts led by superintendents with 344 being described as unified school districts.

McMillian and Schumacher (2010) describe the target population as a group that meets similar criteria established for the study. Attempting to research all 344 unified school districts would be unattainable in a mixed methods study that emphasized qualitative research. Therefore, the target population for this study was narrowed to superintendents of unified school districts located in southern California.

Target Population

For the purpose of this study, southern California included San Bernardino and Riverside counties located in the southeast sector of the state with a combined total of 37 superintendents of unified school districts (CDE, 2019).

Sample

The sample is the subgroup of the target population the researcher plans to study that will provide information that can be generalized for the larger group (J. W. Creswell, 2012, p. 142). J. Creswell (2005) recommended a minimum sample size between three to five for mixed methods research, when the focus of the research was on analyzing qualitative data. This smaller sample size can provide valuable information on this
chosen topic (Myers, 2000). Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences able to be explored of superintendents working with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained rather than the total number of participants in research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). This study used non-probability convenience sampling because it allows respondents who meet required criteria to be chosen based on their geographic convenience or availability. This helped to ensure knowledgeable respondents and increase the likelihood of participation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The team of ten peer researchers developed criteria to define the exemplary superintendents that would be sought for this study. All participants met a minimum of four of the following exemplary criteria:

- Evidence of successful relationships with school board members.
- Identified by county superintendent as exemplary in working with their school board.
- Received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as ACSA.
- Recognition by their peers.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Participated in CSBA Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
- Memberships in professional associations in their field.
• Has a minimum of three years of experience as superintendent in his or her current district.

Participants meeting a majority of the criteria were suggested by a county superintendent who was well aware of the superintendent and board political dynamics in the geographical area and initially approved by the research committee chair. Further screening was conducted to verify remaining criteria for final approval. Following completion of verification of at least four of the eight criteria by the researcher an email invite was sent to secure participation. Informed consent was obtained for all volunteer participants. Of the overall number of unified school district superintendents, five who met the criteria were invited and committed to participating in the study. Although this is a small sample, the strength of the study was enhanced by triangulation of the data including five school board meeting observations and 11 artifacts collected that served to provide rich information that further explained and confirmed the specific strategies identified (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Table 1 reflects all participating superintendents met the minimum criteria established by the peer research team. Two of the participants met all eight of the categories. One participant met seven of eight categories; one met six of eight categories; and one met four of eight categories.
Instrumentation

A mixed methods instrumentation was utilized for this study. Data were collected and analyzed through quantitative and qualitative processes. In collaboration with faculty, a digital quantitative survey was developed on a SurveyMonkey tool by the 10 peer researchers. The 10 peer researchers and faculty also developed scripted semi-structured interview questions aligned to the purpose of the study. Each of the 10 peer researchers then conducted a pilot study to test the survey instrument. Feedback to assess the pilot was provided by all 10 thematic peer researchers and used to make minor modification. Faculty reviewed the survey for clarity, reliability, and validity before redistributing the survey. The qualitative data from the interview responses was used to further explain the quantitative survey response results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Demographic Data

Table 2 represents a description of the demographics of the superintendents who participated in this study, including gender, age, total years as a superintendent, years as superintendent in current district, district student enrollment, and education level.
Table 2

Demographics of Suburban Superintendents in Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Total Years as Superintendent</th>
<th>Years in Current District</th>
<th>District Student Enrollment</th>
<th>Education level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53,027</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54,000</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20,244</td>
<td>M.A./M.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>5-1/2</td>
<td>5-1/2</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents from the population who met the established criteria were surveyed and interviewed. The ages ranged from 51 and 70 years old and consisted of four males and one female. Four of the participants hold doctoral degrees and one holds a master’s degree. The superintendents had between 5 and 12 total years as a superintendent and between 5 and 8 years in their current seat. The enrollment in the districts ranged in size from 11,000 to over 54,000 students.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The presentation and analysis of data addresses the quantitative data collected from digital surveys and qualitative data collected via face to face interviews between November 20 and January 30, 2019. In this sequential explanatory mixed methods study the researcher administered the digital surveys first to gather quantitative data and subsequently conducted the face to face interviews to gather the qualitative data. The purpose of the interview was to enhance meaning to the quantitative data collected via the digital survey and identify effective strategies used by suburban unified school district
superintendents in working with the seven political styles they perceived of their individual board members from the political styles matrix. The seven political styles identified by superintendents include:

- challenger
- arranger
- strategist
- balancer
- developer
- adaptor
- supporter

Each superintendent was assigned a letter and the recorded interview audio file was transcribed. All personal identification information was deleted and a copy of the transcript was shared with each superintendent participant to review and verify for accuracy. Following the completion of all of the superintendents’ transcriptions the researcher scanned the data to identify prospective themes. The five interview transcripts were uploaded in the NVivo software, coded, and organized into themes. An initial list of 32 themes was determined.

**Reliability**

The data collected from interviews, artifacts, and observations were triangulated and reported under each research question. A peer researcher coded one interview which included observation and artifact data to determine consistency of results. The peer researcher coded and analyzed 10% of the qualitative data with 80% similarity. Following the coding procedure, major themes for effective strategies aligned to each
political style were narrowed to the most significant results. A total of 10 prominent themes were identified, with 223 coded strategies. The data is presented according to the research questions utilized in the study.

**Quantitative Findings**

Research Question 1 for this sequential explanatory mixed method study was utilized to collect data from exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents that met the outlined criteria. In response to Research Question 1 superintendents identified not only their individual political style but also those they perceived of their school board members using the nine political styles outlined in White et al. (2016) Political Styles Matrix. The definition of political styles for this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was described as the way one’s values, character, and beliefs are manifested into actions and behaviors to influence others and achieve desired outcomes. Political style, which can include use of power and influence, impacts how a leader might view and respond to different circumstances and the opinions of others. The Political Styles Matrix is focused on organizational interests versus self-serving interests and the level of initiative leaders devote to attaining those interests (DeLuca, 1999; Grenny et al., 2013; G. Petersen & Fusarelli, 2005; White et al., 2016).

**Perceived political styles of suburban unified superintendents.** Quantitative data was sought from five suburban unified school district superintendent participants via SurveyMonkey developed by 10 peer researchers and faculty advisors. Descriptive information was identified to analyze and characterize critical data in addressing the research question “How do superintendents in suburban unified school districts perceive their own political styles and the individual styles of their school board members?”
Three of the superintendents (A, C, and D) listed strategist as their political style. Superintendent B listed his political style as adaptor and superintendent E listed herself as developer. All five study participants’ political style is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3

*Self-Identified Political Styles of Suburban Unified School District Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent</th>
<th>Political Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Developer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Perceived political styles of school board members.* Political styles for a total of 27 school board members were identified. Four of the superintendents had five school board members and one had seven school board members.

On the Political Styles Matrix developed by White et al. (2016), analysts, adaptors, and supporters represent a passive political style across a range of goals from self-interest to organizational interest. Planners, balancers, and developers are considered an engaged political style across the range of goals and challengers, arrangers, and strategists are considered assertive political styles from self to organizational interest.

Challenger was reported as the political style with most frequency. Ten of the 27 school board members were labeled as challengers which equates to 38% of those included in the study by superintendents and represents more of a self-interest and assertive style. Six school board members were labeled as strategists (19%); three school board members were labeled as supporters (11%); three school board members were labeled as adaptors (11%); two school board members were labeled as developers (7%);
two school board members were labeled as arrangers (7%); two school board members were labeled as balancers (7%). There were no school board members labeled as planners or analysts.

Table 4 provides a summary of the political styles of school board members identified by superintendent participants.

Table 4

*Political Styles of School Board Members as Perceived by Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Styles</th>
<th>Superintendent A</th>
<th>Superintendent B</th>
<th>Superintendent C</th>
<th>Superintendent D</th>
<th>Superintendent E</th>
<th>Approximate Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The combination of total interview references, artifacts, and observation adds to 223 information sources collected. Artifacts and observations represent 18% of the total sources collected in this sequential explanatory mixed methods study.

Table 5 reflects the sources and frequency of themes by artifact, observations, and interviews for each political style.
Table 5

*Frequency and Sources of Themes by Political Style and Source*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Style</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Total Artifact, Interview, and Observation Sources Approximate Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for All Styles</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Percentage</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Qualitative Findings**

Qualitative data was sought from five suburban unified school district superintendent participants face to face interviews developed by 10 peer researchers and faculty advisors. Descriptive information was collected to analyze and characterize critical data in addressing the research question “What are the strategies superintendents in suburban unified school districts use to work with the different styles of school board members?”
Superintendent participants were asked to share detailed stories regarding events or times school board members exhibited traits of a particular political style and strategies they utilized to work with them. J. W. Creswell and Creswell (2018) found that mixed method studies provide a deeper understanding beyond what is secured by an individual research method such as qualitative or quantitative alone. Responses provided valuable insight in support of the quantitative results on perceived styles and are presented by assertive styles (arranger, challenger, strategist), engaged styles (balancer and developer), and passive styles (supporter and adaptor).

Figure 8 displays the total number of references and percentages of political style strategies mentioned by study participants.

*Figure 8. Total Political Strategy References. There were 223 total political strategies referenced.*

Political strategies used to work with challengers were referenced the most with 70 (31%) of 223 total references. Next in line was arrangers at 37 (17%) of total references. Strategies to work with developers totaled 34 (15%) of all responses followed
closely by strategist (12%), adaptor (10%), balancer (7%), and supporter styles (8%). There were no (0%) planner or analyst political styles identified by study participants.

**Arranger political style.** Arrangers use a political style in which they are assertive in pursuing their goals that are a blend of both organizational priorities and their own self-interests. They build a power base by connecting with many people. Arrangers will take risks to advance their goals and are strategic in combining resources (DeLuca, 1999; Effelsberg et al., 2014; White et al., 2016). Arrangers love to broker deals and think out of the box when resolving issues (White et al., 2016).

**Arranger descriptions.** Two of the five participating suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with a political style of arranger for a total of two (7%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study. Both provided examples of how their board members exhibited the arranger political style. Superintendent D described his arranger school board member:

She is always wanting to get involved and wants her voice heard. She wants to do what’s best for kids and she will assert her influence when necessary to get things the way she wants it. She does what is best for our kids. She fulfills a self-interest as best for the organization. She just does that and she likes the strokes. She gets involved in the arts and in the ‘weeds’ of the work. She organized a great art event at a local park and it was very successful for the entire board even though we gave her the credit. A fellow board member needed her endorsement and she hesitated. Eventually she supported him and other board members followed. When we do the school bonds, she wants to choose the paint. She does not like to be told ‘no.’
Superintendent C described his arranger board as very assertive and occasionally needing more information to increase his understanding of issues before the board. Their personal interest seemed to drive their efforts.

**Arranger effective strategies.** Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with arranger styles. There were a total of 31 strategies referenced by two study participants.

*Listen to them,* which was referenced seven times in two interviews and one artifact. *Hear their side* was referenced six times in two interviews and one artifact. *Seek their opinion* was also referenced six times in one interview one artifact and one observation. Arrangers can be most useful when superintendents seek their advice on how to work through potential hostilities between individuals on the board by finding common ground (White et al., 2016). Superintendent D described effective strategies when working with his arranger school board member,

I am very respectful. I'll give her time and I'll listen. I'd call her to check in. Get her opinion and defer to her and give her credit. I listen and so we can take an honest look at stuff.

*Spent extra time with them* was referenced seven times in two interviews and *frontloading with key information* was referenced five times in two interviews, one artifact and one observation. Superintendent C mentioned providing his arranger school board member key information in one on one conversations and even inviting them to spend time with cabinet “helping them understand.” Superintendent Cs arranger helps fellow board members to “develop deeper understanding” and “find common ground.” He supports his ideas but encourages him to be open to “advice as to how to get it done”
(Superintendent C). Superintendent D asserted the importance of being respectful “giving her the time” and “giving her that kind of attention.” Additionally, Superintendent C added “one on one conversations” to provided more information is very helpful.

During a board meeting observation for Superintendent C, the arranger board member insisted on voting on an agenda item that was listed as discussion only. The superintendent explained the proper protocol and even recommended a recess so legal staff could provide key information before continuing the discussion.

Table 6 identifies the five main themes that were identified as effective strategies used with arrangers.

Table 6

*Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Arrangers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listen to them.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend extra time with them.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hear their side.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek their opinion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontload with key information.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>31</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Arranger ineffective strategies.* Superintendents were asked what strategies were ineffective in working with their school board members with arranger styles.

Superintendent C noted that being impatient with his arranger board member has been the
most ineffective stating, “Pushing things along faster than they are willing to go or have the capacity to go.”

**Challenger political style.** Challengers are characterized by self-interest, assertive behavior and confidence in their own vision, ideas, and goals, which inspires a strong desire to lead and make decisions quickly. Challengers see themselves as movers and shakers, efficient, politically strategic, aggressive, and willing to confront the views of others in an attempt to influence outcomes (DeLuca, 1999; Jasper, 1997; Meyer et al., 2005; Polletta, 2004; White et al., 2016).

**Challenger description.** Four of the five suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with at least one political style of challenger for a total of 10 (38%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study. Superintendent B described his three challenger school board members:

You know, they're ideological people, impractical people. And so he's a challenge in that sense because we're practitioners. So I think those two just by default doesn't marry each other too well. So when the challenges come, I understand why this is coming because he has such a deep belief. He wants everyone to read books and not everyone has an issue with this, but we all have doctorates on cabinet. So he gets impatient the past few years specially and then he would, you know, exert that through and trying to persuade and interject his ideology and practice on principles. My second challenger is one of the most honorable men I’ve met. He has a since of righteousness when it comes to being fair to people. He wants all board members to receive the same information at the same time to be fair. My third challenger has the kind of the language and the
understanding of public education as a former teacher union president. Coming out pretty hard, she will come in and say Next Generation Science Standards needs to be done this way. It needs to be done by this time as an example. She has a natural tendency, because of background, to be very straight about it and directive. But that directness is not a forcefulness. It's more of the way she communicates.

Superintendent D identified two challengers on his board. His first challenger is the youngest member of the board. He describes him as “wanting the next level in politics” because he is friends with the governor and other high ranking politicians. Superintendent D states that this particular board member makes promises to constituents and gets upset when his fellow board members don’t agree. He attempts to put controversial items on the board agenda consent calendar and can rarely even get a second on his motion. One particular time it went south and this board member was up in arms saying “how dare you do this!” (Superintendent D). Superintendent D describes this board member’s behavior as “assertive, self-centered and that he makes quick decisions” (Superintendent D). Referencing this same challenger, Superintendent D stated that “one particular time he shared with me he felt I've been ‘slow rolling’ him and not responsive cause he's young.” Superintendent D described his second challenger board member:

He can be mean because at times he will yell at others almost to the point of throwing things. One particular time he intervened and said inappropriate things regarding an employee on a personnel matter. He often refers to how former
superintendents [names redacted] did it and that’s not how [names redacted] did it and that kind of stuff.

Superintendent A identified four of his seven board members as challengers. His first challenger is described as one who “pushes the envelope on the side of the community” because he likes to challenge the typical limitations of policies and that he succumbs to political pressures from the community. His decisions are more about “politics and position over policy” (Superintendent A). Superintendent A describes his second challenger as always advocating for what’s best for students stating that she once took on controversial grading practices as her focus and in the end our system was impacted as a result her bringing attention. Superintendent A further stated that she has a positive influence on equity and policy. The third challenger identified by Superintendent A is described as impatient “wanting change to occur immediately” because she feels education works too slow. Superintendent A’s fourth challenger is described as “purely politically motivated” because he tends to champion political causes for personal gain. He challenges the “status quo” even when the rest of the board is in favor (Superintendent A).

**Challenger effective strategies.** Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with challenger styles. There were a total of 64 strategies referenced by four study participants.

*Bridging relationships* was referenced 14 times in four interviews and one artifact. *Listening* was also referenced 14 times and mentioned six times in four interview sources. *Clarify expectations/priorities* was referenced 10 times in three interviews, one artifact and two observations. *Don’t take it personally* was referenced
eight times in two interviews. *Get them some wins* was referenced seven times during two interviews followed by *spend time with them* (5), *include in decision making process* (4), and *hold the line* (2). Working with challengers can be exhausting and highly political in nature (White et al., 2016). Superintendent A described his four challenger school board members:

For my first challenger I do a lot of deep listening and spending time with her and providing clarity around the underlying purpose of items. Taking time to get to know what they are after and try to find some common ground. For my second challenger bridging a relationship with them and linking them up with other board members becomes critical. I play the mediator to preserve relationships between them. Sometimes using social pressures between board members leads to consensus because a lot of times they don’t see eye to eye with this member. The third challenger requires being involved in the decision making process. It helps them to see the overall picture of the situation so they don’t attempt to just push things through before the board is ready. Making sure to clarify information seems to really help. I am very responsive and try to listen intently to my fourth challenger board member. He insists on challenging the status quo so I try to show him interest, energy, and engagement. I move quickly with him when possible so he feels I’m responding in a timely manner.

Superintendent D described his first challenger board member as a lone wolf who struggles being a “team player” with other members. To help him, Superintendent D “holds the line” in discussions to help him not to go into futile situations. He mentions “spend time, spend time, spend time” (Superintendent D) with them. For his second
challenger Superintendent D mentions being “very responsive” and showing him that he “values him.” He allows him “up front” (Superintendent D) to get all the public attention on positive items and is willing to ask him “what wins can I get you this year?” (Superintendent D). Superintendent D will often check in with his challengers to engage them in tough decisions that need to be made so they feel they are genuinely valued as board members. He too looks to build relationships between challenger board members and others who may have influence over them and can sway them.

Superintendent B identified three challengers on his board. A strategy he mentioned as critical in working with all of them was “don’t take anything they do or say personally.” “Spending extra time with them” (Superintendent B) is key to not only build a relationship but also to “get into their thinking” (Superintendent B). Superintendent B states that at times you have to be able to come in and hold the line by saying “you can’t do this.” He also mentions he is willing to “own up to his mistakes” (Superintendent B) and ask for advisement. But ultimately he moves on from any drama and allows them time to calm down and make their way back.

Superintendent C admitted to struggling with his one challenger board member who is new to the governance team. He mentioned “still trying to figure out what’s the best approach” (Superintendent C). So far communication through spending extra time, including inviting them into cabinet to “frontload key information” (Superintendent C) has been positive. Superintendent C also works on minimizing his own bias toward the board member so he is approaching him with an open mind.

During a board meeting observation this particular board member questioned the amount of travel the superintendent was participating in by asking “how is this travel
benefitting the district interests?” (Superintendent C). Rather than respond in a defensive mode, Superintendent C explained in a very calm tone the actual benefits. Superintendent C explained in a subsequent conversation it wasn’t a “hill to die on” and cancelled a couple of future travel plans.

Table 7 identifies that eight themes that were identified as effective strategies used with challengers.

Table 7

*Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Challengers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bridge relationships w/ and between board members.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify expectations/priorities.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t take it personally.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get them some wins.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time with them.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include in decision making process.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold the line.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Challenger ineffective strategies.* All four of the superintendents with challenger board members mentioned “dying on the mountain” as an ineffective strategy. Showing “super sensitivity” and failing to be a “good listener” were also emphasized as less than
favorable strategies. Superintendent B suggested “don’t attempt to control everything the challenger board member does” and allow some things to “play out.”

**Strategist political style.** Strategists are visionary, open to new ideas, and collaborative. They empower others and model the organization’s values. Supporting organizational interests over self-interests, they strategically use a variety of approaches to propose new initiatives, engage diverse stakeholders, elicit commitment and make purposeful decisions (DeLuca, 1999; Dergel, 2014; White et al., 2016). Strategists tend to put tremendous energy into personal politics and are skilled in building groups of support (White et al., 2016).

**Strategist description.** Four of the five suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with a political style of strategist for a total of five (19%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study.

Superintendent D described his two strategist school board members:

Both strategists have or had kids in the system. They want to make a difference. They have no political aspirations. He has a lot of influence. He told me during board prep, ‘I don't like what you're doing here for PGS (Professional Growth System) in this position.’ His strategy is to call the union president. He calls the vice president, who's part of PGS. He tells me, ‘When you just get ready in closed session, I'm going to bring this up so I will watch you. It's a four in favor of my superintendent’s proposal to replace a vacated cabinet level position before this discussion.’ He says, ‘great well you don't have to like what I have to say.’ I said, ‘no, I want to hear it.’ And so he throws it out. ‘It's a couple of hundred thousand dollars of savings, you know,’ and as he did that, here's his influence.
Three of the four altered where they agreed with my strategist. My female strategist likes to meet with me weekly over food. She said, ‘be careful about this, this, this, this.’ ‘You're not thinking about this.’ She's thoughtful and she's respectful and she has kids in the system. She's pretty political and is running for mayor. But she's not a challenger. She's not assertive. She will let things kind of flow. And that's where I say she's open to new ideas. She's a visionary, she's collaborative, she empowers others. The things she has said and done have always served me well and helped me to work with other board members.

Superintendent E described her strategist as the school board member who gets it and displays leadership on important issues:

He's a mover and shaker and gets everything done. He is a very wealthy businessman in the community who gives literally hundreds of thousands of dollars of his own money to things that are important to him, like the YMCAs and things like that. He is 100% about the school district and what's good for kids and he sets aside his own self-interest and he's very vocal about what should happen or what needs to happen and what he's gonna make sure will happen as a board member. He takes his role very seriously. His, both his two kids went through our school system. Down deep inside he truly believes in the work that he's doing.

Superintendent A described his strategist board member as the one that really understands where the other board members stand on issues and are able to push their objectives through:
He works hard to build relationships behind the scene to advance his agenda. During a discussion on career pathways his strategist board member was able to influence others by validating their concerns and fitting them into reasoning to favor the initiative resulting in full support from an otherwise previously unsure board.

Superintendent C shared his strategist is the most valuable and ideal board member who is nothing but positive and supportive of all his fellow board members: He is deliberate and does not like for the district to ‘jump from one initiative to another rapidly.’ He understands the value of working through goals and seeing progress over time. He has children in the district but does separate personal from what in the best interest of the organization. During a difficult board meeting he loved the way that this strategist pulled that other board member into the conversation, empowered them by acknowledging their perspective on it. It was probably their strategist’s leadership in that moment that got this to a five in favor vote.

**Strategist effective strategies.** Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with strategist styles. There were a total of 10 strategies referenced by all five study participants.

*Help them see impact of decisions* was referenced nine times during three interviews and one board meeting observation. *Seek their advice* was referenced six times in three interviews. The theme *bridging relationships w/ and between board members* was referenced five times in one interview followed by *frontload with key information* (3). The advantage to working with strategist board members is that their
preferences are usually clear while aligned to what’s in the best interest of the district (White et al., 2016). Superintendent A described strategies used to work with his strategist school board member:

Providing ‘clarity’ and ‘frontloading them information’ are key in working with my strategist board member. Just getting them to ‘understand the big picture’ is why giving them more information works. Understanding the ‘possible impact of decisions’ helps them to see how sometimes it affects the entire organization like the time they brought forth concerns regarding grading practices. Additionally, explaining to them that ‘dictating change’ comes with challenges if ‘relationships w/ and between board members’ aren’t in a healthy state. I help them to navigate those challenges by working on the inner relationships.

Superintendent C’s approach aligned with Superintendent A of simply providing more information for his strategist board member, “I employ a strategy of frontloading this strategist board member with key information” so he could “help him see the possible impact of the impending decision” could bring. Superintendent E also agreed that sometimes she will “frontload her strategist board member with key information” when she knows the issue will be controversial. She knows that board member will work behind the scenes to get others on page.

Table 8 identifies the four main themes identified as effective strategies used with strategists.
Table 8

Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Strategists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help them see impact of decisions.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek their advice.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging relationship w/and between board members.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontload with key information.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategist ineffective strategies. Superintendent A insists that delaying or not being responsive in a timely manner only lessens the chances of desired outcomes coming to fruition. Superintendent C expressed the importance of staying focused on a few priorities rather than jumping around and seeking input on focus areas.

Balancer political style. Balancers blend self and organizational interests. Focused on the prevention of disequilibrium, balancers use their knowledge of the organization’s culture to diplomatically shift their support, when needed to maintain stability, harmony, and equanimity (Sheehan, 1989; White et al., 2016). Balancers possess the ability to see all angles of a situation and encourage equitable resolutions for all involved.

Balancer description. One of the five suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with a political style of balancer for a total of two (7%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study. This particular
superintendent had the only two balancers in the study and provided examples of how their board members exhibited the balancer political style. Superintendent E described her balancer school board members:

He continues to be challenged with some of the thinking by fellow board members that he really respects. I think his influence has really helped neutralize my detractors. So I think he continues to build his, you know, power base of supporters. He goes to lots of school events. He's very connected with the unions in terms of meeting with them and getting their opinions and things like that. He's just the best ever and has just stuck by me. The second balancer board member tries to broaden her view a little bit. She wants all the information to make a good decision. She was new and I got the vote of no confidence and she sort of wanted to find out what was that all about really to get both sides. I think what she is coming to realize is that once you get into the seat there is more to the stories you hear.

Balancer effective strategies. Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with balancer styles. There were a total of 11 strategies referenced by one study participant.

Communicate was referenced by one participant five times during one interview. Be responsive was referenced three times in one interview. Hold the line was referenced two times during one interview, one artifact and observation followed by seek their opinion with one interview reference, one observation and one artifact. Balancers tend to feel there is a way to solve all conflicts or problems by working to find compromise (White et al., 2016). The lone study participant that identified two of her board members
as a balancer was Superintendent E. She shared effective strategies used to work with her two balancers:

I communicate, communicate, communicate with her on a regular basis in order to always make sure she has accurate information. She tends to believe every rumor or piece of information passed to her in the community as an elected official. I am very responsive to her emails so she always has the information she needs to make a fair decision. Sometimes I even give her information that I don’t share with other board members because I know it’s not as pertinent for them. I entrust her with information. There are times I am firm by holding the line in a nonthreatening way. The most effective strategy I use with my second balancer is to seek his opinion on critical matters. He has such a good feel on what’s going on in the community and knows how to garner support. We often have lunch together just so folks see us out in public as a show of comradery.

(Superintendent E)

Table 9 identifies the four main themes identified as effective strategies used with balancers.

Table 9

*Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Balancers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be responsive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold the line</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek their opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Balancer ineffective strategies.** Superintendent E insisted her balancers can sometimes be intimidated by her and that’s not an effective practice. Additionally, not giving them a heads up on issues coming forward and not following up on requests or ignoring them has caused some avoidable issues in her relationships with them.

**Developer political style.** Developers work behind the scenes to coach or challenge others to build skills that can positively advance organizational interests to which they are fully committed. Developers exhibit a high level of self-awareness of their own knowledge and skill (DeLuca, 1999; Goleman, 2000; Rath, 2007; White et al., 2016). Developers focus on empowering others but are not willing to risk their position or influence at risk (White et al. 2016).

**Developer description.** Two of the five suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with a political style of developer for a total of two (7%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study. Superintendent E described her developer board member:

She's definitely somebody who is a woman of conviction but she's not somebody that is necessarily the face of the organization stands out in a crowd or demonstrates any kind of vocal opposition or support in a board meeting. What she does do a lot of is she works in the community quietly to bring people together for a common purpose. She's absolutely dedicated and devoted to the mission and vision of the school district, but she leads very quietly behind the scenes.
Superintendent C describes his developer as a “seasoned veteran” board member who is willing to coach others:

She is willing to work to develop other new and experienced board members so they can be successful by ‘throwing them a rope down to them.’ She coaches me and other board members which really helps build governance team unity. She believes in fairness but is very quiet during actual conflicting conversations. The board was having a spirited conversation on how and when to implement ethnic studies. She waited to speak after hearing everyone else and then spoke eloquently about the importance of making it happen but maybe looking at a gradual approach. Her impact was so powerful for the other board members to hear her unbiased view that it helped them to reach consensus without putting the district at risk.

**Developer effective strategies.** Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with developer styles. There were 32 strategies referenced by one study participant.

- **Build trust** was referenced 13 times by two study participants, one artifact, and one observation. **Include all sides** was referenced seven times by one participant.
- **Problem solving** was referenced five times by two study participants, one artifact, and one observation. **Know their agenda** was referenced four times by one participant and one observation. Getting to know groups interests and building relationships is important to developers while working to bring them together around organizational interests (White et al., 2016). Superintendent C described strategies used to work with his developer school board member:
I’m doing things to promote trust. I’m careful to make sure anytime I say something it’s on the record. It’s important to create the space for people to look past my position and say I’m going to tell you the truth. Gotta bring people along and sometimes you have to let go of what you believe are the best ideas and subjugate yourself to the wisdom of your folks in the room. I have gained experience about how to get people feeling more comfortable having authentic genuine conversations and my developer excels in the process. He is really able to read the landscape.

Superintendent E focuses on building trust with her developer as needing to discuss issues more than the others:

Ensure she has key information up front before controversial items that align with his priorities. She exhibits a deeper understanding of possible issues and able to coach other board members through discussions. She never wants to be blindsided by community members with information that the superintendent should have communicated. She likes to talk through things and solve the issues.

Table 10 identifies the four main themes identified as effective strategies used with developers.
Table 10  

Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Developer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build trust</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include all sides</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know their agenda</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Developer ineffective strategies.** Saying things in passing without giving proper details makes Superintendent C’s developer board member uneasy. Superintendent E shared that not giving her developer board member a heads up about anything that’s in direct opposition to her position or opinion is very disruptive.

**Supporter political style.** Supporters are characterized as risk-averse, selfless, and passive devotees, backers, or advocates of the organization’s visions and goals. Supporters seek harmony and hesitate to take sides, though make decisions and provide resources that align with the organization’s goals (CSBA, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016). Supporters are described as avoiding controversy and secretly supporting all sides of any issues (White et al., 2016).

**Supporter description.** Two of the five suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with a political style of supporter for a total of three (11%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study.
Superintendent B described his two supporter board members:

My supporter board member has not one time tried to pressure or force her position to make a decision over me. She's never done that. One particular time she completely disagreed with me on a personnel decision but still supported me after a strong closed session conversation. She often supports me with her words. They're not just colleagues and board member, they're friends of mine. His second supporter board member likes to be heavily involved with the schools. At the end of the day, both of those supporters support me on all matters. So I excluded her on a decision regarding a school matter and you would’ve thought the war ended, I guess for her, that's a big, big deal. ‘Why did you exclude me she asked?’ She wouldn't talk to me for a week. It shocked me because we had a great relationship, but she got over it and got back to the support.

Superintendent C described his supporter board member as “risk adverse, selfless, and aligned to the organizations vision and goals. This individual seeks harmony during board meetings by using his board member comment time to wish everyone a happy day.” Superintendent C shared that this particular board member votes consistently in favor of the organization especially when bringing FAFSA completion as a graduation requirement was a tough approval process for the board. They study the board packet and are able to track what’s happening in the board meeting (Superintendent C). Nothing they ever bring forward is initiated by personal request (Superintendent C). Superintendent C is most impressed by how supportive this board member is of items brought forward by other members.
During a board meeting observation evidence of the one of the supporter board member’s advocacy for the Superintendent B became evident when he reminded the public that the superintendent could not possibly be held responsible for a former employee funneling funds illegally to himself as the superintendent has “many duties in a day.” He was very protective in his communication to the public.

Supporter effective strategies. Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with supporter styles. There were 11 strategies referenced by two study participants.

Provide rationale was referenced four times by two study participants in two interviews and one observation. Spend time with them was referenced three times during one interview and two artifacts. Value strengths was referenced two times in two interviews and one artifact. Give latitude was referenced two times in one interview and two artifacts. Superintendent B shared strategies she uses with his two supporter board members:

You can expect they will support you just because. You have to give rationale so they understand the gist of the purpose. I allow them latitude to visit school sites on their own or with me because they enjoy it. I spend a lot of time with them not just because they are the board but because we genuinely consider ourselves to be friends. You have to deposit the time. I feed them information when spending time because they want to be in on everything although sometimes it is not possible. I deposit into their ‘emotional bank’ and it ‘pays off.’ When they disagree with a decision I’ve made I allow them time to settle down and give them space. Eventually we will talk and clear the air. You have to find the
strengths in your supporters. I lean on and show value of their strengths. They sometimes can influence other board members to a 5-0 vote with their experience and ability to convince others of the value to our students.

Superintendent E shared strategies she often employs in working with her supporter board member:

They will have a litany of questions and you have to spend the time to respond in a timely manner before board meetings. He needs the information so he can process his thoughts. In my response I will cc all board members because sometimes the questions are great information that can impact and clear up any possible confusion on items. I spend time to sit and listen when he is upset about something and it seems to be effective. Clarifying the reasons for items by providing more information has been key.

Superintendent C shared that he really does not have any conflict with his supporter and could not really identify and strategies he’s had to employ. He mentioned “they are just there and always supportive and I allow them to go” (Superintendent C).

Copies of social media artifacts by the first Superintendent B supporter board member reflected their full support of the schools in the district through frequent site visits alongside the superintendent and other cabinet members. Allowing frequent visits was mentioned by Superintendent B as part of giving them latitude. In one Facebook post, one of the Superintendent B supporter board members shared “I love sitting and listening to what our principals are doing to help our students thrive” therefore exhibiting her support of the work overseen by the superintendent and his cabinet. During a board meeting, Superintendent B’s second supporter board member commented that “with the
sheer amount of things on his daily plate the superintendent can’t monitor everything. He depends on staff to do that!” Additional posts by Superintendent C reflected his delight in his board approving FAFSA completion as a graduation requirement for students. He states, “It’s a culture of collaboration where we share ideas and we create better education experiences for all students” (Superintendent C). One of the stories shared by Superintendent C was how his supporter board member served as a quiet leader in that approval process in which he strategically allowed her to work her magic with the others. He values her influence during tough discussions and has full confidence of her support for what’s best for the district.

Table 11 identifies the four main themes identified as effective strategies used with supporters.

Table 11

**Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Supporter**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide rationale</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend time w them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value strengths</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give latitude</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supporter ineffective strategies.** Several superintendents insist that “drawing the line in the sand” is a very ineffective strategy that only increases conflict and disdain amongst their supporter board members. Excluding them in important decisions on a regular basis is also mentioned as ineffective with supporters.
**Adaptor political styles.** Adaptors are pragmatists who generally support organizational changes and team decisions, provided they do not perceive personal risk. An adaptor is one who presents a passive, cooperative political style balanced between self-interest and organizational interests (Bobic et al., 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirton, 1976; White et al., 2016). Adaptors prefer not to appear unsupportive or questioning of procedures or issues (White et al., 2016).

**Adaptor description.** Two of the five suburban unified school district superintendents identified school board members with a political style of adaptor for a total of three (11%) of the 27 school board members mentioned in the study.

Superintendent E described her adaptor board member:

> He is sort of aligned with whatever was being discussed in the community. So say most recently we had this very controversial decision for our board to get a new phone system which didn’t have full board support. Sounds like something so simple. But this has been talked about since 2005 and we still don't have a new phone system. He has provided sort of just a calm sense of ‘yes, this makes sense’ and ‘of course we should do that’, which I think has caused our most vocal board member against it to take pause, take a step back and say, maybe I need to rethink this.

Superintendent A described his two adaptor school board members:

> They are willing to help everyone to ‘get along and go along.’ They want approval of their peers and don’t usually push an issue specific to a person or interest. During a conversation on mental health this board member echoed the voice of several other board members. They tend to understand where other
board members are and able to push objectives through. Building relationships upfront allows them to advance their agenda.

**Adaptor effective strategies.** Superintendents were asked what strategies were effective in working with their school board members with adaptor styles. There were 19 strategies referenced by two study participants.

*Communication* was referenced 11 times in two interviews and one observation. *Meet needs* was referenced five times in one interview and two artifacts followed by *show value* referenced in one interview and one artifact. Adaptors are considered passive by nature and show concern for others while struggling to share their true opinions (White et al., 2016). Superintendent A shared strategies he utilizes to work with one of his adaptor board members:

I still listen and not just gloss over or pass by them. By design I schedule time with them for breakfast or lunch meetings. Deep communication and listening works for this person. Getting clarity around their ultimate outcomes and helping them to understand the bigger picture is effective. I also make it a point of communicating what specific challenges are and how to navigate them.

Superintendent A described the strategies he employs with his second adaptor board member:

I make sure I understand their needs and what the underlying issues are to get a good pulse on what they are after. I don’t believe they are the squeaky wheel, so if I’m not careful by meeting their attention needs I can be blindsided by them. I prioritize knowing what works for this person. I do work closely with them to communicate that what they are doing must be right and in the interest of
everybody. I show this person they are important and I value their information. I acknowledge them in private and in board meetings to show them understanding.

Superintendent E calls her adaptor on her drive home, or on the weekend just to “chat about silly things” because continual communication seems to “comfort her.”

Table 12 identifies the three main themes identified as effective strategies used with adaptors.

Table 12

*Summary of Effective Strategies Used with Adaptors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show Value</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adaptors ineffective strategies.* Superintendent A shared that the most ineffective strategy with adaptors is “not giving them the time” and that “delaying communication or not being responsive in a timely fashion” is a barrier to getting desired outcomes.

Superintendent E shared that “inattention to their opinions” is an ineffective strategy when dealing with adaptors.

**Key Findings**

Key finding were organized into categories according to digital survey results, coded interview transcripts, artifacts and observations to identify perceived political styles of superintendents and school board members, and strategies superintendents identified to work with multiple styles. Superintendent’s perception of their own political
style and of their board members was identified in quantitative data results. Qualitative data referenced by a minimum of two superintendents during interviews and supported by at least one artifact or observation were combined to identify key findings. Based on the research the following key findings were identified.

**Political Styles**

Superintendents identified their own political styles and the political styles of their school board members.

- Three of the five suburban unified superintendents identified themselves as strategists which represents 60%.
- Superintendents identified 63% (17) of their total school board members (27) as having assertive styles (challenger, arranger, strategist). Challengers were perceived the highest at 38% (10).
- There were no planner or analyst political styles perceived of school board members by superintendents.

**Political Strategies**

Information collected from face to face interviews with superintendents regarding strategies used to work with board member political styles is reflected in the following themes.

- Themes under Relationships included *build relationships with board members, bridge relationships between board members, and don’t take it personally*. These political strategies were supported by a total of 27 of 189 references and one source from an artifact. Bridging relationships with and between board members was referenced the most at 19 times.
• Themes under Communication included communicate, problem solving, clarify expectations, seek their opinion, provide rationale, be responsive, frontload with key information, and help them to see the impact of their decisions. These political strategies were supported by a total of 63 of 189 references during interviews, five sources from artifacts, and seven sources from observations. Communicate was the most referenced at 16.

• Themes under Trust included get them wins, spend time and extra time, build trust, hold the line, and give latitude. These political strategies were supported by a total of 37 of 189 references during interviews, six sources from artifacts and two sources from observations. Spend time and extra time and build trust were referenced the most at 15 and 13 respectively.

• Themes under Listen included include all sides, know their agenda, listen to them/ listening, and hear their side. These political strategies were supported by a total of 38 of 189 references during interviews, two sources from artifacts and one source from observations. Listen to them and listening were referenced the most at 21.

• Themes under Value included show value, value strengths, include in decision making, meet needs, and seek advice. These political strategies were supported by a total of 20 of 189 references during interviews, three sources from artifacts and one source from observations. Value strengths was referenced the most at six.

• Hold the line was referenced only four times out of a total of 189 during interviews, one artifact and one observation.
• Overall responses revealed the fact that superintendents use different strategies to work with each individual board member. There were a combined 223 references made regarding strategies for the seven perceived political styles that were discussed in interviews, and derived from artifacts, and observations.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the study’s purpose, research questions, methodology, data collection process, population and sample, and a comprehensive description of the data analysis process. An analysis of the findings resulting from a digital survey and five face to face interviews with suburban unified superintendents provided in-depth information. The two research questions that served as the basis for the analysis, identified perceived political styles of school board members and effective strategies suburban unified superintendents used in working with the different political styles.

Chapter V provides a summary of major findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V provides a review of the purpose statement and research questions, methodology, population, and sample. Additionally, it presents a final summary of the study, including major findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions from the results of the data collected. These are followed by implications for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed methods study was to identify the political styles of exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to identify and explain the political strategies suburban school district superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

Research Questions

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How do superintendents in suburban unified school districts perceive their own political style and the individual styles of their school board members?
2. What are the strategies superintendents in suburban unified school districts use to work with the different styles of school board members?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

Using a mixed methods approach, this study combined quantitative data with qualitative data. Triangulation of the data collected included artifacts, surveys, interviews, and observations.
Specifically, this sequential explanatory mixed methods approach combined quantitative data from responses to a digital survey with qualitative data from face to face interviews with five exemplary suburban unified school district superintendents in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in southern California identifying their own political style and what they perceived as the political styles of their individual school board members. In addition, key qualitative data collected from face to face interviews with each superintendent, artifacts and observations provided in-depth details of political strategies utilized in working with the varied political styles of their school board members.

A mixed methods design was used because it offered the greatest opportunity to both identify perceived political styles of key players and develop a rich understanding of the lived experiences of superintendents in dealing with those styles at the governance level of a school district. J. W. Creswell and Creswell (2018) insist the intent of the mixed methods design is to have qualitative data help to provide more depth and insight into quantitative results. Using a digital survey to gather preliminary data about each board member, as well as the superintendent, provided a launch pad to engage in interviews, observations and the collection of artifacts that would produce thick, rich descriptions of the styles and politically effective strategies.

This study was part of a thematic study conducted by ten peer researchers under the guidance of two faculty dissertation chairs. All researchers utilized the same purpose and research questions, as well as methodology and instruments. Fifty superintendents from various types of districts in various regions of California were studied by the thematic research team.
Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define population as, “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized” (p. 489). The population for this study is public school district superintendents in California. The population was further narrowed to only unified school district superintendents. The superintendent serves as the chief administrator who manages their district. For 2017/18 the CDE (2019) reported 1026 total public school districts led by superintendents with 344 being described as unified school districts.

Target Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) describe the target population as a group that meets similar criteria established for the study. Attempting to research all 344 unified school districts would be unattainable in a mixed methods study that emphasized qualitative research. Therefore, the target population for this study was narrowed to superintendents of unified school districts located in southern California. For the purpose of this study, southern California included San Bernardino and Riverside counties located in the southeast sector of the state with a combined total of 37 superintendents of unified school districts (CDE, 2019).

Sample

The sample is the subgroup of the target population the researcher plans to study that will provide information that can be generalized for the larger group (J. W. Creswell, 2012, p. 142). J. Creswell (2005) recommends a minimum sample size between three to five for mixed methods research, when the focus of the research is on analyzing qualitative data. This smaller sample size can provide valuable information on this
chosen topic (Myers, 2000). Further, the importance of this purposeful sample was in the depth of knowledge, perceptions, and experiences able to be explored of superintendents working with board members with different political styles. The importance of the data emerges from the comprehensive qualitative data obtained rather than the total number of participants in research (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). This study used non-probability convenience sampling because it allows respondents who meet required criteria to be chosen based on their geographic convenience or availability. This helped to ensure knowledgeable respondents and increase the likelihood of participation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The team of 10 peer researchers developed criteria to define the exemplary superintendents that would be sought for this study. All participants met a minimum of four of the following exemplary criteria:

- Evidence of successful relationships with school board members.
- Identified by county superintendent as exemplary in working with their school board.
- Received recognition as an exemplary superintendent by a professional organization, such as ACSA.
- Recognition by their peers.
- Articles, papers, or materials written, published, or presented at conferences or association meetings.
- Participated in CSBA Masters in Governance training or other governance training with at least one board member.
- Memberships in professional associations in their field.
Has a minimum of three years of experience as superintendent in his or current district.

Participants meeting the above mentioned criteria were recommended by a county superintendent and retired superintendent working as a consultant for an executive search firm who were well aware of the superintendent and board political dynamics in the geographical area and approved by the research committee chair. Following completion of verification of at least four of the eight criteria by the researcher a list of potential participants was established. Once the list of exemplary superintendents was completed, five suburban unified superintendents who met the criteria were invited and agreed to participate in the study. Although this is a small sample, the strength of the study was enhanced by triangulation of the data including five school board meeting observations and eleven artifacts collected that served to provide rich information that further explained and confirmed the specific strategies identified (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Major Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the political styles of suburban unified school district superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it was the purpose to identify and explain the political strategies suburban unified school district superintendents use to work with the different political styles of school board members. There are several major findings for Research Questions 1 and 2. The major findings are presented here:

• Superintendents strengthen communication with school board members by utilizing multiple methods.
• Superintendents work to bridge individual relationships with and between each school board member.

• Superintendents focus on listening skills in order to fully comprehend school board member priorities and concerns.

• Superintendents prioritize building trust with school board members by utilizing a variety of approaches.

• Superintendents meet the needs of school board members by valuing their opinions, concerns, and priorities and political responsibilities as elected officials.

• Superintendents differentiate their strategies to match the styles of their board members.

**Unexpected Findings**

An unexpected finding that resulted from this study was that none of the five suburban unified superintendents included board governance training as an effective strategy. Although, the majority of strategies focused on building relationships, trust, interrelations between board members, and effective communication, providing periodic training on expectations for conduct and effective board governance protocol was not mentioned in this study. However, Superintendents A, B, C and D did mark board governance training as completed on the digital survey. Superintendent E shared:

Under her leadership the board had not participated in any governance workshops together through CSBA because they considered themselves to be ‘well versed in understanding their role in policy enforcement and development and the superintendent’s role in the day to day running of the district.’ It should be noted
that this superintendent has secured a recent contract to ‘work in-house with a
search firm on governance training’ but it did not come up in the interview.
The absence of comment on governance training departed from the literature, which
argued that it is important for school board members to seek continual professional
development to stay current on policy and explore research-based strategies on effective
board governance practices (Griffin, 2005). It was interesting to this researcher that
governance training was not brought forward by any of the superintendents as a strategy
during the interviews.

The second unexpected finding was the separation of listening and effective
communication as strategies. All five of the superintendents in this study expressed the
importance of practicing listening when board members need to express disappointment,
concerns or new ideas. Listening is typically considered a component of communication
but in this study there was a distinct difference. Communication included an exchange
between the superintendent and board members but listening included avoiding
responding or attempting to fix the issue but rather allowing the information to “simmer”
with no response or a response at a later time. Superintendents were adamant that there
was a time to know when to just listen and when to communicate while working with all
of the political styles of their board members.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1

Superintendents who want to work effectively with their school board members
must strengthen communication by utilizing multiple methods.
Exemplary suburban unified school superintendents must enhance consistent two-way communication and develop a systematic way to hear the ideas and concerns shared by school board members. Some form of communication was the top referenced strategy by study participants. All five superintendents interviewed identified various communication strategies in working with six of the seven board member political styles identified. Several superintendents referenced engaging school board members by seeking their opinion when problem solving as an effective communication strategy. This was mentioned as most effective when working with arranger styles. Strong communication can be built when superintendents provide board members the rationale for decisions or programs. It is critical that superintendents respond in a timely manner to school board member calls and questions, clarifying expectations and situations before an issue or conflict worsens. Seeking out a board member’s preferred style of communication whether via text, phone call or in person and establishing frequency of meetings is an important step in keeping them informed and meeting their needs.

Effective communication skills for the superintendent are critical in working through the political nature of school boards and building connections (T. E. Glass, 2010).

**Conclusion 2**

*Superintendents must develop individual relationships with each school board member, and also work to bridge relationships between and among all members of the school board.*

Exemplary suburban unified school superintendents must prioritize building genuine relationships with each of their school board members. Four of five superintendents identified building relationships between board members as the second
most referenced strategy in the study. Superintendent D mentioned going as far as
talking scriptures with their challenger who seemed to invite the conversation during a
difficult personal issue. Superintendent C referenced facilitating discussions between
two board members to work though conflict or sometimes recommending his developer
coach another board member through a difficult topic.

When conflict exists between board members, it presents a politically perilous
situation for the superintendent and the district. Superintendents must intervene as
conflict arises between board members, bridging the relationship by helping them to find
common ground or shared interest. Wilson and Watkins (2010) agreed, superintendents
must pay attention to concerns brought by school board members or it could cause a
breakdown in the interactions between the two and slow working through various issues.
It can also escalate into values conflicts, which are the hardest to resolve. Building
relationships is especially important in working with challenger and strategist political
styles which represent the “self-interest” and “organizational interest” sections of the
“goal allegiance continuum” found in The Politically Intelligent Leader (White et al.,
2016). Building a relationship with a fellow board member who has influence over their
challenger is a key strategy in influencing the challenger’s behavior and positions.

Conclusion 3

It is essential that superintendents focus on using excellent, attentive, listening
skills in order to fully comprehend school board member needs, priorities and concerns.

Politically savvy superintendents must understand the importance of effectively
listening rather than immediately attempting to solve board member concerns. Research
supports that by focusing on building listening skills superintendents can develop a
relationship of mutual dependence and increased trust with school board members (Harvey & Drolet, 2005). Interviews with all five exemplary superintendents reflected listening as a key component in working effectively with school board members. Peterson and Short (2001) stressed superintendents need to respond and comprehend what is being communicated by board members by listening as well as taking action. Setting up meetings with individual board members to hear all sides of issues is very important to understanding their concerns. Superintendents must listen to understand the agendas and priorities of each of their board members, asking for clarity and building trust by acting on the information received when appropriate. Taking notes during individual meetings and not interrupting is an excellent example of practicing good listening skills with school board members. It is equally important to pay attention to body language of school board members as well as the superintendent during meetings.

Listening was the most referenced strategy by superintendents to work with arranger and challenger political styles. For example, for challenger school board members, superintendents may need to listen patiently and be open to criticism and ideas that may be different than their own, even when they are not expressed diplomatically. Listening without agreeing or disagreeing provides the opportunity to consider without pressure and do what’s right for the district, but it also lets the board member know the superintendent is giving the idea fair consideration.

Conclusion 4

Superintendents must prioritize building trust with school board members by utilizing a variety of approaches.
Trust emerged as a major theme in working specifically with developer school board members. Superintendents who appreciate the insight and perspective of each of the members build trust with their boards (AASA, 2019). Exemplary superintendents must utilize a multitude of strategies to build trust by never allowing their board members to be blindsided with information by the public. Superintendents must work with school board members to address priorities by getting them some wins with public recognition when aligned with organizational goals. Superintendents also build trust with school board members by spending extra time with them when needed even if not business related. Being open, honest, and transparent, and following through on promises also helps to build trust. Providing open invitations for school board members to join staff on regular site visits helps them to understand and see district priorities in action. When the superintendent has a competent board member who can coach others, using that person in that capacity can help to build trust between and among board members and with the superintendent.

**Conclusion 5**

Superintendents who want to work effectively with their school board members, must focus on meeting their needs by valuing their opinions, concerns, priorities and political responsibilities as elected officials.

Exemplary suburban unified superintendents recognize that each board member has his/her own needs as an individual and as an elected official. It is essential that superintendents understand those individual needs and attempt to meet them in a variety of ways. One-on-one meetings over lunch or coffee can help the superintendent to discover each board member’s concerns and priorities. Understanding what each board
member values and considers important will help the superintendent to establish appropriate measures to take.

As elected officials, superintendents must allow their board members to be up front as the face of the district during public recognition where they interact with their constituents. Credit needs to be given to the board as a unified team when they’ve established and adopted policies that align with district priorities and community interests. Superintendents “make emotional deposits” by including board members in some discussions and decisions, seeking their advice and leaning on their strengths. This shows that they are valued and pays dividends to the relationship.

**Conclusion 6**

*Politically intelligent superintendents must differentiate their strategies to match the styles of their school board members.*

Superintendents must work with each individual school board member in specific ways to meet their needs according to their political styles. Superintendents accomplish this by increasing their awareness of the most effective ways to communicate and interact with individual board members.

In order to recognize the political styles of board members, superintendents can assess them by observing behavior during contentious times, assessing levels of commitment applied to ideas, and assessment of whether the basis of their goals are aligned to organizational or self-promoting priorities (White et al., 2016). All of the superintendents (100%) articulated a perceived understanding of individual board member political styles and different strategies that work best. For example, challengers like to move quickly on decisions, but arrangers may resent it if you push them to decide
before they are ready. In working with a balancer, communication is the name of the game. Transparency is key. Holding back information will be perceived as a lack of trust. But information overload will not be welcome by a Strategist. They are “bottom line” people, who will let you know what information they need. Over their careers politically intelligent superintendents who build their skills in assessing board members’ varying styles and matching strategies to those styles will have greater success in working with their boards.

**Implications for Action**

This research on political styles and strategies of superintendents and school board members served to unmask a very important but unaddressed aspect of school district governance. Implications for findings in this study combined with those of the other nine peer researchers participating on this thematic dissertation research team can serve to positively impact new and veteran superintendents, school boards and educational leadership search firms. Strategies derived from this study will assist superintendents in becoming successful politically intelligent leaders.

**Implication 1: Self-Reflection**

This study can be utilized for superintendents to develop personalized reflection tools to identify their own political styles and strategies they currently implement. This reality check can be used to identify and improve their practices in working successfully with their board members. Superintendents can use strategies mentioned in this study that have been identified as a match with particular political styles of their board members.
Implication 2: Professional Development and Leadership Development

Regional organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), Urban Education Dialogue (UED), California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators (CAAASA), California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators (CALSA), American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National Association of School Administrators (NASS) are centered on professional development and collaboration around best practices in leading school districts. Specifically, participants can explore effective strategies to build relationships, practice excellent communication and listening skills, building trust and working cohesively as a governance team. Therefore, the results of this study can be shared nationwide if not worldwide through their platform for leadership development. Current superintendents may also use key findings of this research to design workshops to build a high-functioning governance team. Additionally, the California School Boards Association (CSBA) can use this information in building critical information on how to utilize political styles to benefit students in school districts.

Implication 3: Superintendent Recruitment

Search firms can utilize the findings in this study to recruit candidates with political styles that may be a good match with the governance team needs identified by school boards looking to fill the superintendent seat. Firms can identify candidates who have developed or displayed political strategies that have positively impacted previous or current school boards. This will serve as added value to the search process.
Recommendations for Further Research

The research for this study resulted in the effective strategies suburban superintendents in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties located in southern California use in working with the political styles of school board members. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, there are recommendations to add depth to further research of the nine political styles and effective strategies.

Recommendation 1: Comparing Strategies Used by Superintendents with Different Levels of Experience

All of the superintendent participants in this study had five or more years of experience in the position. Some were serving in their second school district. It is recommended to study strategies utilized by superintendents (4-5 yrs.) vs strategies used by experienced superintendents (10+ yrs.) to compare political styles and strategies and any differences in tendencies based on tenure in the seat. What are the differences in the behavior of new superintendents versus veteran superintendents? New and veteran superintendents can use the information to use as a guide for do’s and don’ts while serving in the seat.

Recommendation 2: Replication with Superintendents of Varied District Types

It is recommended a phenomenological qualitative study be conducted that includes the same question of what strategies are effective in working with each of the nine political styles in urban districts, charter schools, and private schools, which were not part of this thematic research.
Recommendation 3: Governance Training

It is recommended a qualitative study be conducted to examine school boards and superintendents that have been participants in board governance training versus those teams that have not. Is there a notable difference or impact on how the superintendents work with the political styles of the board members?

Recommendation 4: Meta-Analysis of Political Styles Thematic Research

It is recommended that meta-analysis research be conducted to compare the findings and common themes of studies completed by all 10 thematic dissertation team members. There were varied target populations studied including female, Latina, high school, rural, unified, and suburban superintendents from northern and southern California regions. A future study could analyze the combined results of all the studies to identify effective strategies used work with the political styles of board members.

Recommendation 5: Expansion of Study Target Population

It is recommended that a replication of this study be conducted with the addition of superintendents in the central region of California and other states to examine any differences in how superintendents work with board member political styles. This may include examining how the structure of different state school systems affect the political dynamics between superintendents and board members.

Recommendation 6: County Superintendents Study

It is recommended a mixed methods study be conducted on the political styles and strategies of county superintendents and board members. What strategies does an elected county superintendent utilize to work with political styles of board members who have no authority over them compared to appointed superintendents who work under the authority
of their board? Information from the findings in this study could be impactful for county superintendents and their boards.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

Living currently in such a politically charged and divided society adds to the complexity of serving as a leader. Spending intimate time discussing the work of suburban unified superintendents for this study provided such deep insight into the daily challenges of working with school board members and remaining focused on the task at hand of maximizing outcomes for students. As Superintendent B put it “you learn not to take the negative experiences personally” and learn to “bounce back with resilience.” Although several of the superintendents in this study were anticipating retirement at the conclusion of this school year, each of them reiterated how much they love the opportunity they have had to move generations forward in society. Echoing Lee Iacocca’s quote, “in a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something else,” the same can be said of anyone who works ultimately in the best interest of students.

Politically intelligent leaders are critical in the motivation, inspiration, and guidance of decision makers that can make life trajectory differences for those they support. I have learned that exemplary leadership is all about being in touch with our purpose, knowing our why, and staying laser focused on the interests of the organization. When out of alignment leaders must be intentional in correcting the course and refocusing the work while preserving positive relations. It has been my honor to be in the presence of such exemplary superintendents who exemplify a selfless, servant style of leadership.
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APPENDICES
# APPENDIX A

**Synthesis Matrix**

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<th>References</th>
<th>Theoretical Foundations</th>
<th>Theoretical Framework</th>
<th>Politics and Public Education</th>
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<td>Polley, N.</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Community power and political theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fuks, M.</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Factors in a constructive relationship between the superintendents and school board</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quill, M.</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>The concept of authentic leadership in the contemporary world</td>
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<td>Roth, T.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Strengths finder 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reeves, D. B.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Leading change in your school: How to conquer myths, build commitment, and get results</td>
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<td>Roe, C., &amp; McInerney, N.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Wisdom in organizations: Whence and whither</td>
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<td>Roe, R., &amp; Kruglanski, A. W.</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Deconstructing - A perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roe, R., &amp; Kruglanski, A. W.</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Deconstructing - A perspective</td>
</tr>
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<td>Shin, L., Kim, J., &amp; Kim, Y. S.</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Classification of organization theory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B

**Political Styles and Strategies Thematic Researchers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Politics Thematic Team</th>
<th>Specific Area of Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brad Tooker</td>
<td>Suburban Unified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Tooker</td>
<td>High School Districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roni Jones</td>
<td>Small Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina Green</td>
<td>Latino Superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Andreas-Bervel</td>
<td>Small Suburban Southern California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reggie Thompkins</td>
<td>Unified Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy Blakely</td>
<td>Suburban Unified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisa Winston</td>
<td>Female/Suburban Unified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maura Murabito</td>
<td>ROP Superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Sinatra</td>
<td>Small School Districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Digital Survey

Thank you for sharing your time, experience and expertise in creating a better understanding of the political strategies that superintendents use in working with school board members.

The purpose of this sequential mixed methods study is to understand the political styles of superintendents and school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it is the purpose to identify and describe the political strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

You have been selected for participation because of your expertise in working with your governance team. The results of this study will assist superintendents to manage the decision-making process with school board members. The political framework used in this study was taken from the book: The Politically Intelligent Leader; White, Harvey & Fox, 2015.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Click on the agree button that you have received and read the informed consent form and Participants Bill of Rights document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

If you do not wish to participate in this 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 informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in this study. You have been provided a code that must be entered in the box below. This code insures the security and privacy of the information that you provide.

- DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this survey.
Demographic Information

* Please choose the code provided to you by the researcher from the dropdown list below.

[Dropdown list]

Tell us a little about yourself.

* Total years of experience as a superintendent (in any district)

[Input field]

* Years of experience as superintendent in this district

[Input field]

* Years of experience in this district

[Input field]

* Gender
  - Female
  - Male
  - Non-binary

* Your current age

[Input field]

* Level of your terminal degree
  - M.A./M.S.
  - Ed.D.
  - Ph.D.

Tell us about governance training you have participated in.
Indicate which governance training you have participated in.

- CSBA governance training
- Governance training using an external consultant
- Other governance training
- None

Directions: For purposes of identification and confidentiality assign each of your board members a number 1-7. Please read the definitions carefully prior to completing the survey. You may use the definitions sent to you as part of your information packet as a reference while completing the survey.

DEFINITIONS

The following section defines terms as they are used in this study. These terms were collaboratively developed by a team of peer researchers studying political styles and strategies of superintendents. The definitions are organized around the nine political styles matrix based on initiative and interest. The styles are listed as self-interest, blended interests and organizational interest for each initiative: passive, engaged and assertive. For purposes of this study political style is defined as the manner and approach of providing direction, implementing plans, and motivating people.

Passive Political Styles

- **Analyst.** Analysts are passive and oriented toward self-interest over organizational interest. They are primarily focused on tasks over relationships and will seek evidence, proof, and detailed analysis before risking a change (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Boulgarides & Cohen, 2001; DeLuca, 1999; Rowe & Boulgarides, 1992; White et al., 2016).

- **Adaptor.** Adaptors are pragmatists who generally support organizational changes and team decisions, provided they do not perceive personal risk. An adaptor is one who presents a passive, cooperative political style balanced between self-interest and organizational interests (Bobic, Davis, & Cunningham, 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Kirtin, 1976; White et al., 2016).

- **Supporter.** Supporters are characterized as risk-averse, selfless, and passive devotees, backers, or advocates of the organization’s visions and goals. Supporters seek harmony and hesitate to take sides, though make decisions and provide resources that align with the organization’s goals (CSBA, 2016; DeLuca, 1999; White et al., 2016).

Moderately Engaged Political Styles

- **Planner.** Planners demonstrate modest initiative in political ventures and are typically focused on self-interests rather than organizational interests. Planners gather and analyze data for potential personal risks, putting constraints on decision making. (Hackman, 2002; Hackman & Wageman, 2005; White et al., 2016).

- **Balancer.** Balancers blend self and organizational interests. Focused on the prevention of disequilibrium, balancers use their knowledge of the organization’s culture to diplomatically shift their support, when needed to maintain stability, harmony, and equanimity. (Sheehan, 1989; White et al., 2016).

- **Developer.** Developers work behind the scenes to coach or challenge others to build skills that can positively influence advance organizational interests to which they are fully committed. Developers exhibit a high level of self-awareness of their own knowledge and skill (DeLuca, 1999; Goleman, 2000; Rath, 2007; White et al., 2016).

Assertive Political Styles

- **Challenger.** Challengers are characterized by self-interest, assertive behavior and confidence in their own vision, ideas, and goals, which inspires a strong desire to lead and make decisions quickly. Challengers see themselves as movers and shakers, efficient, politically strategic, aggressive, and willing to confront the views of others in an attempt to influence outcomes (DeLuca, 1999; Jasper, 1999; Meyer, Jenness, & Ingram, 2005; Polletta, 2004; White, et al., 2016).

- **Arranger.** Arrangers use a political style in which they are assertive in pursuing their goals that are a blend of both organizational priorities and their own self-interests. They build a power base by connecting with many people. Arrangers will take risks to advance their goals and are strategic in combining resources (DeLuca, 1999; Effelsberg, Soiga, & Gurt, 2014; White et al., 2016).

- **Strategist.** Strategists are visionary, open to new ideas, and collaborative. They empower others and model the organization’s values. Supporting organizational interests over self-interests, they strategically use a variety of approaches to propose new initiatives, engage diverse stakeholders, elicit commitment and make purposeful decisions (DeLuca, 1999; Dergel, 2014; White, et al., 2016).
Instructions: Decide what style best matches your preferred political style and that of each board member. Use the definitions as a reference point for making your decision about each board member’s placement in the Styles Matrix. All of your responses are coded and confidential.

**Style Matrix**

* Indicate the style that best matches your preferred political style and that of each board member. If you work with five board members, leave numbers 6 and 7 blank. Please keep a separate record of which board member corresponds to each number below for use during the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Challenger</th>
<th>Arranger</th>
<th>Strategist</th>
<th>Planner</th>
<th>Balancer</th>
<th>Developer</th>
<th>Analyst</th>
<th>Adapter</th>
<th>Supporter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent (self)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Board member 2</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of this pilot survey is to identify any concerns with the instrument. If there was anything in this survey you found to be confusing, misleading or unclear, please describe that below.

Thank you for your participation. I look forward to talking with you about the strategies you use to work with board members of different political styles.
Informed Consent

I want to remind you that any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). For ease of our discussion and accuracy, I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent sent to you via email. I will have the recording transcribed to a Word document and will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas. The digital recording will be erased following review and approval of the transcription.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document? If so, would you be so kind as to sign the hard copy of the IRB requirements for me to collect?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the conversation altogether.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let’s get started, and thanks so much for your time.

*Important Note for the Interviewer: To ensure validity and reliability, please ask each question for every Board Member and the Superintendent.*

Questions

To ensure validity and reliability in our data collection, I will repeat some questions for each of the styles you have identified on your Board.

Strategies and Styles

1. Board Member(#) has a style identified as _____________. Can you share a story about a time when this Board Member demonstrated some of the characteristics of this style?

   ○ ALTERNATE: Board Members #___ and #___ have been identified as _____________. Can you share a story about a time when Board Member #___ demonstrated some of the characteristics of this style and then share a story for Board Member #___?

2. What strategies did you use to work with this style?
Conflict and Strategies

3. On occasions that posed a potential conflict with this Board Member, either with you or other Board Members, what strategies did you use before, during or after the conflict?

Effectiveness

4. What strategies did you use that were not effective with this Board Member?

Effective Political Strategies

5. Having worked with this Board Member through different governance issues, what would you say is the most effective strategy you have used to reach a successful outcome?

After you have asked questions about each board member:

1. You identified your political style as ____________. What have you learned about your own political style in working with your Board?
2. What are the strategies that have worked extremely well with all the Board Member styles?
3. What are the strategies that are only effective with certain Board Member styles?
4. Are there any other ideas you have about strategies you have used with your Board that you would like to share?

Prompts can be used at any point that you feel that the answer was not sufficient in detail. You may not ask any of them but they are there to be used if needed.

1. “What did you mean by …”
2. “Do you have more to add?”
3. “Would you expand upon that a bit?”
4. “Why do think that was the case?”
5. “Could you please tell me more about …”
6. “Can you give me an example of …”
7. “How did you feel about that?”
8. “Why do you think that strategy was so effective?”
APPENDIX E

Invitation to Participate in Study

Invitation to Participate

DATE:

Dear …

My name is Reggie Thompkins, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in the School of Education at Brandman University. I am participating in a thematic dissertation with nine other researchers. This letter serves as an invitation for you to participate in a research study.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this thematic, mixed-method explanatory sequential study is to understand the political styles of superintendents and school board members. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to identify and explain strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members. Results from this study will be summarized in a doctoral dissertation.

PROCEDURES: If you choose to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in a questionnaire and a 60-minute, one-on-one interview. I will ask a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experience as an exemplary superintendent in a suburban unified school district. The survey questions will assess variables of goal allegiance and interest to identify political styles. The interview questions will assess specific strategies used to work with the different political styles of board members. The interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are no major risks to your participation in this research study. The interview will be at a time and place, which is convenient for you.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participating; nonetheless, a potential benefit may be that you will have an opportunity to identify strategies to inform best practice with different political styles of board members. The information for this study is intended to inform researchers and leaders of strategies used by exemplary leaders to work successfully with the different board member political styles.

ANONYMITY: If you agree to participate in the survey and interview, you can be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the survey or interview. All information will remain in locked files, accessible only to the researchers. No employer will have access to the interview information. You will be free to stop the survey or interview and withdraw from the study at any time. You are also encouraged to ask any questions that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. Feel free to contact the principal investigator, Reggie Thompkins, at [redacted] or by phone at [redacted], to answer any questions or concerns you may have. You may also contact
Dr. Patricia White (Chair) at pwhite@brandman.edu. If you have questions, comments, or concerns about the study or your rights as a participant, you may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, 949-341-7641.

Sincerely,

Reggie Thompkins
Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
[redacted]
[redacted]
APPENDIX F

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: The strategies used by exemplary superintendents to work with the different political styles of board members.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Reggie Thompkins

PURPOSE OF STUDY:

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Reggie Thompkins, a doctoral candidate from the School of Education at Brandman University. The purpose of the study is to understand the political styles of superintendents as school board members as perceived by superintendents. In addition, it is the purpose of the study to identify and explain the political strategies superintendents use to work with the different political styles of board members.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and will include an interview with the identified student investigator. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and will be scheduled at a time and location of your convenience. The interview questions will pertain to your perceptions, and your responses will be confidential. Each participant will have an identifying code, and names will not be used in data analysis. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

I understand that:

A. The researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying code safeguarded in a locked file drawer or password protected digital file to which the researcher will have sole access.

B. My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time if I so choose. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

C. If I have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Reggie Thompkins via email at [redacted] or by phone at [redacted]; or Dr. Patricia White (Chair) at pwhite@brandman.edu

D. No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent, and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of data is to be changed, I will be so informed and consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research.

E. 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 Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 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 consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_______________________________________  Date:_____________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

________________________________________  Date:_____________________
Signature of Principal Investigator
APPENDIX G

Personal SurveyMonkey Link for Participants

Link: [redacted]
APPENDIX H

Survey Monkey Styles Matrix and Survey Instrument

### Nine Political Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Initiative</th>
<th>Self-Interests</th>
<th>Blended Interests</th>
<th>Organizational Interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive</td>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>Arranger</td>
<td>Strategist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Planner</td>
<td>Balancer</td>
<td>Developer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>Analyst</td>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>Supporter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicate the style that best matches your preferred political style and that of each board member. If you work with five board members, leave numbers 6 and 7 blank. Please keep a separate record of which board member corresponds to each number below for use during the interview.*
APPENDIX I

Expert Observer Feedback Form

Field Test – Observer Feedback

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set based on experience and feedback. Gaining valuable insight about interview skills and affect with the interview will support the collection of data gathering when interviewing actual participant. As the interview observer you should reflect on the questions below after the interview is finished. You should provide independent feedback at the conclusion of the interview field test. As observer you should take notes that will assist the interviewer to be successful in improving their interview skills.

1. How long did the interview take? ______ Did the time seem appropriate?
2. Did the interviewer communicate in a receptive, cordial, and encouraging manner?
3. Was the introduction of the interview friendly with the use of commonly understood language?
4. How did the interviewee feel during the interview?
5. Was the interviewer prepared and relaxed during the interview?
6. Did the interviewee understand the interview questions or did they require clarification?
7. What parts of the interview went smoothly and why?
8. What parts of the interview seem to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
9. Did the interviewer maintain objectivity and not interject value judgements or lead the interviewee?
10. Did the interviewer take opportunity to discuss or request artifacts that support the data gathered from the interview?
11. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you suggest changing it?
12. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?
APPENDIX J

Brandman University Institutional Review Board

BUIRB Application Approved: Reggie Thompkins

MyBrandman <my@brandman.edu> to me, Douglas, Patricia →
Sat, Oct 26, 12:55 PM (18 hours ago) ✭  📸  📩  ⬅  🤹

Dear Reggie Thompkins,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

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 IRB.Brandman.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
buirb@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
A Member of the Chapman University System

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at buirb@brandman.edu.
APPENDIX K

Electronic Signature to Participate in Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Click on the agree button that you have received and read the informed consent form and Participants Bill of Rights document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you do not wish to participate in this survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the disagree button.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the informed Consent packet and &quot;Bill of Rights.&quot; I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in this study. You have been provided a code that must be entered in the box below. This code insures the security and privacy of the information that you provide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this survey.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>